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Identifying factors affecting intra-organizational social capital with a grounded theory approach

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Abstract
The main objective of the present study is to identify factors affecting intra-organizational social capital with a grounded theory approach. This study used an interpretive and constructivist approach and grounded theory. The participants of the study included 15 employees, pilots, and flight attendants, whose sampling method was purposefully conducted. The data collection tool was a semi-structured interview, and the researcher reached theoretical saturation in the data. Grounded theory and open, axial, and selective coding were used to analyze the research data. The results of the study showed that the decrease in the organization's social capital was due to low wages and fear of layoffs due to economic crises and the possibility of another war. These problems are due to the structural conditions prevailing in the country, which has involved the airline in numerous problems due to the country's long-term exposure to sanctions and increasing inflation. Finally, the selective code of the concept of “long-term structural instability of the production of social capital of stakeholders” was obtained. The sources of social capital of the company depend on the individual resources of the employees and their relationships on one hand, and on the reputation of the company on the other, which has caused the persistence of individuals in the company despite the difficulties.

Keywords:
Social capital,
Intra-organizational,
Stakeholders,
Commitment to the company,
Turnover

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

The rapid development of information technology, increasing customer expectations, and the need for flexibility have caused organizations to pay attention to organizational social capital. The impact of social relations on economic activity has been the main topic of the social capital literature. Looking at the definitions of social capital, it is clear that in general, this concept focuses on social relations and its main elements include social networks, civic participation, norms of mutual interaction and public trust. In general, it is defined as a collective asset in the form of shared norms, values, beliefs, trust, networks, social relations and institutions that facilitate cooperation and collective action for mutual benefits (Erices-Ocampo et al., 2024). The term social capital was introduced into management research by the theoretical studies of Nahapit and Ghoshal (1998). They incorporated the social capital literature in sociology and introduced this concept to organizational research. Definitions of social capital are numerous and vague, and there is no basic indicator for its definition and measurement (Durante et al., 2025; Adams & Vinita Fitch, 2023).

Social capital refers to the structure and quality of social relationships that individuals, social groups, and society can benefit from. Most researchers agree that social capital is a multidimensional resource created through interpersonal interactions and includes network ties and shared values, such as trust and reciprocity, which can facilitate cooperation and collective action (Mahmoudi & Pourshahabi, 2023). Social capital represents the outcome of interactions and connections that are continuously formed over time in social environments. The absence of this capital for organizations indicates a lack of benefits (Gerami et al., 2021). Studies have shown that little attention has been paid to the way in which organizational social capital is created. Also, most of the studies conducted in this regard consider social capital as an independent variable, and few studies have examined social capital as a dependent variable. Currently, there is a research gap to analyze the most relevant factors affecting social capital in organizations. In practice, the formation of social capital cannot be the result of the action of a single variable, but is a complex and multidimensional concept whose factors and symptoms remain largely unknown in large and medium-sized companies. Research conducted on social capital in domestic airlines (Sadegh Rai Moghadam, 2013; Sayad, 2012) has studied social capital as an independent variable and examined its impact on variables such as performance. Since the first step to developing social capital in an economic enterprise is to identify the status of social capital within its organization, and no comprehensive study has been conducted to determine the status of social capital in an airline company, given the importance of this topic in airline companies, the aim of the present study is to understand and identify the conditions, situations, and contexts that have led to the emergence of social capital within the organization in Taban Airlines. Accordingly, the researcher addresses the main question: what are the factors affecting social capital within the organization with a grounded theory approach?

Theoretical Framework

Social Capital

Social capital is a comprehensive concept that considers the social aspect of human interaction as a whole and allows members of an association or network to access resources due to their membership in the association (Christy et al., 2021). Social capital refers to the characteristics of social organization such as trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions (Salisua et al., 2019).

Odoch et al. (2025) examined the increasing financial resilience of women-owned small and medium-sized enterprises in the post-COVID-19 pandemic: the role of social capital. The

results showed that social bonding through personal connections and shared responsibility contributed to the resilience of women entrepreneurs during the Corona era.
Lauer et al. (2025) examined social infrastructure, social organizations, and friendship formation. The results showed that the drivers of the formation of friendship networks in organizations are: (1) the importance of structured programs and activities as drivers for communication, (2) creating spaces for informal interactions, and (3) creating interactions based on similarities and differences.

Research Methodology

This study used an interpretive and constructivist approach and grounded theory. The participants of the study included 15 employees, pilots, and flight attendants, whose sampling method was purposefully conducted. The data collection tool was a semi-structured interview, and the researcher reached theoretical saturation in the data.

Research Findings

The grounded theory method and open, axial, and selective coding were used to analyze the research data. The results of the study showed that the decrease in the organization's social capital was due to low wages and fear of layoffs due to economic crises and the possibility of another war. These problems are caused by the structural conditions prevailing in the country, which have involved the airline in numerous problems due to the country's long-term exposure to sanctions and increasing inflation. Finally, the selective code of the concept of "long-term structural instability of the production of social capital of beneficiaries" was obtained. The company's social capital resources depend on the individual resources of employees and their relationships on the one hand, and on the other hand, on the reputation of the company, which has caused people to remain in the company despite the difficulties.

Conclusion

The present study was conducted with the aim of identifying the factors affecting intra-organizational social capital with a grounded theory approach. The results of this study are consistent with the results of Odoch et al. (2025), Lauer et al. (2025), Ben-Hador & Hopkins (2025), Ashayeri et al .(2025), (Fathi Bajestani et al. (2025), Mahmoudi & Pourshahabi (2023), Stefanidis et al. (2023), and Saadati (2023). Odoch et al. (2025) showed that social bonding through personal connections and shared responsibility contributed to the resilience of female entrepreneurs during the Corona era.
Considering the results of the study, the following suggestions were made:
(Creating a clear promotion path for ground forces: Designing a “career path map” and training-development programs to reduce the perceived gap with flight crew and increase motivation.
(Rethinking the pay system with an emphasis on transparency: focusing on targeted non-cash benefits (training, loans, insurance) and forming a joint salary review committee to increase satisfaction and reduce turnover.