

IT CHAMPIONS AS AGENTS OF CHANGE: A SOCIAL CAPITAL PERSPECTIVE

Research-in-Progress

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Abstract

Beyond studies on IT champion characteristics, there is a paucity of theoretically-based research on the IT championing process. Using an analytic induction strategy, we employ the Social Capital Theory to better understand how IT champions arise in organizations and how they use different sets of tactics to promote an IT implementation. We conducted five case studies, with a total of 87 interviewees. The initial analysis of two cases reveals evidence in support of the conceptual framework that has been deductively constructed based on the social capital and IT championship-related literature. Consistent with analytic induction, a number of new insights have also emerged. Once completed, we expect this study to make several contributions, as it extends our understanding of how different dimensions of social capital are leveraged by IT champions. It also complements existing variance-based models, helping understand better the process by which IT championship-related causal mechanisms occur.

Keywords: Social Capital Theory, champions, IT implementation, analytic induction, case studies, social resources

Introduction

Research has made significant contributions towards a better understanding of technology champions. These are individuals who throw their “weight behind an innovation, thus overcoming indifference and resistance that the new idea may provoke in an organization” (Rogers, 2003, p. 414). In doing so, champions “actively and vigorously promote their personal vision” (Beath, 1991, p. 355) for using technological innovations in organizations. While extant research has provided a better understanding of the *personal angle* associated with the championing process, for instance in relation to the champions’ characteristics, types and strategies used to further particular innovations, this effort has largely been exploratory in nature. Moreover, and although there are some exceptions (Parr et al., 2000; Bassellier et al., 2003; Neufeld et al., 2007), one could argue that there is a relative paucity of theoretically-based research on IT champion-related topics, especially when it comes to exploring the *social angle* of championing an IT innovation. Leveraging a research lens that closely reflects the social nature of the championship process promises to bring into sharper focus new aspects of the focal phenomenon and reveal new insights. As such, it would come to deepen our understanding of IT champions above and beyond what is already known based on extant literature.

In light of the social aspects of an IT implementation, in this paper, we focus on the notion of the IT champion while employing the Social Capital Theory (SCT) as a research lens. We do so in an effort to understand better *how IT champions arise in organizations* and *how they use different sets of tactics to promote an IT implementation within an organizational context*. What promises to make SCT a particularly relevant and useful theory in this study of IT champions is its ability to shed light and emphasize the resources that are embodied within a particular actor’s set of relationships which, once established, can then be leveraged to further the cause of some productive activity, such as an IT implementation. Initially the paper will draw upon studies of technological and IT championship in order to identify the types of resources that champions use to promote an IT innovation within an organization. Afterwards, the focus will be put squarely on the process through which IT champions develop and leverage their social capital in order to secure these socially-available resources which are necessary for project success.

The paper begins by synthesizing the extant literature on champions and social capital with the overall goal of informing the study’s initial conceptual model. Following the presentation of the methodological considerations, including the sampling, data collection and data analysis strategies, the paper highlights some preliminary findings and the contributions of the research to theory and practice.

Literature Review

IT Championship

The role of the champion has repeatedly been identified as tremendously important to an innovation’s diffusion (Beath 1991; Markham 2000; Schon 1963). Research on the resources that IT champions supply is however relatively limited. In fact, we could only identify ten studies about the relation between resources and technology champions¹. Overall, the literature supports the importance of two types of resources (Lin 1982, 1999) in the championing process: personal (which are in the champion’s possession) and social resources (which are in other people’s possession). On the one hand, some studies emphasize personal resources as the salient type of resource that helps champions in championing technological innovations. These papers (Howell & Higgins, 1990; Chatterjee, Grewal, & Sambamurthy, 2002; Bassellier, Benbasat, & Reich, 2003; Howell & Boies, 2004) generally show that champions and non-champions differ in the types of personal resources they possess and the actions they undertake based on these resources. On the other hand, successful IT implementation may not be achieved by the mere reliance on the IT champion’s personal resources. The literature suggests that IT champions also need to have access to a variety of resources that are possessed or are controlled by other people or units

¹ Akkermans and van Helden (2002); Bassellier et al (2003); Beath (1991); Chatterjee et al (2002); Day (1994); Howell and Higgins (1990); Neufeld et al (2007); Parr and Shanks (2000); Wightman (1990); Zhang and Faerman (2007)

(i.e., social resources) (Akkermans & van Helden, 2002; Beath, 1991; Day, 1994; Parr & Shanks, 2000; Wightman, 1990). While the importance of social resources has been acknowledged in the literature, there is a dearth of knowledge on how to secure such resources. More research is required to understand the different ways by which technological champions build and secure access to social resources in the context of the championing process.

Our literature review also reveals that the studies that have considered the championship process have generally done so either in an atheoretical manner (Howell and Higgins, 1990; Chatterjee et al., 2002; Zhang and Faerman, 2007) or have adopted a behavioral research lens that was primarily individual or functional in nature (Bassellier et al., 2003; Neufeld et al., 2007; Parr and Shanks, 2000). With regards to the former case, extant literature suggests that when lacking a theoretical foundation studies run the risk of errors of inclusion and exclusion (Benbasat & Zmud, 2003). As for the latter, in order to extend our understanding above and beyond what is already known based on previous studies and in light of the social nature of the championship process, the research lens would have to be able to bring into focus the champion's ability to secure and deploy social resources when championing an IT innovation. Such an approach promises to explain seemingly contradictory findings in extant literature. For example, while Hwang et al (2004) found a positive relationship between the organizational position of the champion and IT championship, it is not clear whether this effect is because of the influence of the champion on budget-related decisions (e.g., in Maidique, 1980) or due to the relational knowledge of the champion (e.g., in Howell & Boies, 2004) in such a position.

In order to address such a concern, we have employed SCT to focus our attention on social resources and their types. This is done in a bid to open the black-box of social resources and to scrutinize the mechanisms by which IT champions draw on these types of resources to promote IT innovations.

Social Capital

SCT aims to explain human behavior within a social context. Drawing on earlier work (Granovetter, 1982; Bourdieu, 1985; Granovetter, 1985), social capital is rooted in the interactions that take place between rational actors and in itself represents a type of resource (Coleman, 1988). It directly concerns the particularities inherent in the relationships that exist between actors engaged in some form of productive activity.

Calls have been made for a more systematic and rigorous treatment of the social capital concept (Portes, 1998; Adler et al., 2002). Initial steps towards this much needed conceptual clarification highlight the need to discriminate when it comes to the type of actors that are being studied. As such, one has to explicitly identify the *recipients*, who are those that have and ultimately use social capital to lay claims and gain access to some valuable resources of a collective. By the same token, those agreeing to the demands of those actors that enjoy social capital and end up providing the required resources are to be referred to as the *donors*. Particular to an organizational context, social capital has been classified according to its relative focus, whether it is outwardly or inwardly-oriented (Adler et al., 2002). On the one hand, there are studies looking at 'bridging' forms of social capital that cross various types of boundaries and consider the relations an actor maintains with actors outside one's own collective (i.e. externally-focused relations). The resources made available primarily via this type of social capital tend to be information-related (Granovetter, 1982). On the other hand, work has also considered the 'bonding' forms of social capital that account for the relations an actor maintains with actors within a shared collective (i.e. internal relations). The resources made available via this type of social capital are primarily emotionally-related or scarce in nature (Putnam, 2000). Furthermore, researchers seem to converge on the fact that communication (Narayan et al., 2001), or interaction in general (Adler et al., 2002), are the chief enablers of one's social capital. It is thus thought that social exchanges of various types provide prospective recipients with the opportunity to establish and nurture ties of an internal or external nature that can then be called upon in order to access and to leverage donors' resources for the promotion of a certain agenda.

With regards to the consequences associated with using social capital, benefits and drawbacks alike have been identified in extant literature. On the one hand, one's leveraging of social capital can yield benefits that include ready access to resources, such as information, an enhanced degree of influence, control, and power, but also increased solidarity. On the other hand, using social capital can also derive certain drawbacks as they relate to cost efficiency, as maintaining relationships with potential resource donors

entails a certain degree of emotional and material commitment, but it can also yield a variety of issues brought about by *overembeddedness*, as “the ties that bind may also turn into the ties that blind” (Adler et al., 2002; pg. 30). While social capital can be used to provide access to opportunities that are otherwise restricted, under certain circumstances, it can also play a negative role and end up preventing the success of business initiatives by members of a collective, if it promotes communal behaviors over individual freedoms or fosters freeriding activities.

Having considered what enables social capital, as well as what the impacts of social capital are, researchers have also focused their attention on the actual social capital construct in a bid to open up what was previously essentially treated as a black-box and to seek to operationalize the construct. Resulting from this endeavor is a particular understanding of social capital as a construct that consists of three distinct dimensions, namely *structural*, *cognitive* and *relational* (Nahapiet et al., 1998). First, the *structural dimension* primarily concerns the pattern of relationships that connect the actors, as represented by the recipients and the donors (Burt, 2004). In particular, this includes elements such as network tie characterizations, for instance as weak or strong, network configurations, including measures of centrality and modularity, and last but not least, appropriable organization, or the possibility of transferring ties from one social setting to another. Second, the *cognitive dimension* is mainly meant to account for those factors that enable the shared interpretations and meanings among a group’s members. Shared codes and language, as evidenced by actors that, for instance, ‘speak’ the same technical or business-related talk, or that showcase shared narratives by having the same contextual knowledge of organizational events, are examples of this dimension. From this perspective, it is argued that individuals that share the same codes, language and narratives are generally better positioned to arrive at a common interpretation with regards to the possible outcomes of their respective relationships and will thus be more likely to partner and be willing to share or exchange resources (Tsai et al., 1998). Last but not least, the *relational dimension*, which comprises factors such as trust, norms, obligations and identification, is primarily concerned with reflecting the quality, reliability and virtue that are embodied in the network of relationships connecting an individual. Recognized very early on as a major factor that enhances the strength of one’s social capital (Granovetter, 1985), trust has been found, for instance, to be an important determinant of entrepreneurial activities (Davidsson et al., 2003).

Social Capital in IS

From an information systems (IS) perspective, and of particular relevance to the IT championing process, where information and knowledge is often a critically sought after resource (Markham, 2000), research has shown how social capital motivates individuals to volunteer knowledge in the context of an electronic network of practice made up of legal professionals (Wasko et al., 2005). Operationalizing one’s *structural* capital as the number of individuals that a particular actor has direct ties with, and the *cognitive* capital via the length of tenure, as a proxy for the experience that develops over time as individuals interact with one another to learn context-specific skills, specialized discourse and norms, the results indicate that centrality and tenure are significant predictors of individual knowledge contribution. While *relational* capital, operationalized as the degree of commitment and reciprocity, did not influence knowledge exchange, the finding was attributed to particularities of the research context, more specifically to that of an electronic network, and not to idea that social capital does not include a certain relational dimension, as previously theorized (Nahapiet et al., 1998).

Leveraging the distinction between the outwardly and inwardly-oriented forms of social capital, namely bridging and bonding (Adler et al., 2002), research has uncovered empirical support that interaction taking place via social media use leads to the formation and maintenance of social capital among a random sample of undergraduate students (Ellison et al., 2007). As such, social media use – and the use of Facebook in particular – is pegged to primarily allow users to form weak ties with actors from beyond the boundaries of one’s current social network, but not to allow, to a similar extent, for the creation of strong relationships that are associated with bonding forms of social capital.

It appears however that the use of technology does not always translate into an enhanced degree of social capital and that sometimes it can actually reduce it. This is especially true in cases when technology helps supplant human expertise and insight and, as such, loosens the dependencies between actors. In a study of a bricks-and-clicks dotcom, Schultze et al. (2004) argue that “where use of IT in a network relationship reduces the exchange of privileged and situated information, there is a decline in the opportunities to

create and sustain social capital.” (pg. 104) Therefore, social capital is more likely to be built based on direct personal communication often conducted one-on-one and sometimes even face-to-face. It is also more likely to emerge from frequent and repetitive interactions around topics of direct relevance to the parties involved, rather than from “infrequent and complex interactions” (pg. 105) even if those are technology-enabled.

Conceptual Model

It becomes apparent that social interactions, often in the context of a given practice and sometimes face-to-face, stand at the very heart of social capital formation. It allows participants, donors and recipients alike, to build and strengthen professional and personal ties that can then be called upon to pursue and advance a particular course of action. From the perspective of the recipient, or the individual that seeks to leverage his or her social capital for a given purpose, the interactions provide the opportunity for establishing these relationships, the motivation or the reason for establishing these ties and, last but not least, the ability or the means to establish these connections with potential resource donors.

Once established, as a result of sometimes sustained social interaction, the social capital embedded in these interpersonal ties allows recipients to connect, in a more meaningful manner, with donors and to secure access to valuable resources that are spread throughout a given collective or even beyond the boundaries of such an entity. Echoing the *structural dimension* of social capital, it is to be expected that individuals, who find themselves in a somehow preferentially located position within a given network of professionals as a result of their social interactions, will be in a better position to secure access to a variety of potentially scarce resources. Whether one develops deeper and stronger ties with one’s colleagues or is enjoying a higher density of relationships with others within his or her given reference group, that person will be in a better position to leverage the strength and the diversity of those relationships to ensure the successful transfer of resources from the donors to the recipients. Similarly, with respect to the *cognitive dimension* of social capital, individuals that arrive through social interaction at developing shared interpretations and a common set of meanings across a given collective’s membership will be in a better position to transfer resources in a successful manner. It is essentially the understanding that is shared by the various parties to a social exchange, recipients and donors alike, that will facilitate the successful transfer of resources because the donors will in a better position to fully understand the motivation and the justification behind the need for respective resources that they happen to have in their possession, and thus they will be able to make an educated and qualified decision as to whether or not they wish to share their resources with the recipients. Last but not least, the *relational dimension* of social capital, by virtue of the fact that it refers to issues such as trust but also norms, obligations and identification among and with the various parties engaged in a social interaction, also plays a role in explaining the transfer of resources from donors to recipients. On the one hand, one would expect that in a purely democratic and voluntary environment trust and identification developed as a result of social interaction would likely explain why a donor shares his or her resources with a recipient. On the other hand, in a more top-to-bottom type of an environment, organizationally-developed norms and obligations would play a larger role in explaining a recipients’ ability to secure the very same resources.

It is for these reasons but also because these resources that are accessed by making use of one’s social capital can be financial, informational or reputational in nature, that it logically follows that social capital will play an important role in helping explain the IT championing efforts that take place in the context of an IT implementation.

While the framework shown in Figure 1 is not meant to represent the basis of a variance-based research model, it is included as visual representation of the theory building effort that seeks to integrate the social capital and IT championing bodies of literature into a process model aimed at explaining the role that IT champions play in an IT implementation. It also represents the skeleton upon which the findings of this study will be contextualized, although it is flexible enough that it could evolve to incorporate any additional insights that may emerge from the qualitative content analysis of the data.

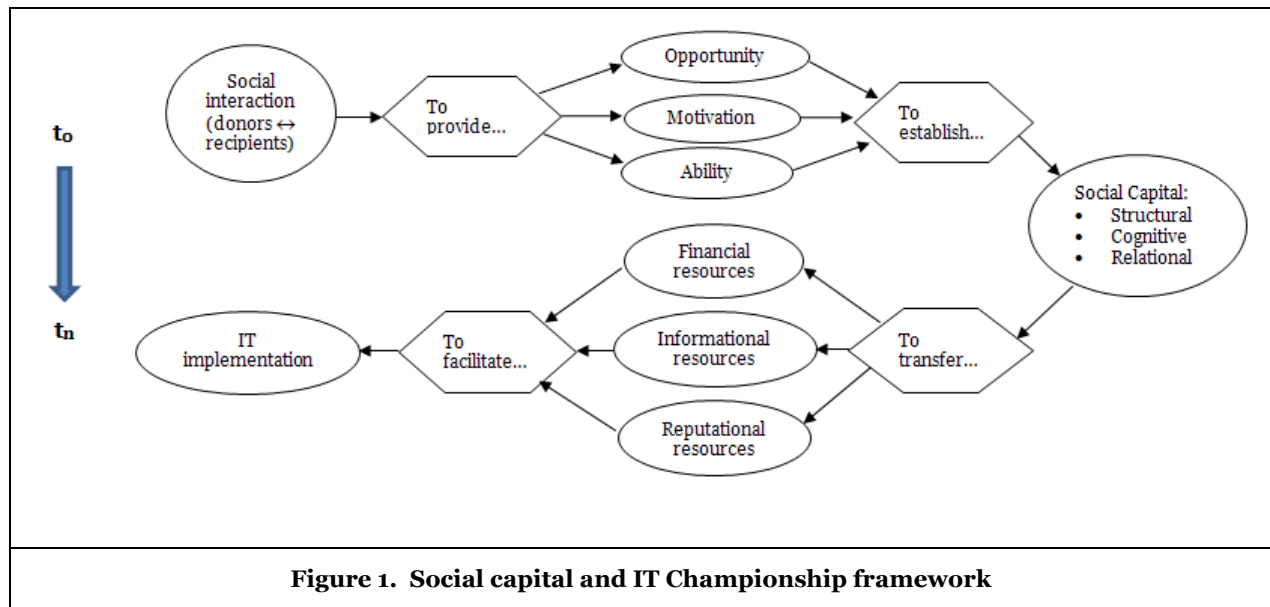


Figure 1. Social capital and IT Championship framework

By applying this framework to championship studies, particular champion-related elements are brought into stark focus as social capital enables IT championing by way of the resources that are acquired through it. For instance, Schon (1963) argues that a champion “must have considerable power and prestige in the organization.” (pg. 85) This perspective could be looked at from the relational dimension (i.e. trust) or even the structural dimension (i.e. network centrality) of social capital. In addition, a champion needs to know how to use the company’s informal system of relationships (Schon, 1963). Of particular relevance then becomes the cognitive dimension and one’s ability to speak the same language and having the same contextual knowledge about organizational going-ons. Furthermore, as it has been empirically shown that champions attempt to influence others more frequently when championing a technological innovation (Howell et al., 1990), it is worth noting that social capital can once again bring forth a unique contribution. By taking into account the fact that when individuals promote certain ideas to a larger collective they often engage in a mix of influence tactics, including coalition building and exchange, an SCT perspective promises to reveal important insights related to the nature of the champions’ network ties (i.e. weak vs. strong), as well as the obligations and responsibilities they face within an organization.

Ultimately, at its most basic level, the activity that an IT champion is performing, in the context of an IT implementation, is a social process that seeks to promote and “sell” a particular technology. As such, using SCT as a research lens to study champions and their activities offers unique opportunities for research that go above and beyond what is known based on extant literature with regards to the personality characteristics and leadership behavior types of these change agents.

Methods

Building upon the salient takeaways that emerged deductively (Webster et al., 2002) from the analysis of the extant literature, this study adopts an analytic induction strategy (Patton, 2002) as its empirical approach. As such, it uses qualitative data from interviews to seek evidence that supports the proposed conceptual framework, but also instances of so-called deviant cases that may come to contradict previous conceptualizations of the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2002). In addition, an iterative approach to data analysis allows for any new insights to emerge, which are then used to shape our understanding of the IT champion.

Given the relatively rich body of work available on IT championing, and yet the novel perspective offered by the SCT, analytic induction was deemed to provide the best methodological fit for this study (Edmondson et al., 2007). As an alternative to purer forms of grounded theory, it offers the possibility for the research to leverage explicitly insights from extant literature, while at the same time, to allow the

qualitative data to speak to entirely new concepts that would thus come to enrich our current understanding of IT champions (Patton, 2002).

The case data were collected as part of larger studies on IT implementation in healthcare-related settings. The five sites were selected based on theoretical sampling (Patton, 2002), while also striving to ensure areas of similarity and discrepancy so as to allow for a compare-and-contrast data analysis approach (Guba et al., 1989) across the different settings. As far as the similarities are concerned, the locations were healthcare settings where the same types of actors were stakeholders in the IT implementation. Nonetheless, the organizational types varied to include teaching and community hospitals while also the IT implementation outcomes varied from success to failure.

Interviews were conducted according to a snowball procedure (Patton, 2002) whereby key actors at each location were asked to recommend the inclusion in the study of additional interviewees who would be able to contribute critical information about the championing efforts displayed during the IT implementation. To allow for data triangulation (Yin, 2009), multiple interviewees per location were selected for inclusion in the study. All in all, 87 people were interviewed, including physicians, residents, nurses, and administrators.

Data Collection

The primary data collection approach consisted of face-to-face interviews conducted on-site at various research locations. The unit of analysis was the IT implementation project. Data collection relied on semi-structured interviews that began with a generic question, inviting respondents to share their personal and professional experience with the implementation, and continued on to more specific questions that aimed to probe more deeply each respondent's participation in the implementation. This structured approach allowed for the emergence of an initial basis for comparisons between the cases (Miles et al., 1994).

On average, each interview lasted approximately one hour and elicited the respondents' narratives related to the specifics of the IT implementation in their hospital. Generally speaking, the broad based discussion covered IT implementation phases (Cooper et al., 1990) ranging from ascertaining the business need, through software selection, to successful project completion or abandonment. Project documentation and observation notes were used for data triangulation purposes. Data collection ended at the point of saturation (Corbin et al., 2007), when no new respondent was identified by its peers as a potentially valuable source of relevant information, and when no new information kept emerging during the interviews.

Data Analysis

The individual interviews were audio recorded in their entirety and transcribed verbatim. The qualitative data is then coded using QSR NVivo8 in a highly iterative manner. The first coding task is to create initial code categories that mirror the salient constructs and relationships contained in the proposed conceptual framework. As such, during the first round of coding, data elements from the transcribed interviews are parsed, broken down and assigned to various concepts that came about as a result of the review of the extant literature (e.g. actor identity: donor / recipient; instances of opportunity, motivation or ability for developing social capital; social capital dimensions: structural / cognitive / relational; resource transfer type: financial / business knowledge / technical knowledge / reputational / authority) .

As the coding progresses, the concepts are constantly compared to one another and core themes of IT champions are sought. Where appropriate, codes with the same content and meaning are grouped into categories (Miles et al., 1994). In reflection of the analytic induction approach to data analysis (Patton, 2002), subsequent rounds of coding see the addition of new codes meant to reflect insights that emerge directly from the iterative analysis of the qualitative data. In a similar fashion, preliminary code categories reflecting concepts that ultimately do not find support in the analysis of the qualitative data are to be dropped. The coding process is carried out until theoretical saturation (Corbin et al., 2007). In line with similar approaches in extant literature (Larsson, 1993), the validity of the coding process is enforced by seeking a consensus of opinion between the two researchers involved in the data coding process. In the extreme case when consensus is unreachable, a third researcher provides the tie breaking interpretation of the content following a discussion with the original coders.

Finally, analyzing the qualitative data consists in a two-step process (Eisenhardt, 1989). First, the intra-case analysis is aimed at revealing patterns that are particular to each case. The focus on the divergence of evidence facilitates the development of a deeper understanding of the underlying reality associated with the IT implementation in each particular case. Second, the inter-case analysis allows for the emergence of commonalities or convergence of evidence across the different cases. Throughout the two-step analysis, the most revealing quotes are retained to help form the basis of the study's chain-of-evidence (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2009). Explicit references to these results are then made throughout the text, where they are used to illuminate the theoretical development effort and to set the study's findings within the context of the extant literature.

Preliminary Findings and Future Steps

A first, initial, round of analysis of two cases reveals that our data does provide evidence in support of the conceptual framework proposed in Figure 1 and which has been deductively constructed (Webster et al., 2002) based on the analysis of social capital and IT championship-related extant literature. For instance, examples of social capital's three dimensions (e.g. structural, cognitive, and relational) have been brought forth by respondents on various occasions. Echoing considerations related to the **structural dimension** of social capital, the relative positioning of the champion in the organization has emerged as one factor that shapes his or her ability to access others' resources in the context of an IT implementation. As one of the respondents put it, *"we had the IT implementation director, who was doctor [...], who was the dean for many years."* (Nurse 2, Case 2)

Furthermore, having a shared language and understanding, situated and built around a common practice, highlights the **cognitive dimension** of social capital and speaks to its importance in mobilizing resources in pursuit of an IT implementation agenda.

"[W]hen I approach one of my colleagues, I address him essentially from a medical perspective, using the spoken and unspoken medical jargon alike. [...] A doctor is not to be managed in an authoritative fashion because they are not employees. They have a certain freedom of action. Therefore they must be made to recognize on their own that a project can have collective but also individual benefits." (Administrator 1, Case 2)

Last but not least, the role that the champion's credibility plays in motivating employees to rally behind a particular IT implementation. Trust, for instance, emerges as one particular instance of the **relational dimension** of social capital which is critical to getting others to share their resources when asked to do so in the context of an IT implementation.

"[I]t is a question of credibility. [...] I consider doctor [...] as being one of those honest people, capable of listening, explaining and then selling... capable of talking to someone while looking them in the eyes and saying 'this is it'. In other words, holding a conversation which appeals to the people's intelligence without however being obsessed or preoccupied by administrative results." (Administrator 1, Case 2)

Reflecting the analytic induction (Patton, 2002) stance of the current study, a number of new insights have already emerged from the iterative data analysis process. For instance, in the context of championing an IT innovation, social capital appears to play a role not only in securing the transfer of various resources from donors to recipients, but also in the appointment of the champion. In these particular cases, when a champion has been nominated, from a SCT and resource transfer perspective, one can argue that authority is passed from the committee, as a collective donor, and vested on the champion, as an individual recipient. To a certain extent, it is this added degree of authority that enables the champion to credibly alternate between carrots and sticks in order to move the implementation forward. However, being appointed as the champion on a given implementation project is only half of the story. In the words of one of the respondents, once appointed to lead such a project, *one has to become a champion by taking ownership, leading by example* and meeting the stakeholders' expectations. Moreover, there is a sense that the very context of the implementation plays an important role in providing the background against which the social interactions between the donors and the recipients take place and where the champion's social capital emerges and solidifies. Such ideas are echoed by many of the respondents who argue that a particular context facilitates the enactment of the social interactions between the various stakeholders.

In addition, while we initially took an abstract view of IT, the analysis reveals that the IT artifact does seem to influence how social capital is shaped and is used in the context of championing IT. For instance, this becomes apparent as one of the respondents in Case 5 elaborates on the IT platform that was used to develop the integration of multiple systems across several hospitals and shelters. Compared to the off-the-shelf electronic medical record (EMR) system implemented in Case 2, the IT artifact in this case is open source, therefore featuring a greater possibility for customization by its various stakeholders. It appears that the very nature of the technology, as an open source platform, appears to provide significant opportunities, motivations, and abilities for users to actively take part (even voluntarily) in the project, and thus contribute to the formation and the use of social capital, even “at 5:30 in the morning on Saturday”.

“... people could email their ideas and thoughts and feedback so that everybody could get it, see what people were thinking and they could go thru the archives, those would also be open and on the internet and then those that’s where the ideas would get worked on – and those would get transferred into the [open source application] and would be permanently tracked and worked on.” (IT champion, Case 5)

We expect that the detailed, in-depth analysis of all five cases will provide additional evidence in support of our framework, while at the same time revealing new insights that will allow us to refine further our initial research model. Ultimately, it is this new knowledge gained from leveraging a social capital lens that will allow us to understand better how IT champions arise in organizations and how they use different tactics to promote an IT implementation within an organizational context.

Implications and Contributions to Research and Practice

The importance of this study resides in the fact that it identifies and uses a theoretically relevant research lens, namely SCT, in its study of IT champions. In light of the social nature of the championing process, the conceptual match with the theoretical lens allows researchers to understand the mechanisms through which champions leverage the potential for action embedded in their relationships to secure access to social resources necessary for promoting an IT innovation.

We expect this study to make three specific contributions to research. First, by looking into the process of IT championing from a social capital perspective, this paper complements existing exploratory studies as well as variance-based models, helping understand better the process by which IT championship-related causal mechanisms occur. It scrutinizes the social process of championship and extends our understanding of IT championing beyond studying, for instance, the personality characteristics differences between champions and non-champions. Second, by employing a social capital lens, the paper extends our understanding of how the different dimensions of social capital are shaped by the actions of IT champions. While IT championship is a social process and the IT champion is a social actor, less was known on how the actions of IT champion are, to a certain extent, contingent on his or her social capital. Accordingly, the paper shows how IT champions have the ability to leverage their relationships with other potential stakeholders in an implementation and to provide motivations and opportunities for resource donors to share their resources in the context of a project. IT champion’s actions are shown to contribute to the shaping of different dimensions of social capital, namely structural, cognitive, and relational. Third, by employing an analytic induction method, our preliminary findings reveal certain emerging insights that are promising in light of extant literature. For example, while our initial framework implied that the role played by social capital in the context of championing an IT innovation was largely IT-artifact agnostic, the emerging data showed that distinct types of IT will provide variation in shaping social capital, in particular, and the championship process, in general.

The paper’s main contribution to practice is that it can assist managers or IT champions to consider all the dimensions of social capital for innovation support. As research indicates, while the formal appointment of a high-rank, credible individual as an IT champion contributes to enabling the structural dimension of social capital, it is also necessary for managers to plan for facilitating social capital creation across its other related dimensions. Attempting to foster a shared understanding of the project via shared language and common narratives (i.e., cognitive dimension) and a trustful environment among all partners surrounding the IT innovation (i.e., relational) are also key for securing and bringing necessary social resources to the project table.

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