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Social Capital and Career Growth

Abstract

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine the instrumental use of social capital regarding career growth within an organization, focusing on the mediating role of perceived competence mobilization and the moderating role of two situational variables: perceived external prestige and job insecurity climate.

Design/methodology/approach

Relationships among the constructs are predicted based on relevant literature, and are tested using survey results from 324 employees working in 14 leading corporations in Korea.

Findings

Results show that social capital positively influenced, via perceived competence mobilization, each of two career growth dimensions (i.e., the personal efforts to develop a career and the experience of being rewarded by the organization). In contrast, moderated path analysis indicated that perceptions of external prestige and job insecurity climate failed to moderate the indirect effect of social capital on career growth.

Practical implications

In light of the instrumental use of social capital and the ensuring mechanism of competence mobilization, a detailed understanding of this effect on career

growth cannot only neutralize the fears of brain drain, but is also helpful in

providing possibilities for building new career development strategies.

Originality/value

Although social capital has become an influential concept in social sciences,

little evidence has been presented on the above relationship, particularly from

the perspective of careerist orientation. This may be the first research

examining how and when the influence of social capital becomes instrumental

with respect to career attainment within an organization.

Keywords social capital, organizational career growth, perceived competence

mobilization, perceived external prestige, job insecurity climate

Introduction

Are socially connected people more prone to career growth? It is undeniable that individuals who

are more successful in their careers are inclined to receive more support from the social relations

they attach (Nabi, 2001). For now, the only definite is that working hard on its own is not enough

if individuals cannot connect socially. In this respect, extant research has examined the role of

social capital on career-related variables such as finding jobs (Lin *et al.*, 1981), starting jobs

(Flap and Boxman, 2017), and career satisfaction (Zhang *et al.*, 2010). However, despite its

appealing logic in empirical validation of the associations, little rigorous investigation has

examined the question of sociality. With the instrumental use of social capital (e.g., Kuwabara *et*

al., 2018), we propose that individuals possessing social capital may prefer to pursue their career

in the same organization provided that they are given meaningful opportunities for growth.

Indeed, little evidence has been presented of how social capital operates, particularly with respect to career attainment among employees within an organization. Examining this social capital–career growth link is significant because, while careerist opportunism is spreading, managers are reluctant to invest in employee development in case staffs leave (Kim *et al.*, 2016). For individuals who hold high social capital who tend to be high performers within organizations (Cross and Thomas, 2008), this reluctance can be a primary reason for hindered career growth and hence the creation of a strong careerist orientation, which can result in a loss of talent to the organization.

This study addresses this research gap by examining a theory-based model that incorporates a mediating mechanism and the boundary conditions of the potential relationship between employee social capital and their career growth within an organization. In our research framework, perceived competence mobilization, defined as 'the degree to which employees perceive that they have adequate opportunities to utilize their competences in their current jobs' (Lai and Kapstad, 2009, p. 1985), is a motivational mediator that can explain why social capital is made manifest in positive effects on career growth. Drawing on social capital at the personal level (Ben-hador, 2017), we argue that competence mobilization may be a mechanism for pulling the instrumental side of social capital so that employees' social networks act to align their internal career growth with the vision and strategies of the institution. The case for either leaving or staying with the organization for career progress may seem equivalent, but a differentiated approach to social capital investment and its enabling potential for recognizing opportunities needs to be considered, as this is important in targeting those who engage in instrumental networking and link it to their career growth. With the linking relationship between social capital

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and the established mediator, we also focus on the moderating effects of external prestige, i.e., the process of deriving self-esteem from identifying with one's organization (Ojedokun *et al.*, 2015), and of job insecurity climate, i.e., the shared perceptions of individual job insecurity (Sverke *et al.*, 2002). These situational cues are added to our analytical framework because they both appear to be a salient aspect of the career choice among contemporary careerists.

Our study makes several significant contributions to the field. First, it examines how and when the influence of social capital becomes instrumental. Probing the mechanism of how socially embedded people explore and assimilate adequate opportunities for career growth advances the existing literature on career-related actions, including the psychological contract based on social exchange. Second, the theoretical implications of the social capital–career growth relationship support a new process for how employers should meet their employees' career needs beyond the merely reactive mind-set of hiring and retaining talent. We therefore provide practitioners with an understanding of the possibilities for building new career development strategies in today's extreme careerism. Third, by testing the moderating influence of perceived external prestige and job insecurity climate on the hypothesized relationships, this study also adds to our understanding of situations in which social capital achieves its optimal effect. This may further answer the practical question of under what circumstances those with high social capital stay and build a career with the current organization, while others often leave for new opportunities elsewhere.

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

In organizations, social capital can be defined as the investment in embedded resources in social networks with expected returns (Lin, 2000). Working with this definition and adapted from Lin

(1999) we can highlight some of the key aspects of social capital. Firstly, in involves the investment of resources in a social network or some kind of social setting; secondly, individuals are able to access such resources within the network or setting and thirdly, individuals are able to gain returns from the resource through instrumental use or purposeful action, for good or ill. Theorists such as Coleman (1990) focused on the relational system of individuals and argued this notion is based essentially on trust or an exchange of reciprocity. Once activated, this explains the high productivity of social capital and its transformation into conventional economic gains (Bourdieu, 1986) as well as potentially adverse or negative outcomes for others. That is, social capital can have both positive and negative facets (Schwanen et al., 2015). As social constructions, life in a social network or setting is made meaningful through a success of co-ordinations between members over time that satisfies particular needs, desires and interests within a particular situation. The outcome of such processes, replicated many times in many situations, may well lead to an impression of order, stability and permanence which make a localized reality. Included in such a reality may be the working up of a particular way of talking and other practices within a particular context, the establishment of practices within special locations to develop skills and ensure continuity and protect the status acquired; all features of the resources of social capital. As members make use of these resources, they determine what counts as good and right and preserve the network from others and disturbances which can be characterised in negative terms and working against the interests of the members (Gergen, 1995). For example, Crossley's (2008) study of social capital that developed from gym membership showed that as well as positive effects, it also involved the exclusion of non-members and some conflict between different groups, each with their own sense of valued identity.

Thus, while the value of social capital may arise from deliberate, goal-oriented investments for future benefits rather than from naturally occurring relationship processes,   in line with the theoretical conceptions of social support, different relationships can provide different types of support (e.g. Jackson *et al.,* 2014) each with a valuational resource of social capital. While social capital is explained in terms of the circularity of the relationship between the act of co-operation and the likelihood of mutual collaboration in the future (Boix and Posner, 1998), the decisive point here is that it should initially be highly valued by individuals for furthering certain social actions, as well as quite purposively goal-directed to those who share the rewarding values (e.g. Chiesi, 2007), but it can also have effects which are construed as negative by others.

Besides the concept of social support, this instrumental action can be further elaborated through a consideration of social intelligence theories in which a key commitment is both sociality and co-evolving intelligence. According to Yamagishi *et al.* (1999), socially competent individuals are more skilled than those with lower competency in the ability to quickly pull out of a risky relation at the first sign of danger. As they are good at reading people, they can also assess who holds power in a situation. While people are often unwilling to network for fear of limited returns on their investment (Kuwabara *et al.*, 2018), socially intelligent individuals can enjoy the advantage of being able to fully explore opportunities by quickly discerning the worthiness of potential relations. Indeed, when social intelligence develops from experience with people and learning from success and failure in social settings, and with employees more career conscious than ever, the elements of social intelligence and their social capital partially share a common pathway of activation (e.g., Witt and Ferris, 2003).

Considering that social capital may prove useful for instrumental action under the above mentioned conditions, a similar cognitive strategy can also be found in the career growth concept, defined as a feature of employees' efforts to progress toward their career goals and skill sets, and of the organization's actions rewarding these efforts with competitive pay and recognition programs (Weng and McElroy, 2012, p. 257). Jans (1989) identified the notion of career growth as one's perceptions of the chances of development and advancement within an organization. It has become clear that career growth is a by-product of both the individual's perceptions and the organization's actions. For example, organizational career growth (OCG) may entail a rational calculation by both the employee and the organization as they individually consider the perceived (possible) costs and benefits associated with their continuing supportive relationship (e.g., McNulty and De Cieri, 2011). As in the case of social capital, this is also apt to start with a process of testing the waters, which allows employees to gauge investor interest in a potential offering before undertaking any career plan. Accepting these insights from the alternative perspective of social capital and social intelligence thought, OCG could be categorized into two dimensions: individual efforts to develop career (OCG-I) and the experience of being rewarded by the organization (OCG-O).

In summary, we suggest that both social capital and career growth are initially a strategic investment for future growth, the purpose of which is to explain the instrumental motivation of how social capital breeds OCG. The instrumentality will influence the manner in which individuals recognize opportunities to capitalize on the network connections for a mutual effort to plot their career with the organization, as well as create and maintain a network portfolio for their career competencies. Figure 1 shows the overarching research model for this study.

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(Figure 1 about here)

The Mediating Role of Perceived Competence Mobilization

Reviewing prior research, we also contend that the information and resources available through social networks can be invested for more personal goal fulfillment. Proper utilization of social capital that facilitates communication ties   can put the individual in an advantageous position to mobilize all resources from around the network (Yang *et al.*, 2011). Role models aside, established competitors in the network pool are also helpful to perform the beneficial functions described above, thereby supporting the impact of social capital on career growth. Even when socially competent, they could further leverage emerging information and advice to achieve career goals aligned with organizational objectives. As long as this instrumental ensemble is a valuable asset for organizations that are able to develop it, employees accessing and gaining social capital are likely to be paid more and enhance their efforts for career progression. Accordingly, we hypothesize the following:

H1. Social capital will exert a significant positive influence on each form of career growth in the organization, i.e., making progress toward professional goals and ability development (H1a) and getting faster promotion and higher remuneration (H1b).

To perform better, employees firstly need to recognize adequate opportunities for acting on their motivation and mobilizing their competencies (Lai and Kapstad, 2009). Associated with this is perceived competence mobilization. Drawing on networks and the assets that can be mobilized via the networks (e.g. Chiesi, 2007; Jackson *et al*., 2014), we posit that employees' perception of competence mobilization is likely to be enhanced by higher social capital. Restated, as social capital is an asset that raises expectations to gather support in case it needs to

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be used, with increasing perception that sufficient investments have been made in the relationships with others, employees with social capital tend to take a more favorable view of their work context. Moreover, since people who are able to accurately infer emotions may be more likely to evaluate their career experiences in a favorable light (Amdurer *et al.*, 2014), the estimation of potential opportunities deserves to be a motive for creating social capital and also for eliciting the need for utilizing them for career use. In this way, individuals who benefit from their rich social connections are likely to perceive higher levels of competence mobilization, despite sharing the same context with others. Therefore, we hypothesize:

H2. Social capital will exert a significant positive influence on perceived competence mobilization.

The relationship between an employee's perceived competence mobilization and OCG is also valid, as an "effort–performance relationship" (Vroom, 1964) can easily be recalled under a set of circumstances favorable to them. For example, if named as a high performer by means of work-related networks and its attendant supports enriched with the help of social capital they maintain (e.g. Seibert *et al.*, 2001), high-social-capital individuals within such an organization recognize the opportunity to grow further, and therefore will take logical steps to pursue career advancement, which will be accelerated through an appraisal and reward system. Combining the preceding arguments, through a calculated expectancy for support, those with high social capital increase the likelihood that they will exert themselves for personal development and gain recognition for their efforts. Since competence mobilization may reflect underlying adequate motivation and potential to perform employees' role well, if individuals with greater social capital are driven by opportunities for competence mobilization, they will be able to experience

higher levels of OCG. That is, instrumental social capital is likely to influence employees'

competence mobilization, which, in turn, may lead to OCG, i.e., experiencing progress toward

their career goals and professional ability development, along with faster promotion and higher

pay. Therefore, we hypothesize:

H3. *The relationships between employees' social capital and each form of OCG, i.e., making*

progress toward professional goals and ability development (H3a) and getting faster promotion

and higher remuneration (H3b), are mediated by perceived competence mobilization.

Moderating Roles of Perceived External Prestige and Job Insecurity Climate

As social capital is an attribute of an individual in a social context (Bourdieu, 1986), the

instrumental motivation initiated by an individual's social capital may be shaped by the

conditions that it is embedded in. In this regard, one potential moderator is perceived external

prestige, i.e., individuals' evaluation of their organization's social status. Corporate reputation is

vital not only for outsourcing labors but for maintaining them as well. For employees, work

experience from reputable organizations may also be considered a proxy for individual

performance and a determinant of human capital (Certo, 2003), thereby providing greater

freedom to plan their career. Hence, we expect perceived external prestige to play a moderating

role in the employees' social capital–competence mobilization relationship. This assumes that

social capital operating with a positively interpreted reputation is likely to be more effective in

enhancing the instrumental motive in social capital and the motivational aspect of competence

mobilization. For example, a better role model or mentor is easy enough to find in the reputable

companies and reaching for better returns on their social networks investment is affordable in the

long term. Following this logic, the social capital–competence mobilization relationship could be

stronger for employees who perceive high external prestige than for employees with a low

perception of external prestige. Therefore, we hypothesize:

H4. *Perceived external prestige moderates the relationship between social capital and perceived*

competence mobilization, such that the positive relationship is stronger with a more attractive

external image.

We also investigate how the aforementioned relationship may vary with the perceived

level of job insecurity. Job insecurity is a work stressor that many employees encounter during

their careers. As noted by Schieman and Reid (2008), a climate with high levels of job insecurity

imply that employees perceive their surroundings as uncertain, tense, and even competitive.

Therefore, employees may experience difficulties in recognizing opportunities to utilize their

competencies in their current role. Although social capital, a relative stable social support that

buffers stress, holds the promise of promoting competence mobilization, boundary conditions

may exist for the positive effect of social capital in the contemporary career era of increased job

insecurity. Job insecurity originates in the individual's perceptions of job instability and is

subsequently shared in common by organizational members. In such a climate, individuals are

apt to become more egocentric and self-centered (Bargal *et al.*, 1992), which, in turn, results in a

lack of social support in a workplace. Hence, the positive social capital–competence mobilization

relationship will be stronger under the condition of a secure job climate, as compared to job

insecurity climate. Therefore, we hypothesize:

H5. *Job insecurity climate moderates the relationship between social capital and perceived*

competence mobilization, such that the positive relationship is stronger in a more secure job

climate.

The aforementioned arguments represent an integrated framework in which perceived competence mobilization mediates the relationships between social capital and OCG, and perceived external prestige and job security climate moderate the social capital–competence mobilization relationship. Combining both the mediation and moderation hypotheses, we propose a moderated mediation model and provide integrative hypotheses. Specifically, high-social-capital individuals with positive external prestige perception have a more favorable view of the career-related support they will obtain from their invested social capital. The workplace may therefore act as a force that motivates them to be a part of an organization and plan their career path accordingly (e.g., Mishra, 2013). Thus, they are more likely to exert themselves for personal development and to experience recognition for the efforts. Conversely, those who perceive a climate of job insecurity at their workplace are less likely to find adequate opportunities for acting on their career motivation due to the lack of return on their investments, which results in low efforts directed at developing their career and eliciting recognition within the organization. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

H6. The indirect relationships of employees' social capital with each form of career growth will be stronger when the degree of perceived external prestige is higher (H6a, H6b).

H7. The indirect relationships of employees' social capital with each form of career growth will be stronger when the perceived level of job insecurity climate is lower (H7a, H7b).

Research Method

In this section, we describe the methods used to test the study hypotheses.

Participants and Procedure

The participants were employees working for 14 leading firms in South Korea. From a sample of 420 employees, we obtained 382 answered questionnaires, of which 58 were not usable due to incomplete information (an effective response rate of 77.1%). Of the 324 valid respondents, 217 (67.0%) were males, and the average age was 34.1 (standard deviation [SD] = 6.5). A majority (69.4%) was university graduates and permanent workers, and 36.2% of the respondents were managerial employees. Participants worked in a variety of occupational job types, including sales/distribution (26.2%), research and development (12.0%), finance/accounting (11.7%), production/technology (10.8%), general affairs/human resources (10.8%), strategy/planning (9.6%), and others (17.0%; 1.9% did not indicate their occupational background).

The companies were recruited from a wide range of industrial sectors to decrease possibilities for associating with particular organizational climates: 5 manufacturing firms, 3 distribution and logistics firms, 2 IT service firms, 3 financial service firms, and 1 construction firm. We approached the firms through e-mail, telephone, and fax contacts, explaining the objectives of the research and inviting their participation in the study. In the first round, 9 contacts refused to participate. After our initial contact and gaining approval from HR directors, we requested each firm to randomly select about 30 employees to serve as research participants, for example, by selecting employee administration numbers. A questionnaire was distributed with a cover letter describing the study's purpose and emphasizing its anonymity and confidentiality for recipients. Participants filled out the questionnaire in their own time and did not receive any compensation for their participation. Through each of the supervisors who administered the questionnaires, a single follow-up was done approximately two weeks after initial delivery. These surveys were finally hand-collected by the first author.

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The selected firms were chosen through purposeful sampling. The sample was selected deliberately rather than randomly to examine study objectives. Most Asian employees consider promotion as the critical factor for career development in line with lifetime employment (Taniguchi and Takahashi, 2006). After the global financial crisis in 2008, the focus on survival in the organization intensified among middle managers seeking promotion. In this sense, the sample appears to be suitable for our research purpose.

Measures

The measures were adapted from previously developed scales, with slight modifications made to reflect the specific context of this study. In addition, the measures were carefully translated from English into Korean, and then back-translated into English by bilingual professionals, following the procedure advocated by Brislin (1970). Any items identified as potentially problematic were omitted or revised. Responses to each item were scored on five-point Likert-type scales measuring the respondents' degree of agreement or disagreement with each item (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). A brief description of the measurement for each variable follows.

Social capital. This was measured using nine items adapted from Chow and Chan (2008). Three categories (structural, relational, and cognitive) of social capital were assessed to capture the nature of social relations. The items included "In general, I have a very good relationship with my organizational members," "I know my organizational members will always try and help me out if I get into difficulties," and "My organizational members and I always share the same ambitions and vision at work". The social capital score was calculated as the average of all items, and in the current study Cronbach's alpha was 0.90.

Organizational career growth (OCG). The scale used to measure OCG was Weng and Hu's (2009) 15-item instrument, which measures the two dimensions of personal efforts to develop career and the experience of being rewarded by the organization. The personal efforts to develop career were assessed by 8 items (e.g., "My present job moves me closer to my career goals") and the experience of being rewarded by the organization was assessed by 7 additional items (e.g., "I am being promoted quickly in the present organization"). The reliability estimates for these data (Cronbach's alpha) were 0.93 and 0.91, respectively.

Perceived competence mobilization. This construct was measured with a 10-item scale[1] based on Lai and Kapstad (2009). The items referred to opportunities for competence mobilization and thus respondents were asked to rate how noticeable they thought it was in their current work. A sample item is "It is my impression that this organization is better than its competitors in terms of providing opportunities for competence development". The reliability estimate for these data in our study was 0.86.

Perceived external prestige. This was measured using a 6-item PEP scale developed by Mael and Ashforth (1992). This measure assessed the degree of an individual's beliefs about how organizational outsiders view the organization. A sample item is "People in my community think highly of my organization". The reliability coefficient of these data was 0.90.

Job insecurity climate. Eight reflective items were adapted from Låstad *et al.* (2015). A sample item is "There are many who are worried about work conditions becoming worse". We took the average of all items (both quantitative and qualitative aspects of the job insecurity climate) to create the JIC score, and in the current study Cronbach's alpha was 0.89.

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[1] Two items are eliminated due to ambiguity of the meaning and low factor loadings.

Overview of Analyses

The following procedures were used for the data analyses: applying recommendations to minimize the common method variance (CMV), exploring correlations among the variables, testing hypotheses through a mediation regression analysis with bootstrapping methods, and finally conducting two separate conditional indirect effect analyses, where the proposed moderator variable was integrated with the simple mediation model. Each equation included the five control variables (i.e., gender, age, education, tenure, and job types), the main effect terms, and the interaction terms in sequence.

<div align="center">Results</div>

The results of marker-variable analyses indicated that all previously significant correlations remained statistically significant after controlling for CMV, supporting that the bias does not introduce any serious deficiency in this dataset (Lindell and Whitney, 2001). Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for all study variables. The reliability of each construct ranged from 0.86 to 0.93, exceeding the common threshold value of 0.70, the suggested minimum. Consistent with the hypotheses, statistically significant correlations also emerged between the conceptual constructs.

<div align="center">(Table 1 about here)</div>

Before testing the proposed moderated mediation model, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (AMOS Version 18.0) to assess the factor structure of our measures. The hypothesized six-factor model (i.e., social capital, competence mobilization, the two forms of OCG, perceived external prestige, and job insecurity climate) fitted the data significantly better

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than both the five-factor[2] ($\Delta\chi^2(5) = 239.73$, p < 0.001) and one-factor[3] ($\Delta\chi^2(15) = 800.40$, p < 0.001) models. The parameter estimates (factor loadings) of the best fitting six-factor model were all significant (p < 0.001) and ranged from 0.64 to 0.87. The measurement model demonstrated acceptable fit: a chi-square/df of 2.78, a goodness-of-fit index (GFI) of 0.94, a normed comparative fit index (CFI) of 0.95, a Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) of 0.92, and a root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) of 0.07. Overall, the indices demonstrated acceptable fit.

(Table 2 about here)

To test the hypotheses, we next conducted hierarchical multiple regression analysis. Table 2 shows the results for the tests of mediation as suggested in hypotheses 1-3. The results supported hypotheses 1a, 1b, 2, 3a, and 3b as follows: (1) social capital was significantly related to competence mobilization in model 1, (2) social capital was significantly related to each of the OCG in models 2 and 3, and (3) after competence mobilization was taken into account, the regression coefficient for social capital became weaker, albeit still significant in model 1, which suggests partial mediation; the coefficient for social capital became non-significant in model 2, which suggests full mediation (Baron and Kenny, 1986). For conclusive inference about the indirect effect, we also generated bootstrap-based confidence intervals (95%) by taking 5,000 samples from the original data. The results revealed that social capital had significant indirect effects on the two OCG constructs through competence mobilization (CI = .10 to .34; CI = .07 to .33), providing support for hypotheses 3a and 3b.

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[2] The five-factor model postulated that items intended to measure the two OCG constructs were combined into one construct.

[3] The one-factor model assumed that all the items used to measure all six constructs fell under the same factor.

(Table 3 about here)

Two separate conditional indirect effect analyses were continuously performed using model 9 in PROCESS for SPSS developed by Hayes (2013). As displayed in Table 3, there were no significant interactions of social capital with perceived external prestige or job insecurity climate in relation to OCG-I or OCG-O. Furthermore, the indices of moderated mediation for separate analyses of OCG were not significantly different from zero, indicating the absence of a moderated mediation relationship. Thus, these results failed to support hypotheses 4-7.

Discussion

As we consider in the literature review, those who hold and activate social capital in particular networks and social settings can in organizations achieve gains for themselves which might also lead to harm or adverse effects for others.

In this study, we examined the instrumental mechanism underlying the social capital–career growth link and tested the boundary conditions in this mediation process. The results demonstrated that social capital affected both employees' career efforts and their experience of being rewarded via perceived competence mobilization, whereas the indirect effects of social capital were not conditioned on either employees' perceptions of external prestige or job insecurity climate. For others, of course, in the same organization, success for some may be countered by unfavourable outcomes associated with career plateauing (Yang, Niven and Johnson, 2019). While career advancement for some is possible, restrictions on vertical mobility will mean frustration for others (Xie et al., 2015)

With regard to the role played by social capital in career growth, the study results revealed that social capital can be a predictor for employees staying and growing with an

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organization. Observably, while the experience of being rewarded by the organization required the aid of competence mobilization, the personal efforts to develop a career could be exerted without having to include the mediation process. This implies that social ties may be too distal to allow employees the salience of various rewards. Instead, the careers of high-social-capital individuals is considered part of the organization through the prospect of capitalizing on their full potential for success, and simultaneously they are also likely to endeavor to develop their own talents while admitting there is no such thing as perceived opportunity. In this case, social capital was still effectual and competence mobilization worked in conjunction with social capital considering the magnitude of the indirect effect (0.20) over the direct one (0.15). If the perceived opportunities based on their reading of the context are not wide enough, employees may use their personal competence and social resources to search externally for better working conditions and new career prospects. This is quite common among today's careerists prioritizing their career concerns over the firm's goals where enhanced job search skills allow access to significant sources of job information via the internet and smart phones which can occur even if there are no intentions to leave (Trusty *et al.,* 2019). In contrast, the social capital individuals pursue career progression in the place wherein there is affordable competence mobilization, and expected instrumental reciprocity is probably clearer irrespective of inside or outside. Accordingly, assuming individuals with high social capital are good candidates for high performance, in order to bond such employees to the company, the employer needs to offer them the opportunities to mobilize their own networks and to gain a feeling of competence inside rather than outside the organization (Gubbins and Garavan, 2015).

Contrary to the hypotheses, the indirect effects of social capital on career growth through

perceived competence mobilization were not moderated by perceived external prestige or job insecurity climate. It appears that the mediating role of competence mobilization is robust to the interpretation of career concerns, such as the fear of losing one's job or the company's image in the labor market. That is, regardless of how favorably the employees' external prestige was recognized or how pervasive the climate of job insecurity was, competence mobilization was more likely to be reported when higher social capital was available. This can be partially attributed to the greater pro-activeness of employees having high social capital (De Battisti *et al.*, 2014). In any organization, long-tenured and high-ranking employees are steeping themselves in a rich social capital (Aguilera, 2003). They are relatively unconstrained by situational forces and more willing to affect environmental change. Thus, it is conceivable that individuals with social capital have a strong belief in themselves and the efficacy of their judgments, and are therefore not likely to be greatly affected by such phenomena as positive workplace reputation (e. g. Smith *et al.*, 2012) even if others are. Furthermore, the climate of job insecurity is not seen as a threat because social capital can act as a buffer to stress in adverse times (De Clerq *et al.,* 2017). Consequently, given that social capital itself is beyond such environmental influences, this finding suggests that social capital is more trustworthy than other forms of capital that can be invested in for employee career growth. This is likely to be related to the nature of job embeddedness accumulated from past networking and experience. Further studies will be necessary to understand the reciprocal causality or interaction in more detail.

Managerial Implications

The results of this study have several interesting and useful implications for managers. First, since competence utilization is essential in order to boost the relationship between social capital

and OCG, managers need to provide employees possessing high social capital with adequate opportunities or positive expectations; for example, by providing a higher level of empowerment to gain autonomy and authority. As individuals with higher social capital tend to take a proactive orientation, they take greater control over their work environment and solve problems on the spot when empowered (e.g., Searle and Rooney, 2013). In diversified mentoring relationships, such individuals may receive more empowerment functions, thereby placing them at a relative advantage compared to their counterparts. Certainly, such informational and tangible social supports might be useful to ensure good returns when job or task experience is limited. In addition, providing a clear career path, which both opens and closes opportunities to identify the next steps in terms of development, experience, and mobility, can be one way of envisioning the return on an investment. In doing so, the employees are assured that the organization is willing to meet their task-related and socio-emotional needs, which in turn leads to lower turnover and the successful retention of valuable employees (Zheng *et al.* 2016).

Second, in light of the linkage between social capital and proactive personality, managers need to fill expected vacancies with qualified candidates having high-social-capital potential. Employees who are proactive and socially invested in their workplaces are likely to identify opportunities in the work environment because of their feelings of responsibility to bring about positive changes within the organization. Particularly, as noted by Kirsch *et al.* (2010), these individuals can promote desired behaviors in a team setting. Compared to professionals who tend to identify rather strongly with their profession but weakly with their employing organization, they are willing to subordinate their individual interests for the greater good of the organization and to take a genuine interest in the organization's activities and overall mission

(Bolino *et al.*, 2002). In fact, selecting an applicant with high social capital represents the acquisition of a valuable employee who has already accumulated human capital. This is because human capital can translate into greater social capital. Hence, by paying closer attention to the potential value of individuals with social capital in the recruiting process, leaders and managers can gain more productive employees who have multiple resources (i.e., both social and human capital) available for developing team talent in alignment with business requirements and organizational needs (Arena and Uhl-Bien, 2016).

Third, if management unavoidably thinks about the dark side of socially embedded employees, largely reflected in instrumental motivation, they need to negotiate a new relationship within their psychological contract accordingly. Even when drawing upon the social resources in the current organization, those with high social capital may still behave so as to enhance their personal interests, possibly at the expense of others. According to Vigoda-Gadot and Talmud (2010), political behavior is likely to be exhibited among individuals with higher levels of social capital. High stocks of bonding capital can especially undergird homogeneous groups, and at the same time reinforce exclusive identities (Patulny *et al.*, 2007). In addition, such high-social-capital individuals can utilize social resources as a preparation for their career both within and beyond the organization. Given that most of them are under constant development and update, they may easily be able to access any job at any organization. Therefore, in the contemporary context of protean and boundaryless careers characterized primarily by psychological mobility, employers no longer think of them in the same category of workers but rather should take an eclectic approach to suit the individual needs of each employee with extensive social ties.

Limitations and Future research

The present study results should be interpreted cautiously due to the following three limitations. Firstly, the study analysis was based on self-reported survey data. Despite attempts to minimize the magnitude of this problem, the possibility remains that a source of uncontrolled error from the common variance may have been included. In particular, it might be reasonable to measure individuals' social capital on the basis of their co-workers' viewpoints, because social capital refers to an advantage created by the way people are connected. Secondly, our findings are not immune to the possibility that Korean cultural values may have influenced social capital and its effects on OCG. Compared to western cultures, personal trust networks or relational capital play a more important role in the collectivistic Korean society. By this same token, the study did validate OCG in terms of two of the four factors originally proposed by Weng and Hu (2010). Therefore, future studies could further probe into related issues to expand the scope of the present research. Finally, other potential mediators or moderators were not considered in this study. For instance, considering that human capital was a particularly strong predictor of career outcomes or competence mobilization, the effect of human capital should have been controlled for and considered with social capital from the perspective of individual competency.

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