

Social capital and communication

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This report provides insight into the theory of social capital and how this is related to communication theory. Based on both these theories, a research framework is proposed to finally support the development of agricultural collaborations. For this purpose, a literature study has been performed, partly at the University of Minnesota in St. Paul (USA). The report concludes with a discussion in which the role of research in this area of investigation is further examined.

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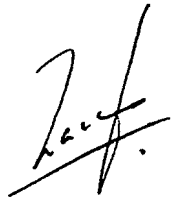
Preface

Social capital is a relatively new term for LEI. In this report a research framework is proposed to support the development of agricultural collaborations, based on both social capital and communication theory.

The target group of this report is the broader scientific community. After having read this report, one will admit that the concept of social capital allows for an open debate about issues such as social structure, norms and habits (in economics) and about the linkage of social capital with communication. It is also an opportunity to bring a wide range of debates into policy discussions in the same way that the concept of 'sustainability' has brought a wide range of views together for discussion, despite (or because of) the different definitions used.

Part of this research has been performed at the University of Minnesota in St. Paul (USA) where the research has been carried out in cooperation with Rob King. We would like to thank Vernon Eidman (head of the Department of Applied Economics) for both the possibility to perform part of the research at this department and the hospitality during the two months the research has been performed here. Furthermore, we would like to thank Dick Broeker (Experiment of Rural Cooperation) for his expertise, enthusiasm and for the hospitality in attending several interesting meetings (in Southeast Minnesota).

Prof. Dr. L.C. Zachariasse

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L.C. Zachariasse', written in a cursive style.

Director General LEI B.V.

Summary

Nowadays, many farmers are joining production networks to jointly produce and market their products. In this way, farmers respond to the economic pressures they experience, due to increasing concentration of activities in other links in the supply chain (mostly retail activities). The development of such collaborations in the agri-food chain is a phenomenon that takes place in many countries.

The construction and functioning of these collaborations are often related to problems concerning trust and communication. For this reason, the main purpose of the research is to support (the development of) fruitful collaborations in the food- and agri-business. To accomplish this purpose, the report draws upon two bodies of literature: theory about social capital and theory about communication. In this report, we propose a conceptual framework for studying social capital. Many definitions of social capital exist. In this research, we use the following one:

'Social capital is the aggregation of potential benefits, advantages and preferential treatment resulting from one person or group's sympathy and sense of obligation toward another person or group.'

Social relations (networks) and the interaction between persons or groups of persons form the basis of social capital. Moreover, trust, norms and a shared language in these networks form sources of social capital. Social capital provides socio-emotional needs, increases the efficiency of action and encourages cooperative behaviour, but it requires maintenance costs and it can limit the openness to information and to alternative ways of doing things. The two processes that are important for the development of social capital in collaboration are collaborative learning and communication. The aspects of social capital as described in this paragraph are included in the proposed conceptual framework.

The concept of communication is briefly explained as perceived by different theorists. Finally, we conclude that communication is a process through which participants create and share information with one another to reach a mutual understanding. In this way, communication is always a joint occurrence, a mutual and cyclical process of information sharing between two or more persons. The description of this cyclical process, which ideally ends up in convergence, is closely related to the concept of social capital. If two or more people unite in a common interest or focus they are more willing to treat each other in a preferential way compared to when they did not. However, little is said about *how* one can create potential benefits, advantages and preferential treatment that result from one person or group's sympathy and sense of obligation toward another person or group (see the definition of social capital). This lack can be met by linking social capital with theories about communication to finally support collaboration in agriculture. Three issues we found in social capital theory related to this link are discussed in this report: the method of dialogue, group facilitation and conflict handling. We describe many do's and

don'ts concerning communication in collaboration. The three most important are included in the proposed conceptual framework.

Ultimately, we provide a deeper explanation of the linkages we see between communication theory and theory about how to build social capital. In this report, we successively discuss patterned flows of information, mutual understanding, signalling and shared language, which we include in the framework.

We present the proposed conceptual framework in which we summarize the content of chapter two and three and the conclusions.

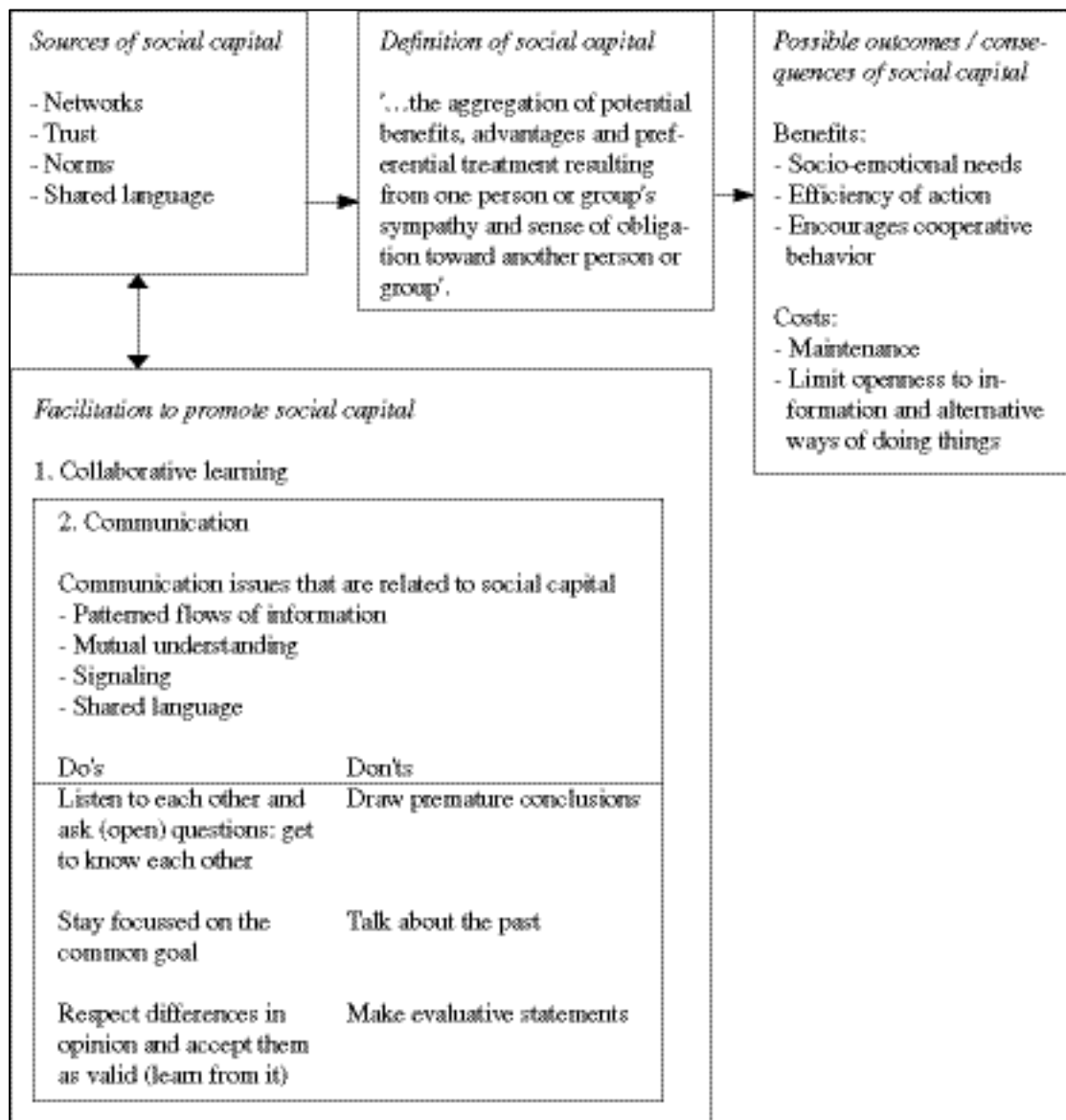


Figure 1 A proposed conceptual framework of social capital and the linkage with communication

We conclude the report with four recommendations. First, it would be interesting to further investigate the (internal and external) meaning of social capital for an organization such as LEI. Second, we recommend to further examine the role of empirical research and how one can use it to determine the difference in the actual and desirable level of social capital and what should be done to get to the desirable level of social capital. Our third recommendation is to further investigate the role of collaborative learning in the development of social capital. And finally, we recommend to include a small, systematic social capital component in LEI projects whenever it is appropriate. Using a common methodology to measure the presence of social capital and to observe commonly defined performance measures in a wide range of settings, over time could enable a 'meta' analysis of the impacts of social capital.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the research

As a result of an increasing concentration of retail activities, participants in the Dutch agricultural sector are cooperating more in order to maintain their market position. For example, many farmers are nowadays joining production networks - cooperative endeavours to jointly produce and market products. The development of collaborations in the agri-food chain is not only a phenomenon in the Netherlands. In many countries collaborations are a response to the economic pressures that are driving the evolution of the chain and encouraging greater vertical and horizontal co-ordination. Such collaborations are becoming more important for the functioning of separate links within supply chains. They can be considered as valuable for production and marketing and they lower transaction costs.

Social capital is an interesting theory in the context as described above. The reason for this will be further explained in section 1.2 and 1.3 in which we respectively show the theoretical and practical relevance of this research. Finally, section 1.4 describes the purpose of the research and organization of the report.

1.2 Theoretical relevance of the research

There are two pure institutional forms for efficiently governing transactions: the market and hierarchy. The market relies on the strong economic incentives of competing self-interest to assure efficiency, while hierarchy relies on authority and the ability to monitor and discipline self-seeking behaviour. Beyond these pure forms, Williamson (1995) and also others (i.e. Barkema, 1994; Mahony, 1992; in Peterson et al.) have defined hybrid forms of organization, including various forms of contracting, strategic alliances and joint ventures. Ziegenhorn (1999) specifically approaches networks as an alternative form of economic organization. In his book *Networking the farm: the social structure of cooperation and competition in Iowa agriculture*, Ziegenhorn quotes Wrong (1961) who says that markets and hierarchies are under socialized considerations of economic behaviour. That is also why a growing literature is exploring the role of social relations and networks in economic activity (Berry, 1993, 1997; Woolcock, 1998; in Lyon, 2000). Networks as a form of economic organization are seen as constituted by a variety of reciprocal exchanges of goods and information between people. As such they are embedded in a series of negotiated relationships.

The hybrid forms of institutional organization as mentioned above utilize individual incentives, authority/monitoring relationships or some mix of both to align the potentially conflicting interests of transacting parties and thereby bring about an economically efficient transaction. This creation of aligned or mutual interests minimizes the costs of transactions by limiting the impacts of opportunism. An interesting concept in this context

is social capital. Social capital is a term that comes from sociology (Coleman, 1987; Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1998; Sandefur and Laumann, 1998), but has become of increasing interest to economists (Knack and Keefer, 1997; Schmid and Robison, 1995) and political science (Putnam, 1993; Fukayama, 1995) (Rudd, 2000). Chapter two will further explain the concept of social capital. For now, we just briefly explain the relationship between collaboration and social capital, since a growing number of collaborations in agriculture form the occasion and the context of this research. To do this we use the concepts of interest and trust that are related to social capital.

One of the differences between the pure institutional organization forms (i.e. market and hierarchies) and the hybrid forms of institutional organization (i.e. networks, strategic alliances, etc.) is the concept of interests. The pure institutional organization forms are mainly meant to meet self-interest. This is also true for the more hybrid forms of institutional organization. However, these hybrid forms consider the interests of the counterparts in a different way. This is especially the case in regarding the way 'to give' and 'to take' take place. Considering this, the dimension of time is important in hybrid forms of institutional organization. 'To give' and 'to take' do not necessarily need to follow up immediately. This is why trust is important in hybrid forms of organization: trust is needed to have a certain degree of reciprocity (in the short or in the long term). As such, to efficiently collaborate in a network, mutual interests and trust are important. Growing bodies of literature relevant to the process of mutual interests and trust center on the concept of social capital (which is often related to networks).

1.3 Practical relevance of the research

Besides the theoretical relevance of the research, there are also some experiences from practice that show the relevance of this research.¹ These experiences are based on situations in developed agricultural countries as for example the Netherlands and the United States.

As has been mentioned in section 1.1 of this chapter, more and more participants in the agricultural sector form collaborations to maintain their competitiveness. The main reason for joining or establishing collaboration is the collective processing and marketing of products. Besides, by forming collaborations, the participants often hope to strengthen their negotiating position with their suppliers and customers. An additional advantage of working together in collaboration is the easy exchange of knowledge and information.

Research shows that the forming and functioning of collaborations often does not happen without difficulties. These difficulties often contain problems concerning the collective formulation of the goal, the strategy and performing activities to finally reach the goal. In many cases, the essence of the problems is related to trust and communication. There are numerous examples of situations whereby participants in the agricultural sector work together in a collaboration, that does not work out the way the participants expect it

¹ The practical relevance of the problem is a result of the experience of researchers who observe(d) these kind of problems while working with collaborations. Some of the problems as described above were also observed during a workshop about collaborations in Maastricht (the Netherlands) on September 24th, 2001. These experiences and observations are not documented.

to be in the beginning. In several examples, the lack of a group bond is a large problem. In particular, in one of the examples the participants never worked together in the past and did not know each other well enough. As a result, there was a fair amount of distrust in the air. Most of the people that were involved liked to be independent and the absence of a group bond made working on the collective goal difficult and sensitive. Different expectations of the collaboration, a different meaning of what each role should be, different interests and priorities of participants and the absence of a group leader made it impossible to make progress in the collaboration. Another example shows a collaboration in which the participants - in particular the executive committee or the leader - had the problem of not daring to make choices at the right moment in a structural way. The participants were afraid of what the consequences would be after making a choice. Besides, the scope of this group was too large and the participants were too different in their way of thinking that they (in fact the leader of the group) were not able to mobilize energy to make progress.

In the examples as described above, the absence or lack of social capital could be mentioned as one of the reasons why the collaborations did not succeed in making progress to finally reach their goal. This research supports collaboration in the agri- and food business based on both social capital and communication theory and further explores the role of science in this support.

1.4 Purpose of the research and organization of the report

The main purpose of the research is to support (the development of) fruitful collaborations in the food- and agribusiness. To accomplish this purpose, the report draws upon two bodies of literature. We will first give an overview of the concept of social capital. We show a conceptual framework that identifies the sources, the benefits and costs and the facilitation of social capital (chapter 2). This conceptual framework forms the starting point from which we discuss theories from other scientists. The second body of literature is theory about communication. After having done a quick literature scan about social capital, we assumed that successful communication between people who want to work together in a group might be helpful to build social capital. In chapter three we describe some theories about communication and communication techniques that might help in promoting social capital. In the last section of chapter three we discuss the linkage between (the creation of) social capital and communication, which is an important part of this research, since this linkage is related to the support of collaboration. Finally, chapter four concludes with a discussion, conclusions and recommendations for further research.

2. Social Capital

2.1 Introduction

The term 'social capital' initially appeared in community studies, highlighting the central importance - for the survival and functioning of city neighbourhoods - of the networks of strong, crosscutting personal relationships developed over time that provide the basis for trust, cooperation, and collective action in such communities (Jacobs, 1965; in Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998)). Early usage also indicated the significance of social capital for the individual: the set of resources inherent in family relations and in community social organizations useful for the development of the young child (Loury, 1977; Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). Recent research has applied this concept to a broader range of social phenomena, including relations inside and outside the family (Coleman, 1988), relations within and beyond the firm (Burt, 1992), the organization-market interface (Baker, 1990) and public life in contemporary societies (Putnam, 1993, 1995; Tsai and Ghoshal, 1998).

The focus of much of the work has been on the reasons for collaboration and how trust develops (Rudd, 2000). In this chapter we do not focus on the reason for collaboration. We explore the way in which social capital might affect the internal functioning of collaboration. To do this, we first give an interpretation of the term social capital. We present our point of view on social capital in section 2.2 and discuss the opinion of different researchers on social capital in section 2.3. In the respective subsections of 2.2 and 2.3 we discuss the definition of social capital, the sources of social capital, the benefits and costs of social capital and the facilitation process to promote social capital. Finally, section 2.4 summarizes key points from this chapter.

2.2 A proposed conceptual framework

Figure 2.1 shows a proposed conceptual framework for studying social capital. The framework includes the definition of social capital, its sources and consequences and the facilitation process of social capital. We discuss them respectively.

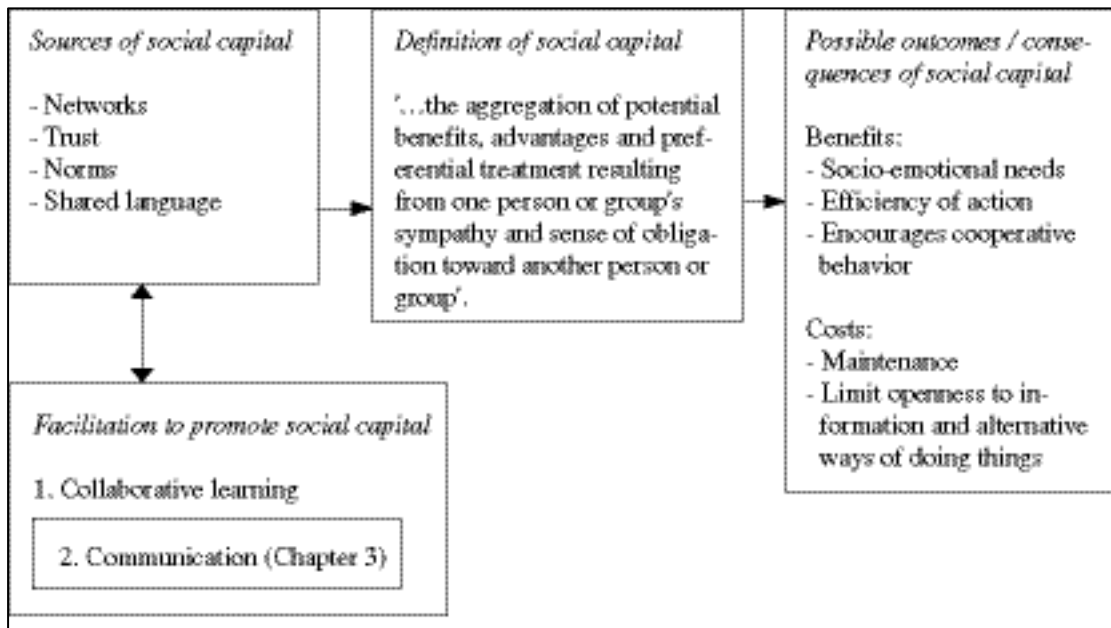


Figure 2.1 Proposed conceptual framework of social capital

2.2.1 Definition

In the past two decades, there has been much discussion on social capital (Fukayama, 1999; Nahapiet & Goshal, 1998; Tsai & Goshal, 1998). When we really want to answer the question 'what is social capital?' and thus refer to social capital itself, the explanation of the Social Capital Interest Group (SCIG) at Michigan State University is clear and useful. We first give the definition of social capital according to the SCIG, and then discuss the basis for what they think social capital is.

'Social capital is the aggregation of potential benefits, advantages and preferential treatment resulting from one person or group's sympathy and sense of obligation toward another person or group ...' (Social Capital Interest Group, Michigan State University, 2000).

The SCIG (2000) believes that social relations are the basis of social capital. The SCIG defines social relations as the attitudes persons develop toward each other or groups of other persons because of their interactions. Because of social relations, persons may acquire feelings of sympathy and obligation toward another person, group of persons and the formal organizations that represent groups of persons. Persons who are the recipient/object of feelings of sympathy and obligation have the potential to extract benefits and preferential treatment from those who hold feelings of sympathy and obligation. The SCIG believes that the potential for benefits from preferential treatment resulting from feelings of sympathy and obligation is the essence of social capital.

The SCIG does not state that their definition of social capital has produced the one correct definition. However, there was near consensus among their group though they represent different disciplines. Finally, they have found that they can communicate about the concept of social capital. For our purpose here, we adopt the definition of the SCIG. They see social capital as a result of interaction between persons or groups of persons. Interaction is all about communication. One of the crucial features of successful cooperation and building social capital is communication, which is the focus of chapter 3.

Nature of social capital

To identify the potential benefits derived from feelings of sympathy and obligation as capital, suggests that social capital has capital-like qualities. The SCIG, but also others (i.e. Hawe and Shiell, 2000) explain the 'capital' metaphor that was borrowed from economics. When 'capital' is used in the economic, but also in other contexts, it suggests something durable or long lasting. The word capital also suggests something that retains its identity even after repeated use, something that can be used up, destroyed, maintained or improved (SCIG, 2000).

An important feature of social capital, compared with other forms of capital, is that it is social in origin. Financial capital originates in financial markets and human capital originates in educational and training settings in which human skills and talents are taught and learned. Social capital originates from social relations. Feelings of sympathy and obligation develop because of social relations, which are both (long) lasting and capable of supplying repeatedly preferential treatment and benefits. Thus, social capital is durable. However, there are also costs (consequences) involved in its acquisition (Hawe and Shiell, 2000). For example, an investment of time and energy is required to establish and maintain the necessary relationship. Hawe and Shiell (2000) think perhaps the most interesting feature of social capital, however, is that it does not depreciate with use in the same way as most physical assets. Instead, there is a multiplier effect by which the more the stock of social capital is used the larger it becomes. However, there are limits to this process. Sometimes, a particularly intense action may 'destroy' one's social capital. Examples of intense actions that may destroy social capital in collaboration include betrayal of confidences or violation of a treaty.

Whether or not social relations increase or reduce social capital depends on it being perceived as synergistic or competitive. Synergistic activities such as mutually beneficial economic exchanges or participation in the same collaboration for a mutually beneficial prize are likely to increase the stock of social capital. On the other hand, activities in which the outcome is competitive - one person wins only if the other person loses - not only use up social capital when one extracts a favour, but also have the potential to destroy one's social capital when the conflict is significant (SCIG, 2000).

2.2.2 Sources

The four sources of social capital mentioned in the conceptual framework (figure 2.1) are: networks, trust, norms and shared language. We briefly discuss them in this order.

Networks

Networks (or social relations) are a critical part of social capital, providing the opportunity for interaction and thus collective action. One of the central themes in the literature is that social capital constitutes a valuable source of information benefits (i.e., 'who you know', affects 'what you know'). Coleman (1988) notes that information is important in providing a basis for action but is costly to gather. However, social relations, often established for other purposes, constitute information channels that reduce the amount of time and investment required to gather information. In fact, three properties of network structure - density, connectivity and hierarchy - are all features associated with flexibility and ease of information exchange through their impact on the level of contact or the accessibility they provide to network members (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998).

Trust

When two parties trust each other, they are more willing to share their resources without worrying that the other party will take them advantage of. Thus, cooperative behaviour, which implies the exchange or combination of resources, may emerge when trust exists (Tsai and Ghoshal, 1998).

Bechtel (1998) makes an important distinction in types of trust. He distinguishes three types of interorganizational trust, which are also relevant in the case of collaborations. He first mentions trust based on control or assuring that the other party will do what they say: *calculus-based trust*. The threat of punishment is likely to be a more significant motivator than promise of a reward. Calculus-based trust often involves a high degree of monitoring to assess whether a party is being opportunistic. The second type of trust is called *knowledge-based trust*. Knowledge-based trust is grounded in the predictability - knowing the other party sufficiently well so that the other's behaviour is anticipatable. Knowledge-based trust relies on information rather than punishment as a motivator. The third type of trust is *identification-based trust*. Identification-based trust is based on identification with the other party's desires and intentions. Trust exists because the parties effectively understand and appreciate each other's motivations and problems. Again, this is closely related to the way people communicate.

Transactions built on calculus-based trust often are governed by formal, contractual means. Calculus-based trust does not survive the occasional transaction in which benefits and costs are not equilibrated. The latter two forms of trust are not calculative, but are based rather on experience with the other parties and/or belief about their moral integrity. Thus, these forms of trust are likely to survive the occasional transaction in which benefits and costs are not equilibrated.

Norms

A norm exists in a given social setting to the extent that individuals usually act in a certain way and are often punished when seen not to be acting in this way (Axelrod, 1997). A distinction can be made between motivations that are based on deeply internalised norms, and motivations that are based on less deeply internalised norms (Portes, 1988). The internalised norms can be engendered through socialization in childhood or through experience later in life, specifically by the experience of a shared destiny with others. Motivations that are based on less deeply internalised norms can be based on obligations created in the

process of enforced trust (Adler and Kwon, 2000). They can be changed more easily than motivations that are based on deeply internalised norms.

Norms of reciprocity are the most visible norms (Lyon, 2000). As Putnam (1993) puts it, generalized reciprocity involves not 'I'll do this for you, because you are more powerful than I,' nor even 'I'll do this for you now, if you do that for me now', but 'I'll do this for you know, knowing that somewhere down the road you'll do something for me'. This norm of generalized reciprocity can resolve problems of collective action and can bind communities.

Shared language

There are several ways in which a shared language influences the existence of social capital and the conditions for combination and exchange of knowledge and information. First, language has a direct and important function in social relations, for it is the means by which people discuss and exchange information, ask questions and conduct business in society. To the extent that people share a common language, this facilitates their ability to gain access to people and their information. To the extent that their language and codes are different, this keeps people apart and restricts their access. Second, language influences our perception (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Pondy & Mitroff, 1979; in Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998)). Codes organize sensory data into perceptual categories and provide a frame of reference for observing and interpreting our environment. Third, a shared language enhances combination capability. Knowledge advances through developing new concepts and narrative forms (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). However, in order to develop such concepts and to combine the information gained through social exchange, the different parties must have some overlap in knowledge. The existence of a shared vocabulary enables the combining of knowledge and information.

2.2.3 Benefits and costs of social capital

The first benefit of social capital for the focal actor is access to broader sources of information and the improvement of information's quality, relevance and timeliness. An important consequence is the increased opportunity to exchange knowledge and to learn, which will finally satisfy the socio-emotional need of validation and personal development. The second benefit in this category includes influence, power and control. Such benefits allow individuals to get things done and achieve their goals. Finally, we mention solidarity and thus the reduced need for formal controls. Strong norms and beliefs, associated with a high degree of closure of the social network, encourage compliance with local rules and customs and will finally lead to a reduced need for formal controls (Adler and Kwon, 2000).

The first benefit of social capital we mentioned is the access to broader sources of information. However, this access requires a considerable investment in establishing and maintaining relationships. Granovetter argues (like Burt (1992) does) that weak ties are more effective than strong ties. Not (or not only) because they provide access to no redundant information, but because they are less costly to maintain than strong ones. Second, the solidarity benefits of social capital may backfire for the individual in several ways. Strong solidarity with in-group members might reduce the flow of new ideas into the group. As Powell and Smith-Doerr (1994) put it, 'the ties that bind may also turn into ties that blind'.

Moreover, strong solidarity can lead to excessive claims, restrictions on freedom and downward levelling of norms (Adler and Kwon, 2000).

To put it briefly, social capital provides socio-emotional needs, increases the efficiency of action and encourages cooperative behaviour, but it requires maintenance costs and it can limit the openness to information and to alternative ways of doing things. Finally, it is difficult to find the right balance between the benefits and costs of social capital to optimise the performance of collaborations.

2.2.4 Facilitation to promote social capital

Two processes are important when promoting social capital in horizontal collaboration. The first process is collaborative learning - the process of people in a group learning together while they work together to finally reach their goal. Through collaborative learning people create a shared language and shared experiences. However, to promote social capital in this learning-process it is required that people or parties must be willing and able to exchange socio-emotional goods such as gratitude and trust (Robison, 2001). Furthermore, Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) show in their research about the creation of intellectual capital¹ the importance of the willingness to value and respond to diversity, openness to criticism and a tolerance of failure.

The second process is communication. Communication is a precondition for the development and maintenance of social capital. Especially a regular dialogue, group facilitation and conflict handling are of importance when promoting social capital. Chapter 3 further explains the process of communication.

2.3 Discussion

In this section we discuss insights of different researchers² on the definition of social capital (2.3.1), the sources of social capital (2.3.2), benefits and costs of social capital (2.3.3) and facilitation of social capital (2.3.4).

2.3.1 Definition

In the past two decades, social capital has emerged as a dominant paradigm in the various social science disciplines (Robison et al., 1999). Although authors agree on the significance of relationships as a resource for social action, they lack consensus on a precise definition of social capital. Some, like Baker (1990), limit the scope of the term to only the structure of the relationship networks, whereas others, like Bourdieu (1986, 1993) and Putnam (1995) also include in their conceptualisation of social capital the actual or potential resources that can be accessed through such networks (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998).

¹ Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) use the term 'intellectual capital' to refer to the knowledge and knowing capability of a social collectivity, such as an organization, intellectual community of professional practice. This research is closely related to social capital research.

² Some researchers are already mentioned in section 2.2, but are now used because of other insights they have. Some researchers have not been mentioned before.

Frame 2.1 shows some of the specific definitions of social capital by some of the prominent disciplinary social capital theorists (Rudd, 2000).

The adoption of social capital as a dominant paradigm in the various social science disciplines has led to multiple and often conflicting definitions of social capital (see frame 2.1 and Robison et al., 1999). The evidence for this was shown in a conference about social capital, which took place on April 20th, 1998. Social scientists and applied problem solvers from around the world and across disciplines attended this conference. At the beginning of the conference, presenters were asked to respond to twelve alternative definitions of social capital proposed by social capital scholars. Not one definition of social capital was generally supported. Robison et al. (1999) suggest that the reason the conference participants could not generally agree on a definition of social capital was that the definitions did not limit themselves to answering the question: *what is social capital?* Instead, past definitions include answers to such questions as: where does social capital reside?; how can social capital be used? and how can social capital be changed? Fukayama also (1999) says that many definitions of social capital refer to manifestations of social capital rather than to social capital itself.

- 1)... the social capital of a society includes the institutions, the relationships, the attitudes and values that govern interactions among people and contribute to economic and social development... It includes the shared values and rules for social conduct expressed in personal relationships, trust and a common sense of 'civic' responsibility, that makes society more than a collection of individuals (World Bank, 1988).
- (2)... obligations and expectations, which depend on trustworthiness of the social environment, in information-flow capability of the social structure and norms accompanied by sanctions (Coleman, 1988).
- (3)... features of social life - networks, norms and trust - that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives (Putnam, 1995).
- (4)... a capability that arises from trust in a society or certain parts of it (Fukayama, 1995).
- (5)... a productive asset that enables individuals to better fulfil their aspirations through access to goods and services via their social network and through collective action (Castle, 1998).
- (6)... a resource that actors derive from specific social structures and then use to pursue their interests, it is created by changes in the relationship among actors (Baker, 1990).
- (7)... the aggregate of the actual or potential resources, which are lined to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition (Bourdieu, 1986).
- (8)... those expectations for action within a collectivity that affect the economic goals and goal-seeking behaviour of its members, even if these expectations are not oriented toward the economic sphere (Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1998).

Frame 2.1 Specific definitions of social capital by some of the prominent disciplinary social capital theorists

Source: Rudd (2000).

Like Robison et al. and Fukayama, Woolcock (1998; in Lyon, 2000) also comments on various available definitions. Woolcock identifies a weakness in many theoretical ap-

proaches to the concept of social capital. Some see it as a combination of ties and norms while others see it as a 'moral resource' such as 'trust'. He asks whether 'social capital is the infrastructure or the content of social relations, the "medium"... or the "message". Is it both?' Lyon (2000) observes that this distinction between what *causes* social capital and what it actually *is*, cannot be made. Social capital comes from the interplay of a range of factors, each of which entails social relations, that shape how agents react and these reactions are shaped by existing social capital.

Lyon's opinion has an element of truth in it. It is not easy to make a distinction between what really causes social capital and what it actually is, especially not when social capital is already present. Nevertheless, it seems important that one can explain and communicate about the concept of social capital to further investigate and disseminate it. That is why a tool like a clear definition seems necessary.

2.3.2 Sources of social capital

An important feature of social capital - as explained before in section 2.2.1 - is that it exists in a social relationship. Why do people enter into and invest in a relationship? The answer is simple: because we are in several ways interdependent. Humans are physically interdependent, because of different skills and resources. By exchanging goods and services, everyone can be made better off. But we are also interdependent in a socio-emotional way. We require validation and expressions of caring from each other. Moreover, we depend on personalized information for support and feedback. Because of our physical and emotional interdependencies, and being rational - we are all motivated by a certain degree of self-interest - we invest in relationships (Robison, 2001).

Among social capital scientists, a basic consensus exists that social capital is derived from social relations. However, there is considerable disagreement and confusion concerning the more specific aspects of social relations that create sources of social capital. Much social capital research can be divided into one branch, which locates the source of social capital in the formal *structure* of the ties that make up the social network, and another branch, which focuses on the *content* of those ties.

Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) go further in their distinction of sources. They suggest, in their exploration of the role of social capital in the creation of intellectual capital, that it is useful to consider the sources of social capital in terms of three clusters: the *structural*, the *relational* and the *cognitive* dimensions of social capital. They separate these three dimensions analytically, but recognize that many of the features they describe are, in fact, highly interrelated.

Nahapiet and Ghoshal use the concept of the structural dimension of social capital to refer to the overall pattern of connections between actors - that is, who you reach and how you reach them (Burt, 1992). Among the most important facets of this dimension are the presence or absence of *network ties* between actors (Scott, 1991; Wasserman & Faust, 1994); *network configuration* (Krackhardt, 1989) describing the pattern of linkages in terms of such measures as density, connectivity and hierarchy; and *appropriable organization* - that is the existence of networks created for one purpose that may be used for one another (Coleman, 1988).

The concept of relational dimension of social capital refers to the kind of personal relationships people have developed with each other through a history of interactions (Granovetter, 1992). This concept focuses on the particular relationships people have, such as respect and friendship, that influence their behaviour. It is through these ongoing personal relationships that people fulfil such social motives as sociability, approval and prestige. Among the key factors in this cluster are *trust and trustworthiness* (Fukayama, 1995; Putnam, 1993), *norms and sanctions* (Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 1995), *obligations and expectations* (Burt, 1992) and *identity and identification* (Hakanson & Snehota, 1995; Merton, 1968).

The third dimension of social capital, which Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) label the cognitive dimension, refers to those resources providing shared representations, interpretations and systems of meaning among parties (Cicourel, 1973). Nahapiet and Ghoshal have identified this cluster separately, because they believe it represents an important set of assets not yet discussed in the mainstream literature on social capital. These resources represent facets like *shared language and codes* (Arrow, 1974; Cicourel, 1973; Monteverde, 1995) and *shared narratives* (Orr, 1990).

<i>Authors</i>	<i>Opportunity</i>	<i>Motivation</i>	<i>Ability</i>
Brehm & Rahn, 1997	Civic participation	Interpersonal trust	
Burt, 1997	Structural holes a)		
Coleman, 1988, 1990	Closure, multiplex ties	Trustworthiness as norm	
Galunic & Moran, 1999	Structural sources	Relational sources	
Leana & Van Buren, 1999		Trust, associability	Associability b)
Lin, 1999	Extensity of ties	Status, tie strength	Education
Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998	Structural dimension (network ties, network configuration and appropriate organization)	Relational dimension (trust, norms, obligations and identification)	Cognitive dimension (shared codes, language and narratives)
Newton, 1997	Networks	Norms & values	
Ostrom, 1994	Networks	Norms	Social beliefs, rules
Portes, 1998		Value introjection, norms of reciprocity, enforceable trust, bounded solidarity	
Putnam, 1993	Networks	Norms, trust	
Uphoff, 1992	Structures	Cognition (norms, values, attitudes, beliefs)	
Woolcock, 1998	Networks	Norms, trust	

Frame 2.2 Sources of social capital

Source: Adler and Kwon (2000).

a) A structural hole means that an actor is connected with someone, but has no tie to that actor; b) Associability is the willingness and ability of participants in an organization to subordinate individual goals and associated actions to collective goals and actions.

We find the sources mentioned by Nahapiet and Ghoshal, similar to those identified in the work of Adler and Kwon (2000). They summarize part of the literature on the sources of social capital in a table, using a distinction between opportunity (*what creates opportunities for social capital transactions?*), motivation (*what motivates 'donors' to help recipients in the absence of immediate or certain returns?*) and ability (*what are the competencies and resources at the nodes of the network?*). In fact, we can compare opportunity with the structural dimension of social capital, motivation with the relational dimension and ability with the cognitive dimension of social capital. The summarization of Adler and Kwon (2000) is partly shown in frame 2.2.

Striking points from frame 2.2 are networks as the opportunity for social capital and trust and norms as the motivation for social capital. We already described these concepts in section 2.2.2. But we will further explore these concepts, because they seem to be important for the understanding of term social capital.

Network(structure) as a source of social capital

Networks are the most visible and clearly definable part of social capital and for this reason they have received most attention in studies on social capital (Lyon, 2000). The fundamental proposition of social capital theory is that network *ties* provide access to resources and the channels for information transmission. However, the overall *configuration* of these ties constitutes an important facet of social capital that may impact the final performance of collaboration.

Burt (1992) devotes a lot of attention to the efficiency of different relationship structures. He argues, in particular, that the sparse network, with few redundant contacts, provides more information benefits. The dense network is inefficient in the sense that it returns less diverse information for the same cost as that of the sparse network (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). Also Flap and Völker (2001) devote a lot of attention to the efficiency of different relationship structures. An important conclusion of their analysis is that different network structures constitute different forms of social capital, depending on what goals the actor wants to attain. For example, when unique information is needed, a network rich in structural holes¹ is an optimal structure (B in figure 2.2), while goals like trusting each other and cooperation are best served by a close network (A in figure 2.2). The network in figure C is recently formulated by Krackhardt (1999). He emphasized that being the link between two or more mutually exclusive cliques can be unpleasant. Although such a network structure might lead to a central position, it may also create a situation in which the focal person is unable to conform to the norms and expectations of the different cliques in which he is involved. It is a double bind: whatever an actor does, he does it wrong and might be sanctioned.

Concerning networks as a source of social capital, Uphoff and Wijayaratra (2000) stress the importance of roles as a part of an on-going pattern of social interaction. Roles for decision-making, resource mobilization, communication and conflict resolution are supportive of collective action. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

¹ Burt (1992) stresses that in competitive situations individuals have an advantage over those to whom they are connected but who have no ties to each other. The focal actor then has a minimum of redundancy in his or her relations and the widest choice of interaction partners. Further, he can play the other actors off against each other. This is the advantage of being autonomous, of having a network with 'structural holes'.

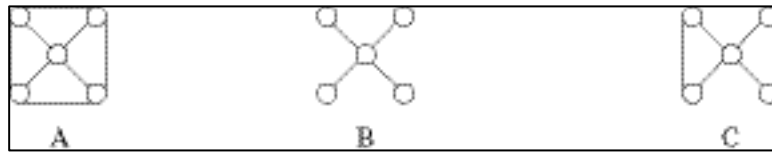


Figure 2.2 Social capital in different network structures: cohesive network (A), structural holes (B) and network with separated cliques (C)

Trust as a source of social capital

There is some confusion in the literature as to the relationship between trust and social capital. Some authors equate trust with social capital (Fukayama, 1995, 1997); some see trust as a source of social capital (Putnam, 1993); some see it as a form of social capital (Coleman, 1998) and some see it as a collective asset resulting from social capital construed as a relational asset (Lin, 1999; in Adler & Kwon, 2000). Within an organizational context, research has been complicated by the fact that trust is both an antecedent to and a result of successful collective action. Trust is necessary for people to work together on common projects, but trust is also a by-product of successful collective action (Leana & Van Buren, 1999). In the motivation-opportunity-ability scheme (see frame 2.2), trust presents itself as a key motivational source of social capital (Adler & Kwon, 2000). In other words: one of the reasons why people might collaborate is because there is a certain degree of trust.

Researchers have defined trust in many different ways, but they generally agree that it requires a willingness to be *vulnerable* (Rousseau et al., 1998, in Leana & Van Buren, 1999). Misztal (1996; in Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998) argues that trust is multidimensional and indicates a willingness to be vulnerable to another party - a willingness arising from confidence in four aspects: (1) belief in the good intent and concern of exchange partners, (2) belief in their competence and capability, (3) belief in their reliability and (4) belief in their perceived openness. When these beliefs are present or growing, social capital can be built.

Norms as a source of social capital

Norms have been defined in various ways in the different literatures and even within the same literature. The three most common types of definitions are based upon expectations, values and behaviour.

In section 2.2.2 we mentioned the following definition: A norm exists in a given social setting to the extent that individuals usually act in a certain way and are often punished when seen not to be acting in this way (Axelrod, 1997). An important, and often dominant, reason to respect a norm is that violating it would provide a signal about the type of person you are. For example, if there is a norm dictating that people should dress formally for dinner, and you do not, then others might make some quite general inferences about you. A norm is likely to originate in a type of behaviour that signals things about individuals that will lead others to reward them (Axelrod, 1997).

According to the definition as described above, the extent to which a given type of action is a norm depends on just how often the action is taken and just how often someone is punished for not taking it. A way to enforce a norm is to punish those who do not sup-

port it. In other words: be vengeful, not only against the violators of the norm, but also against anyone who refuses to punish the defectors. This amounts to establishing a norm that one must punish those who do not punish a defection. Axelrod (1997) calls this a meta-norm.

Norms are an important part of social capital that are drawn on by actors when making decisions on whether to trust an individual. According to Fukuyama (1995), shared norms form the source of trust (Schmid, 2000). Norms define what actions are considered acceptable or unacceptable and can be seen as the basis of building and maintaining personalized trust. Moreover, they can be seen as a part of social structure or a habit that shapes intuitive actions.

Adler and Kwon (2000) stress that the fact that a norm is shared is surely not a sufficient condition for the generation of social capital. A norm can be strong and shared, but they can be such that they undermine, rather than create social capital. An example is a clan in a wider community where people from the community can be excluded. They conclude that it is the specific content of the shared norms that determines whether they function as a source of social capital.

Networks, trust and norms belong to the structural and relational dimension of social capital. Although shared language and codes (cognitive dimension) are only mentioned once in frame 2.2, we stress it here as an important source of social capital. The reason for this is that meaningful communication - an essential part in collaborations - requires at least some sharing of context between the parties are involved.

Tsai and Ghoshal (1998) studied the way in which social capital affects the internal functioning of firms. They argue that a shared vision embodies the collective goals and aspirations of the members of an organization. When organization members have the same perceptions about how to interact with one another, they can avoid possible misunderstandings in their communications and have more opportunities to exchange their ideas or resources freely. Furthermore, the common goals or interests they share help them to see the potential value of their resource exchange and combination. As a result, organization members who share a vision will be more likely to become partners sharing or exchanging their resources.

In collaboration it is important to have a shared vision, but a shared vision is not enough. A shared language has a direct and important function in social relations. It brings people together and it gives access to each information. Section 2.2.2 (below shared language) further clarifies this.

2.3.3 Benefits and costs of social capital

Researchers differ in the level of analysis they use in describing social capital (Leana and Van Buren, 1999). It has been described as an attribute of nations or geographic regions (Fukayama, 1995), communities (Putnam, 1993b), individual networks (Burt, 1992a), firms in their interactions with other firms (Baker, 1990) and individual actors (Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993).

Another, and related, distinction among definitions of social capital concerns the benefits of social capital and how they are distributed across a social unit. Although in all models individuals can benefit from the presence of social capital, there are differences in

how direct those benefits are. There is a group of researchers who see social capital as an attribute of a social unit, rather than an individual actor, and the individual benefits from its presence or suffers from its absence in a secondary way (for example a street lamp). The alternative approach is a 'private goods' model of social capital. Some private goods treatments of social capital focus explicitly on the individual and his or her accrued social assets, such as prestige and educational credentials. The focus in terms of outcomes is always on the individual person or unit and the types of social arrangements and strategies that can work to his, her or its private benefits (Leana and Van Buren, 1999).

A large body of research has focused on the benefits of social capital. However, the literature on its costs is sparse. Social capital has costs, which can sometimes outweigh its benefits for the focal actor (Leana and Van Buren, 1999) and sometimes benefits for the focal actor create costs for other actors (Portes and Landolt, 1996; in Adler and Kwon, 2000). Here we discuss the benefits and costs of social capital at the aggregate level, since this is most relevant for collaboration.

Leana and Van Buren (1999) describe in their model of organizational social¹ capital four primary ways in which social capital can lead to beneficial outcomes for the organization. These benefits also concern the interorganizational level. We mention the model of Leana and Van Buren here, because it is also relevant for collaboration in agriculture.

First, social capital justifies individual commitment to the collective good. If individuals believe that their efforts are an integral part of a collective, they are more likely to spend time doing things the organization and/or its members find useful and less time doing things benefiting the individual, but not the organization.

Second, social capital can also facilitate flexibility rather than rigidity in the ways work is organized and carried out. Thus organizational social capital, with its emphasis on collective identity and action and its reliance on generalized trust, rather than formal monitoring and economic incentives, will facilitate the adoption and effectiveness of flexible or high-performance work practices.

Third, social capital can function as a means of managing collective action. Relational contracts and norms, rather than transactional agreements and formal rules, are the operational underpinnings of behaviour between organizational members. In the language of economics, social capital can reduce transaction costs.

Finally, social capital can be a facilitator of intellectual capital. Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) use the term intellectual capital to refer to the knowledge and knowing capability of a social collectivity, such as an organization. They describe how various forms of social capital could facilitate the development of intellectual capital within the firm by providing an environment conducive to the combination and exchange of information and knowledge. This can happen in several ways. For example, social relations can provide a vehicle for accessing and disseminating information that is often more efficient and less costly than more formal mechanisms. The shared language often found in organizations strong in social capital can also be effective and efficient ways of transferring knowledge and thus increasing the intellectual capacity of the firm.

¹ Leana and Van Buren (1999) define organizational social capital as a resource reflecting the character of social relations within the organization, realized through members' levels of collective goal orientation and shared trust.

Leana and Van Buren (1999) think that, like any asset, organizational social capital is not cost free. Social capital requires maintenance. Moreover, organizations strong in social capital may be characterized not just by institutionalised ways of thinking, but also by highly rigid power arrangements, leading to dysfunctional political behaviour and entrenched leadership. Leana and Van Buren (1999) describe the following potential costs of organizational social capital.

First, maintenance costs of organizational social capital are twofold: (1) costs associated with maintaining ongoing relationships and norms and (2) costs associated with maintaining slack resources. Secondly, social capital can also be an impediment to innovation (Coleman, 1990). The denser and more long-standing the ties among organizational members, the less likely the entry of new information (Staw et al., 1981). Thus, social capital may also hamper innovation through its detrimental effect on the introduction or consideration of new information by members. Finally, the power structure can be that institutionalised that it limits the consideration and acceptance of innovation and change. As a consequence, the organization may become more internally focused and less adaptive to its external environment.

2.3.4 Facilitation to promote social capital

Social capital can be promoted in horizontal collaboration in agriculture. Horizontal forms of social capital involve more lateral ties between individuals within communities and help produce more egalitarian and robust democratic structures (Putnam, 1993a, 1993b, in Warner, 2001). A condition for individuals to participate in horizontal collaborations and to invest in and create social capital is a certain surplus, which means there must be a potential return on one's investment (Robison, 2001).

The literature on social capital suggests that two processes are important when promoting social capital in horizontal collaboration. The first process is collaborative learning - the process of people in a group who learn together while they work together to finally reach their goal. The second process is communication. We realize these two processes are highly interrelated. When people learn together, they interact. However, to further explain we describe them separately.

Collaborative learning process

In their paper about group networks in rural Australia Sobels et al. (2001) describe the background of the group learning process in creating social capital. Falk and Kilpatrick (1999) and Falk and Harrison (1998) propose that social capital is a product of 'learning interactions' in two fields. One is that people accumulate knowledge of social organization - who others are, what they do and what they are good at. A second is that participants develop a shared understanding of individual and collective identities. Kilpatrick et al. (1998) investigated a rural business development program in Australia. They described this program as a 'learning community' that created social capital through a shared language, shared experiences, trust, self-development and fostering identification with the wider rural community. Social capital was identified as a promoter of change through its influence on the learning process. However, here we say that the learning process has its influence on the creation of social capital. Through the group learning process, which is characterized

by information flows, experimentation, discussion and decision-making, social capital can be promoted.

Carayannis et al. (2000) also involve in their research the learning process - in terms of knowledge sharing - as a mean to build social capital. They state in their paper that the emergence of collaboration is facilitated by the sharing of knowledge across organizational boundaries, which promotes the foundation of trusted relationships and builds social capital for further collaboration. Though their topic of research is at the organizational level, it is also applicable for horizontal collaboration in agriculture. Since knowledge is created and embedded in a particular social and operational context, participants in the collaboration create a shared social context through their interaction. People in the collaboration must cooperate to create mutually reinforcing processes of learning-by-doing and learning-by-learning, where they share a social setting to develop and absorb knowledge in a common context.

Norms of interaction, such as a willingness to value and respond to diversity, and openness to criticism and a tolerance of failure, are also applicable in the group learning process when social capital needs to be built. Use of the term symbolic diversity¹ in the research of Flora² further explains this.

When there is symbolic diversity in a community, people within the community can disagree with each other and still respect each other. Differences of opinion are accepted as valid. There is an acceptance of controversy, indicated by the perception of problems from solutions and public discussion of alternative solutions and their implications. Problems are raised early and alternative solutions and their implications discussed. People who raise issues are not accused of causing the problem. Discussion of the pros and cons of alternative solutions can be presented and argued. An individual's identity is not conflated with her or his position on a particular issue. In communities with high levels of symbolic diversity, there is an attention to process, rather than ends only. There is recognition that each solution implemented will bring new challenges. Communities that attend to this learning process have many local celebrations, but also the ability to learn from activities that did not work out as expected.

Communication process

Social relationships generally, though not always, are strengthened through interaction but die out if not maintained. Unlike many other forms of capital, social capital increases rather than decreases with use. Interaction, thus, is a precondition for the development and maintenance of dense social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) in horizontal collaboration. Also Powell (1996) argues that collaboration is buttressed by sustained contact, regular dialogue and constant monitoring (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998).

In order to work in an efficient way, horizontal collaborations will have to define a common goal and a strategy that leads to that goal. Such collaborations must discuss alternative resolutions, consider adverse impacts and amelioration, engage in the production and provision of solutions and provide for sanctions, monitoring, conflict resolution and

¹ The degree in which differences of gender, class, culture, age and length of time in the community are acknowledged and valued for supplying new information and insight to the community process indicates the presence – and acceptance – of diverse symbols (Flora).

² Year unknown.

evaluation of outcomes. This interactive (goal and strategy orientation) process of identification of alternatives, discussion, controversy and decision-making builds social capital. It is comparable to the process of direct democracy in which each person takes responsibility for their own actions and their role in collective decisions. The crucial features of participatory democracies are face-to-face communication, dialogue, controversy and critical assessment that serves to enlighten, educate, articulate community preferences and help resolve problems in an open society (Rudd, 2000).

Chapter three further explains the process of communication. For now, it suffices to stress the importance of time for the development of social capital. Like other forms of capital, social capital constitutes a form of accumulated history - here reflecting investments in social relations (Bourdieu, 1986). Time is important for the development of social capital, since all forms of social capital depend on stability and continuity of the social structure. Since it takes time to build trust, relationship stability and durability are key network features associated with high levels of trust and norms of cooperation (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998).

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter focuses on the question, 'How does social capital affect the internal functioning of collaborations?' In the concluding section of this chapter, we summarize the most important aspects of the answer to this question.

The way social capital might affect the internal functioning of collaboration is related to social relations, which are the basis of social capital. Social relations are (long) lasting and capable of supplying repeatedly preferential treatment and benefits, even when benefits and costs are not equilibrated (since a certain period of time). Three aspects are related to this. First, we mention norms. Norms serve to guide, control or regulate proper and acceptable behaviour. Norms define which actions are considered acceptable or unacceptable and can be seen as the basis of building and maintaining personalized trust. Trust is a second necessary aspect in a collaboration, which indicates a willingness to be vulnerable to another party. Trust in social relations is in general based on knowledge (i.e. knowing the other party sufficiently well so that the other's behaviour is anticipatable) or identification (i.e. identification with the other party's desires and intentions). These types of trust in social relations make it possible for collaborations to survive, even when benefits and costs are not equilibrated. Third, social relations are often characterized by a shared language. A shared language makes the combination and exchange of information in the collaboration easier. This might increase the efficiency of action (i.e. reduce the transactions costs), which ultimately improves the functioning of collaboration. Furthermore, a shared language helps to formulate a shared vision that embodies the collective goals and aspirations of the people in the collaboration. A common goal or interest helps to see the potential value of resource exchange and combination.

3. Communication

3.1 Introduction

In section 2.2.4 we mentioned the facilitation of social capital. According to Webster's dictionary, 'to facilitate' means: to promote, to aid, to make easy, to simplify. Successful communication can be helpful in promoting social capital.

The literature about social capital and how it can be developed shows a rare connection with theories about communication or just simple communication tactics. While most of the communication studies reviewed here focus on group decision-making, those communication processes also promote social capital. Each process discussed fosters social capital as well as effective group decision-making.

We found the most extensive description of the linkage between social capital and communication in the approach of the SCIG (2000). The SCIG states that the intensity and duration of social relations vary as does the intensity and durability of social capital created by social relations. The intensity of social relations may be described as a function of the *means* of communicating. Intense communication would be face-to-face contacts that occur on a regular basis. Less intense communications are those that occur periodically through a medium. Communications by phone, mail, e-mail and messages passed through a third party illustrate this latter form of communication. The intensity of communication may also depend on the *relationship* between those communicating. Face-to-face communication between strangers is likely less intense than face-to-face communication between a husband and wife or a parent and a child. Finally, the intensity of social relations may be a function of the *purpose* for the communication. When the purpose of the communication is to enhance one's economic position, the intensity is different than when the communication is between an engaged couple strengthening their feelings of sympathy and obligation.

There are two remarks we want to make on the approach of the SCIG. First, social capital and communication are interrelated, but this does not mean that social capital will never exist when, for example, only the Internet is being used as a communication channel to maintain a relationship. However, to create a network or *build* social capital, electronically mediated exchange is not enough. This definitely requires more, not less, face-to-face communication (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). Our second remark, is related to the intensity of social relations which is described by the SCIG as a function of the means, the relationship and the purpose of communicating. The SCIG says nothing about the communication in practice¹ between individuals that is related to social capital. Sections 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5 further describe this. First, we briefly explain the concept of communication as perceived by Shannon and Weaver (1949), Rogers and Kincaid (1981) and Habermas (1981) in section 3.2 to illustrate the context of the research. We finish this chapter with a conclusion (section 3.6).

¹ Or social communication behaviour, i.e. listening, non verbal communication, etcetera.

3.2 Theories about communication

Linear models of communication have almost completely dominated communication research in the past. An important example is the communication theory of Shannon and Weaver (1949; in Rogers and Kincaid (1981)). The academic field of communication 'took off' when they set forth their model in *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*. They defined communication as 'all the procedures by which one mind may affect another', but the model itself was designed for purposes of electronic engineering. It is essentially a linear, left-to-right, one-way model of communication (see figure 3.1). It led to technical improvements in message transmission, and it served to bring together scholars from several disciplines to the scientific study of communication.

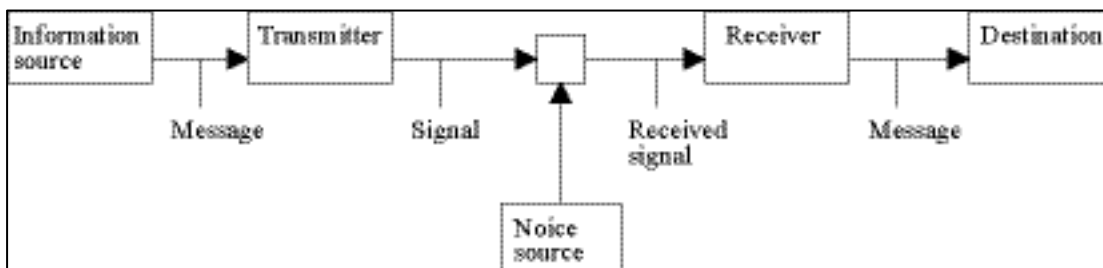


Figure 3.1 Shannon and Weaver (1949), *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*

Electronic communication usually is linear. But when human communication researchers utilized the Shannon/Weaver model, they did not pay enough attention to feedback and noise as components in the communication process. Further, they tended to underestimate the subjectivity of communication, that a message usually means something quite different to a receiver than it did to the source.

During the years after 1949, other communication models were proposed (Osgood and others (1957); Westley and MacLean (1957); Berlo (1960)), which are basically similar to the Shannon/Weaver conceptualisation. Most of these models state that communication, more or less, is a 'process' by which an idea is transferred from a source to a receiver with the intent to change behaviour. But the limitations of linear models became apparent in the application to the study of mass communication (Klapper, 1960) and the diffusion of innovation (Rogers, 1962 and 1976a). The main problem with the linear models of communication stemmed from their basic assumptions about the nature of information, how it is transmitted and what we do with it.

Rogers and Kincaid (1981) mainly meet this problem. In the study of human communication, Rogers and Kincaid (1981) feel that emphasis should be placed upon information-exchange relationships, rather than on individuals as the *units* of analysis. According to them communication is 'a process in which participants create and share information with one another to reach a mutual understanding' (see figure 3.2). A model of communication is incomplete if it only suggests the analysis of a single participant's under-

standing of a message. Communication is always a joint occurrence, a mutual process of information sharing between two or more persons. This cyclical process involves giving meaning to information that is exchanged between two or more individuals as they move towards convergence. Convergence is the tendency for two or more individuals to move toward one point, or for one individual to move toward another and to unit in a common interest or focus (Kincaid, 1979; in Rogers and Kincaid, 1981). The description of this cyclical process, which ideally ends up in convergence, is closely related to the concept of social capital. If two or more people unit in a common interest or focus they are more willing to treat each other in a preferential way compared to when they did not.

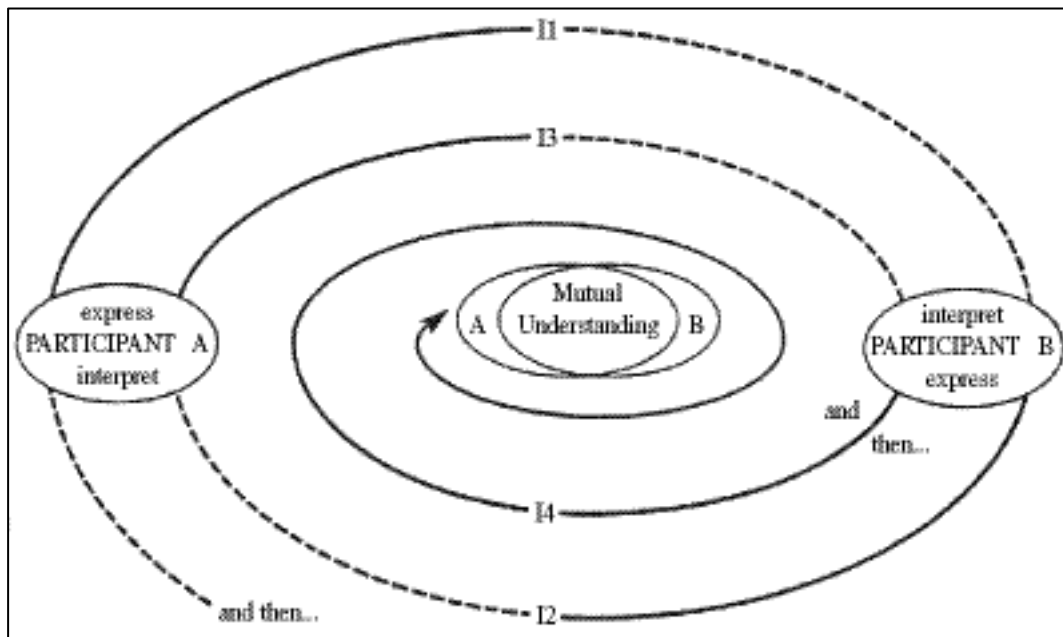


Figure 3.2 Rogers and Kincaid (1981), *The converge model of communication*

A theory that has similar elements - as in *The Convergence Model of Communication* as perceived by Rogers and Kincaid (1981) - is the theory of communicative action as proposed by Jurgen Habermas (Habermas, 1981; in Van der Schans, 2001). In the communicative action model, actions are coordinated by communication. Communication - in the context of practical problem solving - is about a joint process of interpretation and negotiation by which ends are set and means are chosen. Communicative action presupposes actors to realize their goals. In fact, the model of communicative action presupposes three worlds: an objective world of states of affairs, a social world of interpersonal relations and a subjective world of experiences and aspirations to which the actors themselves have privileged access. In the communicative action model, actors are related to each of these three worlds (Van der Schans, 2001).

Habermas argues that every process of reaching understanding takes place against the background of a culturally transmitted pre-understanding, which actors draw from as a

source of unproblematic interpretations of reality. To the extent that in a given action situation a part of this taken for granted stock of knowledge becomes problematic, actors engage in a co-operative process of interpretation in an effort to develop a new, less problematic definition of the situation. This does not mean however that joint processes of (re-) interpretation will lead in every case to a stable and unambiguously differentiated new definition of the situation. Communicative action is consensus oriented, it is not, or not necessarily, consensus based (Van der Schans, 2001).

Habermas suggests that 'strategic action' and 'communicative action' can be used both to describe the same action under different aspects. The question is if participants in the discussion adopt a success-oriented attitude ('strategic action') or one oriented to reaching understanding ('communicative action')? This question gives the impression that in case of communicative action, actors only have one goal: reach understanding. However, also in communicative action, actors strive for their own goal. The difference is that in case of communicative action, actors are willing to confer with the intention to tune actions that need to be taken (and to finally reach their goals). Actors who act in a strategic way don't discuss their own action plans. They try to influence the behaviour of others in a one-way direction. Communicative action means that actors influence in a mutual way by using arguments.

As was said in the introduction of this chapter, literature about social capital shows a rare connection with theories about communication. However, there are some authors who illustrate the linkage between social capital and communication. For example, Bourdieu (1986) states that interaction is a precondition for the development and maintenance of dense social capital. Discussing the development of language, Boland and Tenkase (1995) note that 'through action within communities we make and remake both our language and our knowledge'. According to these authors, such communities must have space for conversation, action and interaction in order for codes and language to develop that facilitate the creation of new intellectual (and social) capital. Moreover, Powel (1996) argues that cooperation is buttressed by sustained contact, regular dialogue and constant monitoring and that without mechanisms and institutions to sustain such conversations, trust does not ensue (see also Coleman, 1990; in Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998).

Authors who illustrate the link between collaboration, social capital and communication often mention only the fact that face-to-face communication, regular dialogue, decision-making, group facilitation and conflict resolution are important features to finally reach a successful collaboration. But in general, they do not discuss how this communication helps build social capital. In this chapter, we partly meet this lack. We say partly, because it is impossible to deeply discuss all communication tactics that lead to better collaboration and a certain degree of social capital. However, we want to discuss three important ones. Successively, we discuss the method of dialogue (section 3.3), group facilitation (section 3.4) and conflict handling (section 3.5) in the context of the theories as described above.

3.3 Dialogue as a method

To further explain the process of successful communication - which will finally buttress cooperation - we discuss the dialogue method according to Van Ruler (1999). The starting point of the dialogue method is the idea that everything we do originates from an idea or a thought in our heads. That can be based on rational analysis, but a thought can equally develop out of pure emotion. Most of what sprouts from our brains is a combination of these two, and we can rarely trace how we came to our thoughts. An idea is there, and sometimes we do something with it. Then thoughts lead to actions. In routine cases that causes no problems. With more important decisions, however, problems may be unavoidable. Anyone in an organization, who has an idea about something more than a routine issue, will usually have to discuss it with some other people. There are two ways of doing this. You can try to convince others and win them for your idea. That requires power and good negotiation strategies. In linguistic terms, this is called a 'debate' or a 'discussion'. We can compare this with 'strategic action' according to Habermas (1981). But you can also present your idea to others and stimulate them to respond in order to improve it. This is the dialogue method, which has elements of the theory of communicative action (Habermas, 1981) in it. According to writers on business management the first approach is more frequently used, whereas the second leads to better results.

The roots of the term 'dialogue' go back to classical Greek, in which the word 'dia' means 'through' and the word 'logos' means 'word', but also 'meaning'. In the methodology described here, the aim is not to reach the truth. The dialogue method is put to a slightly different use, namely as a way of creating mutual clarity so that people come to know each others' views and ideas on certain subjects, to mutual advantage. Getting at the truth - or to use more contemporary vocabulary, the most precise description of the problem - is not the aim here. It's all about clarifying people's views and the motives and assumptions underlying them.

A good dialogue fulfils seven requirements (see frame 3.1). All seven are of equal importance, and a dialogue is as strong as the weakest link in the chain of these seven points (Van Ruler, 1999).

Seen from the perspective of Habermas (1981), in day-to-day life the possibility of communicative action is not always clear from the outset. Communicative rationality requires a willingness (intention rather than overt result) of parties to behave rationally, to be prepared to give and take good reasons. Participants engaged in communicative action presuppose, as Habermas argues, a symmetrical relation in which everyone can participate and no participant dominates the other participants. The conditions constituting this are: every subject with the competence to speak and act is allowed to take part in discussions; everyone is allowed to question or introduce any assertion, and to express any attitude, desire or need; and no participant may be prevented by either internal or external coercion from exercising the above rights (Habermas, 1993 in Van der Schans, 2001). These conditions are comparable with the seven requirements as described in frame three. It might be obvious that it is difficult to meet these conditions and requirements. Habermas argues however that the possibility of reaching a common understanding is presupposed by actors engaged in day-to-day communicative action, otherwise they would not be involved in the process of exchanging arguments in the first place. Also Van Ruler (1999) states that the success of

the dialogue method stands or falls on the discipline of the participants. An analysis of adult meetings shows that conclusions have often been drawn before the talks even begin. These conclusions might not be fair, which in the end will have a negative impact on (the creation of) social capital.

1. *Suspending judgement*

Bohm, one of the architects of this methodology in the US, says that a good dialogue is only possible if the participants are prepared to take the views, feelings and motives of the other into account, without drawing conclusions or passing judgement. Now the hard part here is that nobody is ever a completely neutral participant in talks. And this limits the room there is for a totally free exchange and interpretation of opinions. People don't after all listen to each other with an open mind, and as soon as evaluative, judgmental remarks are made, people go on the defensive. The discussion table becomes an arena, and that certainly doesn't promote the free flow of ideas. That's why the methodology requires participants to suspend judgement for the duration of the dialogue. They cannot be expected not to have judgements, but can be asked to suspend them. This is done by agreeing not to make any evaluative, judgmental comments or gestures; only to ask for further explanations or information. A practice round and a strict chairperson usually suffice for this. Then it is possible to listen freely to each other.

2. *Identifying and suspending one's assumptions*

The requirement to suspend judgement implies not only that the participants make a distinction between neutral and evaluative language, but also that they are conscious of their own assumptions. That is more difficult than merely making a habit of avoiding certain kinds of comments for certain periods. Many assessments are based, not on thorough, thought-out judgements, but on judgements adopted without much thought: assumptions. Assumptions are beliefs, which 'go without saying'; we all have them, and need them to make sense of our world and ourselves. So assumptions are useful. If we didn't have any, we'd have to stop and think about everything. This method asks participants to do exactly that. The second commandment demands that all the participants submit their own assumptions to scrutiny. This doesn't mean that they then become neutral participants, but it does mean that everyone is conscious of the 'truths', which they take for, granted.

3. *Listening*

The dialogue method is not so much a method of speaking as a method of listening. Most of us are brought up to listen defensively, in order to understand what's expected of us and to be able to make a good impression. In dialogue, the aim of listening is to allow yourself to be influenced by the stream of words and meanings flowing over you. Listening in the dialogue process is based on the assumption that all that people feel, see, hear and perceive is one vision of reality, not necessarily the vision. Truth doesn't exist, but is seen as a social construction of reality. Every vision is relative and is open to change.

4. *Inquiry and reflection*

The aim of inquiry is to find out something we didn't know. That sounds obvious, but the secret of good inquiry is not the implementation, but asking the right questions. Asking good questions calls for fundamental curiosity and thorough reflection, directed both outwards and inwards, if people are to hold a successful dialogue. But time and space to exploit this inclination have to be built into the dialogue process. So the methodology requires from the participants an investigative and reflective mentality, and from the chairperson an approach which facilitates its expression.

5. *Non-verbal communication*

When someone gives two messages at the same time, it is almost always the non-verbal message, which is believed to be a reliable guide to the person's views. Non-verbal communication is found in things like posture, gestures, facial expression, and even what people have with them, for example their choice of clothing. And just as it is important in the dialogue process to seek clarification for a word or expression we don't understand, so should we seek clarity on non-verbal messages. The problem is that non-verbal

expression occurs on a much less conscious level than the verbal, which makes clarification much more difficult. Besides, non-verbal expression is often based on emotions, which makes providing clarification even more difficult.

6. *Conversational guidelines*

To fulfil the conditions of a good dialogue, the right environment is needed. The physical environment must be right. It should provide a certain peace. The dialogue should not be disturbed by the details of our hectic daily lives. But it's not just a matter of the physical environment. It also means that before the dialogue process has begun, clear agreements should be made about the social and emotional environment participants want to have. A climate must be created in which a good dialogue is possible. This means agreements on the following points:

- the dialogue doesn't have to bring any results other than dialogue itself;
- everyone will listen without reservations;
- everyone will respect differences in opinion;
- differences in status and roles are suspended and should not be brought into play during the dialogue;
- responsibility for the process is shared equally by all participants;
- whoever has the floor will speak to the whole group and not to one or two members of it;
- any participant may have the floor when they feel the need, based on their inner listening process;
- don't talk about the past, but about what is happening today;
- all participants put their case, which means their reality is theirs: neither more nor less.

It becomes clear that the dialogue is not a neutral form of communication. Everyone contributes whole-heartedly from the standpoint of his or her own, thought-out, opinion.

7. *The chairperson*

Strong leadership in the dialogue process is important, especially in groups who are new to this form of discussion. The role of the chairperson is many-sided. He or she makes agreements with the participants on the topics to be discussed, and the working methods to be used. The chairperson makes sure there is the necessary peace, variation and good atmosphere. He is usually also the host. Besides all this, he directs the talks. He holds the participants to the rules of a good dialogue and to their responsibility for it, keeps the group discipline up and corrects people if it goes wrong. He doesn't interfere with the content of the talks, except when they stray from the subject. But this does not mean he is a completely objective outsider. Through his grasp of the process, he also directs the input of the participants. Not what they think or what they say, but how others receive it, and only if the chairperson does this well it is possible for speakers to really put across their message. These skills also meet the skills of a group facilitator, which will be discussed in section 3.4.

Frame 3.1 Seven requirements for a good dialogue

Source: Van Ruler (1999).

Communicative action is an effort to reach a common understanding about an action situation through reasonable argumentation rather than manipulation or brute force. The process of argumentation is however a risky one. In trying to reach understanding parties may come to accept each others' grounds for doing or not doing things, they may also find more reasons to reject each others' claims. Communicative action therefore does not lead to common understanding in each and every action situation. However, a facilitator can play an important role in reaching understanding between two parties (see section 3.4).

An interesting question in this context and for the conclusion of this section is, 'How can a regular dialogue contribute to (the creation of) social capital?' Having a regular dialogue might first contribute to an accumulation of the cognitive dimension of social capital and secondly to an accumulation of the relational dimension of social capital. In particular,

scholars have shown that the cognitive and relational dimensions of social capital accumulate in network structures where linkages are strong, multidimensional and reciprocal. In a dialogue there is a two- or more-way traffic (reciprocity) and by having a dialogue on a regular basis, linkages between individuals or parties can become stronger. By having a regular dialogue (according to the requirements described in frame 3.1), a shared language can be developed or even discovered. This needs further explanation. The dialogue - when performed in the right way - gives the opportunity to the participating individuals or parties to get to know each other and to understand each other(s) problems). This doesn't necessarily mean that those actors need to agree. After all, they can still respect each other and feelings of sympathy can grow. The dialogue can serve as a starting point to look for possible solutions for problems that exist (between participating actors). In the process of defining the problem(s) and searching for solution(s), participating actors might develop a shared language or vocabulary (in case it was not present yet) which can finally lead to a (better) relationship. Through a growing relationship, social capital can be promoted.

3.4 Group facilitation

It is often necessary for a collaboration to have a driven and enthusiastic leader who is able to keep individuals in the group together and who is able to build trust between different parties in a supply chain¹. The attitudes and skills of a leader are similar to the attitudes and skills of a facilitator. However, a difference between the roles of a leader and a facilitator is that a facilitator usually does not concentrate on the content (the subject matter under discussion) (Vennix, 1996), while the leader of the group does - simply because he or she is often part of the collaboration and thus is concerned about the content. The similarity between a facilitator and a leader is their concentration on the procedure or method (the way a problem is tackled) and process (i.e. the way group members interact in a meeting), which is of extreme importance. To further explain, the interaction process affects the quality of the outcome and thus process may be considered equally critical as the content or method (Block, 1981). This means that it is not only important to pay attention to what you say or do, but particularly to the *way* you say or do it (Hackman, 1990). Another important insight is that the facilitator does not just bring techniques to the process, but also him- or herself. The group interaction process is to a large extent determined by the facilitator's behaviour, which is in turn a function of his or her skills and attitudes. Vennix (1996) discusses a number of important skills and attitudes, which we will summarize below. We remark here, that we use Vennix's insights on the role of a facilitator, but adapt it to the role of the leader in the collaboration.

3.4.1 Skills of the facilitator

The skills that Vennix (1996) describes are all related to communication, but he specifies them as follows: communication, conflict handling, process structuring, concentration, team building, intervention and skills to build consensus and commitment. Vennix dis-

¹ This was one of the conclusions at the end of a workshop, which took place on September 25th, 2001, in Maastricht (the Netherlands) about collaboration in groups of farmers.

cusses each of these in detail, in particular conflict-handling skills. Because of its importance, we will discuss conflict resolution in a separate section (3.5).

When people cooperate, they often face relational and/or business problems during the collaboration and then need to make (a) decision(s). In this and in the following section we give an overview of the skills a facilitator should have to help persons in a group defining problems, generating alternatives and making a choice.

Communication skills

Communication is at the heart of decision-making groups. It is the means through which group members exchange their views and whereby groups arrive at a decision. As might be expected, communication becomes more important when the problem becomes more complex (Hirokawa, 1990), because viewpoints will be more divergent and more effort is necessary to integrate these perspectives to counteract the divergence (Maznevski, 1994).

Most of the communication tactics Vennix discusses, which are important in a decision making process, are comparable with the seven requirements for a dialogue (section 3.3.). For example, Vennix states that open communication is important and presupposes that one must be able to postpone one's judgement. Moreover, he also discusses the issue of defensive listening. However, Vennix describes it from the point of view of a facilitator and goes further in his analysis. He describes the distinction between defensive and supportive communication. Supportive communication is characterized by description, i.e. genuine requests for information as opposed to evaluative statements. It is problem oriented rather than looking for control in discussions, since control produces defensiveness. Furthermore, spontaneity rather than strategy, empathy and equality characterize supportive communication.

Vennix concludes that open, supportive communication is a necessary requirement for arriving at high quality decisions. Creating a sphere of open communication is one of the primary tasks of the group leader. To do this, it is important that the group leader stimulates clearance in the discussion by asking questions, regularly checks whether everybody is still in on the discussion and requires active (or reflective) listening: listening and trying to understand what someone means by what he or she says. Jensen and Chilberg (1991, in Vennix (1996)) and Rees (1991, in Vennix (1996)) suggest some guidelines, which will help in active listening. Some of those are: avoid distractions; use eye contact, head nodding and attentive posture to show that you are listening; do not interrupt and avoid thinking ahead to what you are going to say. If one is a good listener, he or she will almost automatically build some kind of relationship during the discussion.

Group process structuring skills

Freely interacting groups often perform below their potential (Steiner, 1972; in Vennix, 1996). Important reasons for this are unequal participation and a discussion that tends to degenerate into battles in which winning the discussion is more important than finding the best solution. In general, these deficiencies tend to get worse when the group becomes larger. The larger a group, the more difficult it is to keep on track and to maintain high quality communication and a high degree of participation in the discussion. Research indicates that, when dealing with larger groups, it is beneficial when a facilitator introduces structured procedures into the group tasks and into the communication process (Boje and

Murnighan, 1982; in Vennix, 1996). As regards the group task, structure can be obtained by breaking down the decision making task into a number of smaller sequential steps: identifying the problem, generating alternatives and making a choice. Of course each of these steps can in turn be subdivided into smaller sub steps if required. With regard to the communication process, more structure can be accomplished by breaking up a large group into smaller groups.

Concentration skills

A group leader must be able to fully concentrate on the discussion in the group. In general, discussions have the tendency to go off in all kind of directions (Jensen and Chilberg, 1991). The group leader not only has to ask questions, he or she also has to keep track of the flow of the discussion in relation to the original problem. It is not a problem if the discussion gets off the target every once in a while. But it is the task of the group leader to get the discussion back on the track. In order to help the group keep track of the discussion and thinking process, it is important to summarize parts of the discussion. In addition, it is important that every once in a while, the group leader summarizes what the group has done, contrast this with the original plan and prepare the next steps in the discussion.

Team building skills

A team is a special type of group with the following characteristics: in general, teams are more cohesive; in teams there is an open, informal atmosphere and in general, there is a mutual acceptance and understanding between team members. Although disagreement frequently occurs, members of a team are not uncomfortable with this (Dyer, 1977). As opposed to groups, teams have a common goal or mission that they want to accomplish. When it comes to team building, the first step for a group leader is to encourage all members to participate, i.e. to state their ideas, to ask questions, etcetera. Many meetings are characterized by the fact that the 'real' discussions take place outside the actual meeting. One reason for this is that in the meeting participants do not get a chance to voice their ideas, either because they do not feel safe enough to do so or simply because the group is large. In normal group discussions, the larger the group the more skewed the distribution of speaking time among participants. This is not necessarily wrong, but it is the task of the group leader to continually invite people to participate in the discussion. This means that his or her task is to create a safe environment in which people have the feeling that they can air their opinions and that these will be given serious consideration. This will in turn encourage people to participate.

In addition, the group leader has to keep the group focussed on the problem that it tackles. This will create a common purpose. In that sense, the group leader also has to take care of creating a 'we' feeling. Team building is fostered when 'we' sentences are employed: do we (rather than you) really understand how this works; did we discuss this aspect sufficiently; do we agree on this, etc.

Intervention skills

Intervention skills generally relate to participation in the discussion by various group members. A group leader's effort to promote equal participation among group members can be seriously thwarted by so-called problem people in the group. Both Doyle and

Straus, and Krueger discuss the issue of problem people. The most difficult persons are the dominant talker, the shy participant and the rambler (Krueger, 1988). According to Schein (1987) there are four types of intervention tactics, i.e. exploratory, diagnostic, action alternative and confronting interventions. Exploratory interventions encourage a person to go on talking, to tell more. Diagnostic interventions aim at getting the person to think about something (e.g. questions like: what goes on in this meeting?). Action alternative interventions focus on questions related to what can be done about something. Finally, confronting interventions directly focus on a person's own behaviour. The latter is the most difficult and dangerous intervention tactic, because its results can hardly be predicted.

Skills to build consensus and commitment

An important factor in creating consensus is to give each individual a chance to participate in the discussion. Korsgaard, Schweiger and Sapienza (1995, in Vennix, 1996) have demonstrated that in management teams where the leader solicits opinions of group members and takes the team members' inputs seriously, commitment with the decision will be created even when a person does not agree with the final decision. In general, the more people in the group have the feeling that their opinion is heard and considered seriously in the final decision making process, the easier consensus and commitment is created. If the group leader succeeds in creating a situation in which everyone has the feeling that they had a fair chance to voice their opinion, consensus almost automatically materializes during the process (see also Senge, 1990). And as Schein (1969, in Vennix, 1996) has pointed out, consensus might be the best way to reach a decision, because it will foster commitment with the decision. Since consensus breeds commitment, an important task for a group facilitator is to test consensus in the group at regular intervals during the group deliberations.

3.4.2 Attitudes of the facilitator

Without the right attitudes, the skills as described in section 3.4.1, will be virtually useless, or at least they will be considerably less powerful than when they are embedded in the attitudes as described below.

Helping attitude

A group facilitator is a person who assists a group in the process of solving a problem or making a decision (Hart, 1992). Also the leader of the collaboration (=group) must have this helping attitude. If the leader always displays an attitude of knowing things better than the others in the group and criticizing others' views, the leader will generate a lot of resistance in the group. When a person in the group has a problem, the best way for a leader to help is to take the person and his or her problem seriously. In the long run it proves more effective to try first to understand what a person is really saying by asking questions than by providing quick solutions. Moreover, the questions and suggestions the leader makes are meant to start a joint thinking process with the person or group that has the problem.

Attitude of authenticity and integrity

It is effective in the long run when the leader in the group shows integrity and is authentic. Authenticity implies being yourself and displaying genuineness in interaction with other

people. When we take a look to organizations, much of what is going on is not authentic. Impression, power games and manipulation leads to lack of trust between people. Many people acquiesce in this state of affairs, which is best demonstrated by such a typical expressions, as 'that is the way it goes'. However, social reality (or for that matter 'the way it goes') is the result of our own action. Believing that 'that is the way it goes' implies that we will comply in our behaviour and as a result reinforce 'the way it goes'. Changing this state of affairs can only be accomplished by changing our own minds and actions, although this will take time, since people have to get used to it and respond positively in turn. Authenticity and integrity are important factors in creating a favourable climate in organizations, which in turn will augment performance. Related to collaboration, in Vennix's view authenticity and integrity are important factors in building confidence and in creating commitment (and confidence) in the group.

Attitude of inquiry

One of the most powerful interventions for any facilitator or leader is to ask questions. Part of the reason for this is that people tend to give answers and air opinions rather than ask questions in a group. Vennix describes his personal impression of participants who often talk past each other without being aware of it. Frequently, he tells people that he doesn't understand what they mean or why they hold a particular opinion and observes that others in the group are glad that someone asks. These types of questions, posed by a leader or facilitator, are thus useful to prevent misunderstandings and to avoid a false feeling of agreement and clarity. It often happens that at the end of a meeting people feel that they agree, but at the next meeting, when they talk it over again it looks as if they are back at the start and did not reach consensus in the previous meeting. Asking questions to clarify a matter could help to prevent these misunderstandings. On the one hand, this creates a possibility for people to explain their thoughts, while on the other hand it is an effective way to scrutinize these thoughts.

Asking questions is meant to foster a problem orientation and an attitude of inquiry within the group. The more a leader considers what he or she knows to be preliminary and subject of scrutiny and discussion, the more the leader displays a learning attitude as opposed to a teaching attitude, the more genuine his or her questions will be and the more they will foster an inquiry attitude to the group. Focusing on the problem and posing questions is also helpful to avoid politicking and win-lose fights. In that respect a sense of humour will also be very helpful to break the tension when debates might become hostile (see also Krueger, 1988).

Attitude of neutrality

Vennix (1996) describes the importance for the facilitator to be neutral with regard to group members. As we mentioned in the first paragraph of this section, the leader of a group is not completely neutral, because he is concerned about the content of the discussion. However, the leader of the group should not air his or her personal opinions too much, nor should the leader place evaluations on what is said both verbally and non verbally. This is the same for showing the preferences he or she might have for some people or ideas. Instead, the leader must take all participants seriously. Moreover, he or she must avoid getting involved in politicking. This type of attitude will help to build trust and

commitment within the group. As Hackman (1990) reports, the higher the amount of trust between team members, the higher the capacity for learning in the team.

At the end of this section, it is again interesting to ask the following question: 'how can group facilitation contribute to (the creation of) social capital?'. To answer this question, we take a closer look at the role group facilitation can play in creating a feeling of commonality in the group. Skills for team building and building consensus and commitment are related to this. For the group leader, it is important to keep the group focussed on the purpose of their collaboration. What is the main problem that they have to tackle? By creating a 'we' feeling through emphasizing that the participants have a collective problem and a collective goal to work on, social capital can be promoted. Besides, feelings of sympathy for each other might grow. Concerning consensus and commitment it is important for the group leader to create an atmosphere where every individual feels free to voice his or her opinion and gets the feeling that their input is taken seriously. Only by sharing information about each personal opinion, the group leader and others in the group can discover if there is any degree of commonality in the collaboration. The more people have in common, the bigger the chance social capital can grow. Furthermore, feelings of obligation¹ to each other might grow, when commitment to the group and the formulated goal exists. As a consequence, a potential benefit is for example the growing chance of a service of (one of) the group members.

3.5 Conflict handling

When people in a group cooperate, the group frequently consists of various and opposing personalities. Especially when important decisions need to be made, this can lead to difficult situations. In the literature about small group conflict and conflict management, two types of conflict are generally distinguished. One type is affective conflict, also denoted as socio-emotional or personal conflict. Affective conflict is rooted in the interpersonal relations within the group. They concern controversies, which relate to the emotional aspects of interpersonal relations. In other words, certain personalities don't match and cannot seem to get along easily. In general, affective conflict hinders effective group decision-making.

A second type of conflict is substantive or cognitive conflict. Substantive conflict is related to the group task and generally involves differences of opinion about the purpose, effect and progress or the structure, i.e. methods, division of tasks and power. Differences of opinion are a basic aspect of messy problems. Substantive conflict in a group is generally introduced by opinion deviates (Pendell, 1990). Laboratory studies have revealed that in cases where an accepted group member expresses a deviant opinion the number of communications directed towards that deviant opinion increase sharply. Evidently, the increased communications towards the deviant is aimed at changing his or her opinion towards the group opinion. This tendency becomes stronger when the pressure towards group uniformity and group cohesiveness is higher.

¹ See definition of social capital in section 2.2.1.

Research over the last decades has convincingly demonstrated that avoiding conflict and seeking premature consensus negatively affects the quality of the decision regardless of the type of decision-making task. This does not immediately imply that promoting cognitive conflict in a group will increase the quality of decision-making. Promoting cognitive conflict and controversy is only helpful under certain conditions. Promoting controversy sometimes leads to higher quality decisions, because disagreement causes a more thorough investigation of the problem, more information processing and a consideration of more alternatives. As might be expected, however, the relationship between the number of cognitive conflicts and quality of decision is curvilinear in shape. More cognitive conflict induces higher quality decisions. Beyond a certain point however, decision quality will deteriorate with a further increase in the number of cognitive conflicts (Wall, Galanes and Love, 1987). This is illustrated in figure 3.3.

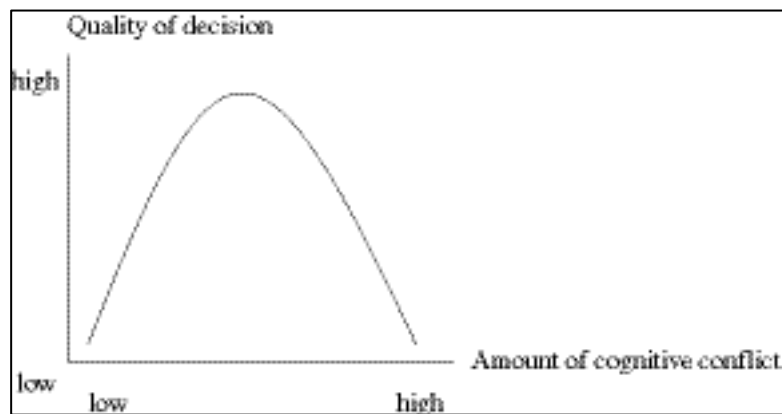


Figure 3.3 Relationship between amount of cognitive conflict and quality of decisions in small groups
Source: Wall, Galanes and Love (1987).

Not only the amount of conflict is of importance. Another important factor, which intervenes between cognitive conflict and decision quality, is the way people respond to conflicts. Thomas (1976) developed a two-dimensional model of conflict behaviour. The two dimensions are: cooperativeness and assertiveness. Cooperativeness is related to attempts to satisfy the other party's concerns, while assertiveness involves attempts to satisfy one's own concerns. Based on these two dimensions the author distinguishes a number of types of conflict behaviour. *Unassertive behaviour* leads to conflict avoidance when a person is uncooperative and to accommodation if the person is cooperative. *Highly assertive behaviour* gives rise to competition (uncooperative mode) or to collaboration (cooperative mode). In the middle between all these forms is *compromising behaviour* which scores intermediate on both dimensions (see figure 3.4).

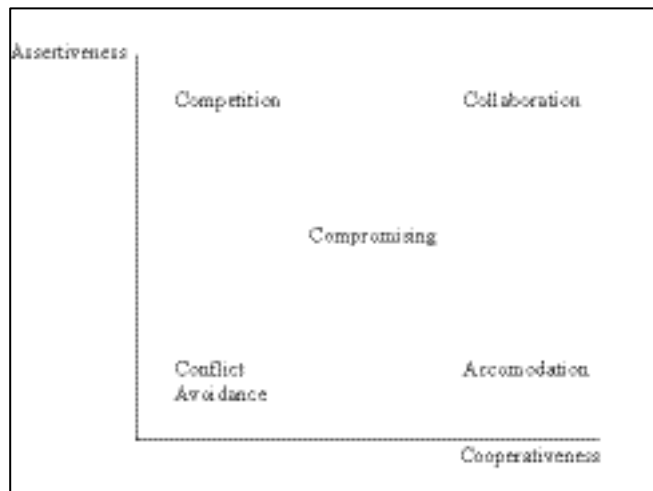


Figure 3.4 Two-dimensional model of conflict behaviour
Source: Thomas (1976).

Each of these types of conflict behaviours is appropriate in different circumstances. For instance, collaboration is most adequate when one wants to merge insights from people with different perspectives. However, the problem is not only that people respond differently to conflict situations, but also that they misperceive their own behaviour. Typically, when people have to judge their own behaviour in retrospect of a conflict they tend to view themselves as relatively cooperative while the other party is generally seen as competitive. Under these circumstances most conflicts will tend to drift towards competition rather than collaboration since competitive behaviour breeds competition (Jones, 1977; Kelley and Stahelski, 1970).

In a competitive conflict situation participants strive to surpass one another. People perceive themselves as having antagonistic interests and as a result they emphasize the differences. There is sphere of suspicion and communication can be hostile and misleading. In those situations people's response to the conflict situation can easily become unregulated (Poole, 1980), i.e. responses are aimed at injuring or eliminating another party. These unregulated responses generally result in a overt power struggle. In a cooperative environment, on the other hand, members give priority to the group's goals rather than their personal objectives. Conflict is seen as positive and beneficial, there is mutual trust and open communication. Here responses to the situation are more regulated. Regulated responses aim at information sharing and clarifying the nature of the conflict.

Finally, Vennix draws the following tentative conclusions. First, substantive conflict in-group decision-making is beneficial to promote vigilance and to increase the quality of the decision. However, if the group falls prey to personalized conflicts this will deteriorate rather than enhance decision quality. The group leader's task will finally be more difficult in a heterogeneous group. One helpful guideline in this respect is that emphasizing diversity in a group will make matters worse rather than better. Exline (1957, in Vennix (1996)) for instance, found that irrespective of actual group composition emphasizing congeniality in groups, led to higher willingness to work with others in the group and greater satisfaction with the progress of the group. Groups in which congeniality was emphasized

achieved more adequate task communication as opposed to groups in which no emphasis on congeniality was provided. Secondly, Vennix concludes that promoting cognitive conflict is only useful up to a certain point. If confronted with a concurrence-seeking group that looks for premature consensus, the group leader might promote disagreement by asking critical questions. In the end, a group leader has to take care that a sphere of cooperation rather than competition is created, because in a cooperative climate cognitive conflict will be most beneficial.

Handling disagreements and conflicts in the right way is of crucial importance to promote or maintain social capital. As is described above, the group leader can play an important role in this. It is a trick to let people interpret cognitive conflicts positively and moreover, let cognitive conflicts experience as a part of a collective learning process. In such a learning process, people get to know each other better, which may positively contribute to the relational dimension of social capital.

3.6 A further approach of the linkage between communication and social capital

This chapter gives an overview of aspects of communication theory that may be relevant for the creation or further development of social capital. In this section, we provide a deeper explanation of the linkages we see between communication theory and theory about how to build social capital.

Like many economic concepts, social capital says little about processes. As the definition says it is the aggregation of potential benefits, advantages and preferential treatment resulting from one person or group's sympathy and sense of obligation toward another person or group. But little is said about how one can create those potential benefits, advantages and preferential treatment that result from one person or group's sympathy and sense of obligation toward another person or group. This lack can be met by linking social capital with theories about communication, because the latter is, in contrast, all about processes. This research may bring these two together.

Which communication issues are especially related to social capital issues? We first start with the issue of (*patterned*) *flows of information* in a group which is related to networks. To discuss this, we use the insights from the communication network analysis of Rogers and Kincaid (1981). They state that the essence of much human behaviour is the interaction through which one individual exchanges information with one or more other individuals. Any given individual in a certain context is likely to contact certain other individuals and to ignore many others (in particular when the context is large in size). As these interpersonal communication flows become patterned over time, a 'communication structure' or network emerges that is relatively stable and predictive of behaviour. As such, a communication network consists of interconnected individuals who are linked by patterned flows of information. We emphasize that no sharp distinction between source and receiver is made. The key is the interconnectedness, the relationship between participants in the group or network, each of whom is both, in turn, transmitter and receiver. Finally, these relationships between individuals in the group that originate in communication is the basis of social capital. Only through these (patterned) flows of information in the group, can social capital exist or be fostered.

Second, we mention the issue of *mutual understanding* which is related to the issue of trust. We explain this as follows: trust or distrust always has its foundation somewhere in an inner or outward perception. A lot of problems concerning trust arise because we direct on supposed experiences, careless perceptions, interpretations and viewpoints (Bos, 1997). Stated differently, people need a certain degree of understanding of the other person to finally trust that person. We say a certain degree of understanding, because the convergence of each participant's understanding with the other's is never complete, never perfect. The codes and concepts that one has available for understanding are learned through experience (Rogers and Kincaid, 1981) and the simple fact is that everyone has his own experiences. One can only learn about someone else's experiences and know how well someone else understands a situation if the other person also shares information, and vice versa. By means of several iterations or cycles of information-exchange, two or more participants in a communication process may converge toward a more mutual understanding of each other's meanings (Rogers and Kincaid, 1981). So as long as people stay in a conversation in which they present their own visions and experiences and as long as people let them explore critically by others to finally attain mutual understanding, problems concerning trust can be prevented and social capital can be promoted. This means that trust has to be maintained and looked after. Maintenance of trust happens by means of meetings and dialogue. The exchange of perceptions and expectations one has from his own actions and from the actions of another person plays an important role in the dialogue. When expectations are not made explicit, and when one does not ask for it, trust will have a blind character: there are no common assumptions, there is no common frame of reference and there are no common purposes. 'Blind trust' often leads to an extreme reaction to the opposite side: distrust (Bos, 1997). Ultimately, this will also undermine social capital.

Third, we mention the issue of *signalling* which is related to the issue of norms. We explain this as follows: a norm exists in a given social setting to the extent that individuals usually act in a certain way¹ and are often punished when seen not to be acting in this way. Norms provide a powerful mechanism for regulating conflict in groups. Moreover, the promotion of norms fosters social capital. How can norms be promoted? In fact, the question to be considered now is what mechanisms can serve to support a norm that is not or only partially established? Axelrod (1997) describes eight of these mechanisms. We discuss two that are closely related to communication. The first is signalling. There are several important implications of the signalling principle for the origin and durability of a norm. A norm is likely to originate in a type of behaviour that signals things about individuals that will lead others to reward them. For example, if one signals commitment and concern through successful (non)verbal communication - which includes the seven commandments of the dialogue - then others may give better treatment to those who act that way. The signalling principle helps explain how an 'is' becomes an 'ought'. As more and more people use the signal to gain information about others, more and more people will adopt the behaviour that leads to being treated well (Axelrod, 1997). The second mechanism is the mechanism of meta-norms, which is described in section 2.3.2. People should be vengeful, not only against the violators of the norm, but also against anyone who refuses to punish the defectors. This amounts to establishing a norm that one must punish

¹ The way people usually act is meant positively.

those who do not punish a defection. In collaboration, people can think about how to punish those people who do not punish a defector. The way they choose depends on the social capital there is. If you create a stronger punishment for defection, you do not need a meta-norm. The point is that when norms are made (more) explicit, the chance is bigger that people will not defect it that soon, because it is (more) visible for others in the group. This can be reached through a successful communication.

Especially concerning trust and norms, group facilitation can play an important role. Group facilitation can help to attain mutual understanding, which benefits trust between individuals. Moreover, group facilitation can provide a way of signalling, by which other people might finally change their behaviour.

4. Conclusion, discussion and recommendations

4.1 Conclusion

Chapter two and three contain a lot of information. We present the proposed conceptual framework again in which we summarize the content and the conclusions of the former two chapters (see figure 4.1).

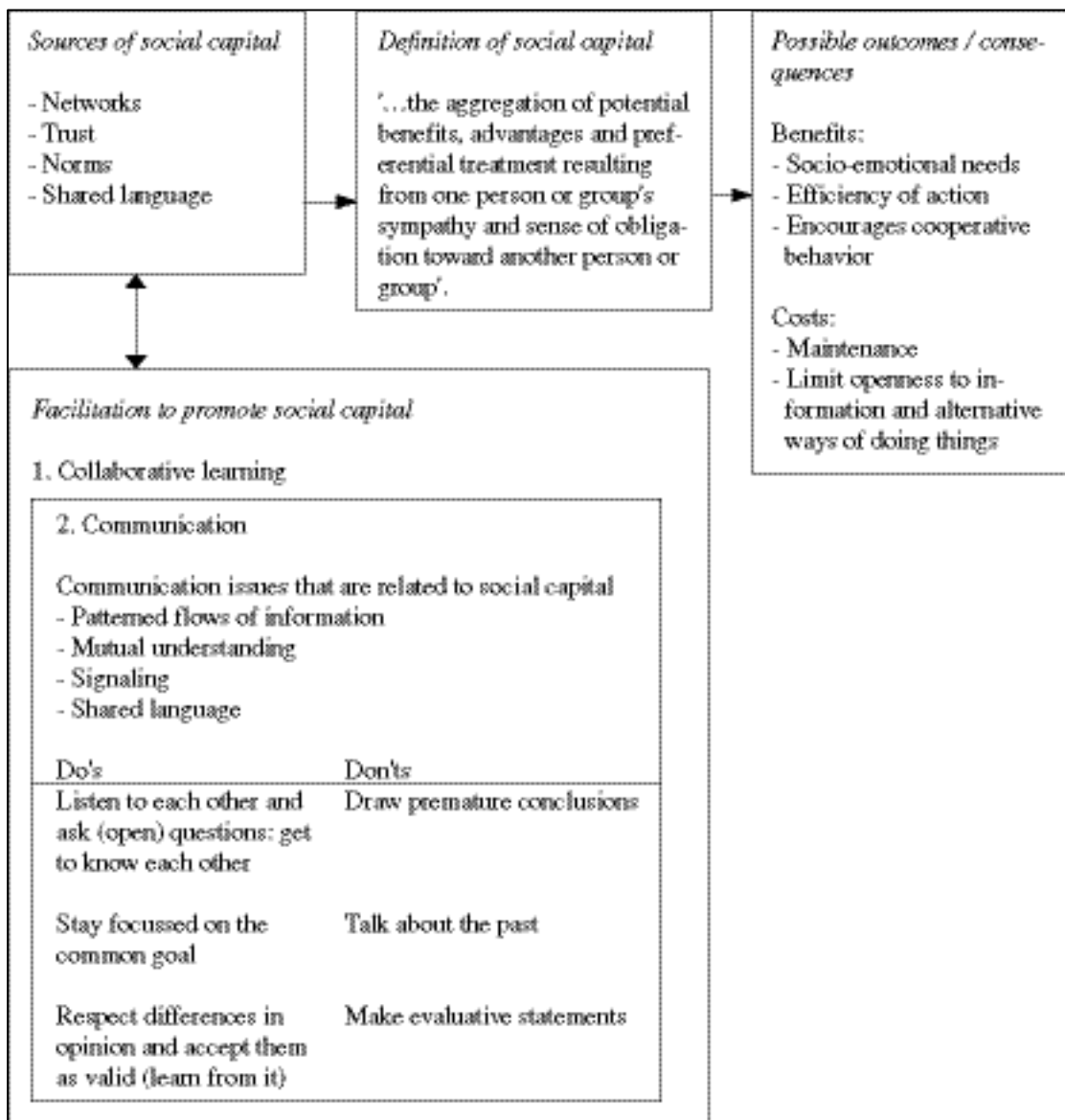


Figure 4.1 Proposed conceptual framework of social capital and the linkage with communication

The new element in this proposed conceptual framework is the combination of communication and social capital. More specifically, it is the influence that communication can have on the development or promotion of social capital. The importance of the new element is as follows: by considering communicative elements in social capital theory, there are more possibilities for social-economic research: the explanatory value will rise.

4.2 Discussion: role of research

In this final chapter, we discuss the application of the theory - as described in chapter two and three - in practice. An interesting question concerning application in practice (for a research institute like LEI) is 'what is the role of research in social capital issues?'

Research that is related to social capital and communication issues is often *action research*. This type of research is used to examine real practical problems. Its goal is to directly take action when finding a solution for the problems that exist. The research focuses on the analysis of existing problems and at the same time tries to find real solutions to directly overcome them (Foot Whyte et al., 1991 in Van Woerkum et al., 1999). Feedback is given to every research moment and forms the starting point for the actors under study to decide how to move on. In this type of research, the researcher is still an external observant. A special type of action research is *participating action research*. This is the case when researchers and other participants in the project (also the actors under study) cooperate in every phase. Problems and research questions are formulated together and the results are interpreted together. In this type of research, the researcher is not an external observer, but a participant of the situation under study. Feedback is given to the results of the research, which forms the basis of taking action. This type of research is concerned with questions related to a real change of reality.

Another remark on the type of research that is related to social capital and communication issues is that it has little of a deductive character and more of an inductive character. Moreover, this type of research is aimed at the actor instead of at the system. In terms of research methodology, taking the *actor perspective* requires a performative attitude of the researcher. He or she has to become a participant in communicative processes with the actors under study to gain insight into their problem definitions, into their motivations behind their actions, etc. (comparable with participating action research). The *system perspective*, on the other hand, requires an objective attitude of the researcher. He or she is not trying to understand the motives of actors but takes the role of an observer focusing on the consequences of actions, the ways in which these consequences get linked with each other and produce an outcome for society as a whole (Van der Schans, 2001).

What does the theory as described so far in this section, further mean for the role of the researcher? Many times, the attitude of neutrality while doing research is a highly discussed topic. We described the attitude of neutrality according to Vennix (1996) in section 3.4.2. Vennix (1996) stresses the importance for the facilitator to be neutral with regard to group members. There are two points we wish to make here for the position of the researcher when he or she acts as a facilitator. The first is that as a researcher, it is hard to have a neutral position. As such, facilitating people or groups without considering norms

and values is difficult. As a researcher, one ultimately wishes to contribute to a certain area in society. This means that one operates with certain norms and values in mind, and as a consequence has to make choices. Norms and values don't change that easily. Beliefs, which form a part of one's values, can change more easily within those values.

The second point is that there are special requirements for the researcher in case when he or she acts as a facilitator. He or she must not only possess the most obvious skills and attitudes a researcher should have (like for example a certain extent of analytical capacity and the urge to investigate), but also the skills and attitudes as mentioned in sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2. A very important skill is the communication skill.

4.3 Recommendations

As is said in the foreword of this report: social capital is a relatively new term for LEI. That is why - on the one hand - this research has an exploring character. Nevertheless, ultimately it is interesting to see what social capital can mean for an organization as LEI. This can be investigated from the perspective of the internal organization (communication network in the organization, existing norms, trust between employees, etcetera). But this can also be investigated from another perspective, namely the relationship between LEI and her customers. After all, social capital has a certain value. An interesting question in this context is 'can we make social capital operational for LEI and if yes, can and will we put it on a balance sheet?'. However, questions like 'what can you actually do with it (in the internal organization)?', 'can we measure social capital?' and 'how can we (as LEI) serve customers with it?' are hard to answer in this stage of the research. That is why we recommend investigating these questions in further research.

The second recommendation is related to the context in which social capital exist. In different contexts, different levels of social capital can be optimal - and as such desirable. First, an interesting question in this context is how you can determine the difference between the actual and the desirable level of social capital. A second interesting question is what needs to be changed to get to the desirable level of social capital. Empirical research can play an important role in answering these questions. Therefore, its role and how one can use it best should be further investigated.

Our third recommendation is to further investigate the role of collaborative learning in the development of social capital. We deeply explored the role of communication in the development of social capital, but as literature shows, collaborative learning can play an important role as well. As such, it would also be interesting to more deeply explore the role of collaborative learning in the development of social capital.

The fourth recommendation towards a more systematic research program at LEI that can make important practical and disciplinary contributions is to include a small, systematic social capital component in LEI projects whenever it is appropriate. Using a common methodology to measure the presence of social capital and to observe commonly defined performance measures in a wide range of settings over time could able to do a 'meta' analysis of the impacts of social capital. This could help answer questions like:

- (i) does the presence of high levels of social capital have a significant impact (positive or negative) on the success of collaborative efforts;

- (ii) under what conditions do high levels of social capital emerge;
- (iii) how does effective communication foster the development and maintenance of social capital?

These are questions of practical importance. Knowing the answer could help LEI to be much more effective in much of its work. These are also important questions in a more 'academic' sphere. LEI can make a real contribution here because it engages in a large number of projects. The key challenge here, though, is to design a social capital 'module' that can be incorporated into many projects without significantly increasing costs or getting in the way of the primary objectives of each individual project.

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