

Shared goals, shared purpose, shared vision

An aspect of the cognitive dimension of social capital

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Abstract

Shared goals and shared purpose are key components of the cognitive dimension of social capital. Shared goals represent collective aspirations and a shared sense of destiny, fostering coordination and collaboration for mutual benefit. They go beyond merely documented goals, embodying the belief that individual interests are represented by the social group or society and that working for the group's benefit will advance personal interests. Shared goals thrive when actors anticipate reciprocation, meet obligations, and meet expectations, fostering belonging, solidarity, and trust. Strong shared goals lead actors to prioritise group needs over personal ones, resulting in increased cooperation, collaboration, and a willingness to defer personal benefits for collective gains. Shared goals focus strategic actions on mutual benefit, allowing actors to simultaneously fulfil individual and group goals. Shared goals strongly influence social norms by clarifying productive actions and highlighting counterproductive behaviours, predisposing individuals to cooperate and constraining opportunistic behaviour. They attach meaning to performance, facilitating evaluation, encouraging necessary changes, and serving as a powerful motivator for collective action. Shared goals are reinforced by success and diminished by unmet expectations, failure, and lack of clarity. Setting achievable goals rapidly reinforces a sense of common purpose, solidarity, and trust, and acknowledging and celebrating shared goal achievements amplifies their impact. Influential actors' reactions to events and outcomes shape the narrative surrounding shared goals, further reinforcing attitudes towards shared goals. Understanding the dynamics and development of shared goals provides valuable insights for fostering common purpose, solidarity, and trust within social networks and communities.

Introduction

Shared goals and shared purpose are commonly mentioned as elements of the cognitive dimension of social capital. The other dimensions of social capital being the structural and relational dimensions. This conceptualisation, distinguishing between structural, relational, and cognitive dimensions, is one of the major approaches to social capital. This approach was systematically explored and elucidated by Nahapiet & Ghoshal (1998) building on Granovetter's (1992) discussion of structural and relational embeddedness.

Shared goals are the collective aspirations of actors and the sense of shared destiny with others (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998). Shared goals are a force that holds people together and allows actors to coordinate their efforts and work together for mutual benefit (Chow & Chan, 2008). They are more than just established and documented goals. They are the shared belief that actor's interests are represented by the social group or society and that working for the benefit of the group will progress personal interests, now or in the

future. Shared goals exist when actors believe that their actions will be appropriately reciprocated by others and that actors will meet their obligations and expectations (Lesser & Prusak, 1999). As such, it is strongly associated with belonging, solidarity, and trust.

When there are strong shared goals, actors are more likely to prioritise group needs over their own personal needs. Also, when there are strong shared goals there tends to be more cooperation and collaboration and actors are more likely to defer personal benefit for collective benefits (Uhlener et al., 2015). Shared goals focus and coordinate strategic action towards mutual benefit that increases the likelihood that actors can simultaneously fulfill both individual and group goals (Uhlener et al., 2015).

The importance of shared goals can be easily understood by considering what happens when actors act with self-interest. Acting on individual goals, particularly if they detract in some way from the achievement of group goals, undermines solidarity, trust, sense of togetherness, identity, and belonging. This weakens group effectiveness and leads to lower participation which can lead to or exacerbate isolation and disconnection.

Shared goals strongly influence the nature of social norms by clarifying and highlighting what actions are productive to achieving shared goals and the actions

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that are counterproductive (Preece, 2004). Therefore, revealing what actions are appropriate and desirable and those that are not (Sanchez-Famoso et al., 2014). These norms predispose individuals to cooperate and tend to constrain opportunistic behaviour (Putnam, 2000). This encourages actors to act more effectively in pursuit of shared objectives. Shared goals attach meaning to performance which makes it easier to evaluate individual and group actions and encourage change where required. Shared goals are a powerful motivator for collective action.

Shared goals are developed over time through social interaction and experience (Harjanti, 2019). Shared goals can be reached when actors are able to understand each other's perspectives, common difficulties, and opportunities for mutual benefit. They are developed from a sense of shared identity and togetherness, and from shared experiences. When individuals identify with a group, their concern for collective processes and outcomes is enhanced, which increases the chances that collaboration will occur (Burbaugh, 2015).

Various activities can help with the development of shared goals, such as jointly developing plans, budgets, procedures, rules, roles, and agreements that participants believe will achieve the desired outcomes (Chenhall et al., 2010). When actors are empowered by these activities, they tend to develop commitment, solidarity, and trust that contributes towards various aspects of social capital (Burbaugh, 2015).

Shared goals are built over time with use. They tend to be reinforced by success and diminished by unmet expectations, failure, and lack of clarity. When a group achieves or makes progress towards shared goals the belief in the goals tend to strengthen. Setting achievable goals can help to quickly reinforce a sense of common purpose, solidarity, and trust. This affect can be magnified by acknowledging and celebrating the achievement of, or progress towards shared goals. The attitudes towards shared goals are reinforced by the narrative, which is powerfully shaped by influential actor's reactions to events and outcomes (such as leaders and external actors).

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