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Social capital as a determinant of business innovativeness

1. Introduction

At the outset it should be noted that numerous determinants influencing the level of innovativeness are present. They are discrete (specific) for micro, meso and macro scales. However, an interactive relationship exists between these spheres through feedback impulses, which have led many authors to undertake a holistic approach to their research. There is no doubt that this multiple factor development of innovativeness is both endogenous and exogenous in character, and in the wider context it concerns the management of innovations. It covers four main stages of that process.

The first step is to generate innovation strategy in line with the mission of a company and its development strategy, and to create the organizational conditions for its implementation. The second stage of an innovative activity is based on looking for one's own ideas and the ideas of other companies. The third stage is the process of innovation development, including the transformation of ideas into products, instruments, etc. The next phase called the *commercialization* is the process of implementing new or improved innovations.

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An important role is played by social capital and the politics of the state at all stages of this management. In light of the low position of the Polish innovative economy, not only in the EU, the problem of the development of innovative enterprises (European 2011, World 2011) rises to a strategic level. It is closely related to competitiveness referred to in the literature as change management (Clarke 1997, Wawrzyniak 1999, Drucker 1995).

Due to current sluggish economic growth and an increasing global competition, the low level of innovativeness as the basis for this competition is a barrier to maintain position on the global market. Thus, the undertaken research problem is up to date and also an important objective in the near future. Supply and demand shocks in the Euro area will negatively affect economic growth in the EU transformation countries. In such situation innovations become a key factor of this increase as a result of the construction and utilization of innovative potential (Skawińska 2011).

The purpose of this paper is to present the results of the research on the relationship between social capital and innovative companies and the existing barriers to the implementation of innovative functions by this capital in Greater Poland. World literature has been used along with data from own studies performed on two collectivities. Their characteristics and the methodology of the research are presented in section 3. It should be noted that the literature presents a general view of the low level of social capital in Poland (Grudzewski and others 2010, Wilczyński 2007, Kołodko 2009, Skawińska 2008). This was reflected in the Strategy for the Development of Social Capital in 2010 adopted by the Council of Ministers for 2011-2012 (http://bip.mkidu.gov.pl).
Government documents assume an increase in this capital as the target of the long-term economic development strategy. Therefore, all other strategies (8) included in the Long-term National Strategy refer to social capital. They include, for example, Human Capital Development Strategy, Innovation and Efficiency Strategy, Strategy for Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development, Regional Development Strategy, etc.

2. Social capital and its relation to innovativeness

The conceptualization of social capital covers either its narrower or wider range (Study 2011). The literature's approach to this category is differentiated according to the authors' scientific discipline (sociology, psychology, economics, political science). This demonstrates the broad range of applications. Both the national and international publishing markets have already come up with

a few valuable publications which verify the theoretical assumptions about the importance of this capital in economic and social development (Fukuyama 1999, Sztaudynger 2005, Przybysz, Sauś 2004). Although there is no in-depth and comprehensive empirical exemplification of this assumption, there are ongoing attempts to perform a model estimate of mismatches of social capital designations to the expected GDP growth and the quality of life of the society at both macro and regional levels. This paper assumes that social capital is a collection of current and potential resources belonging to a person through participation in institutionalized relations and engagement networks due to trust and within the cooperation ties, that determine the ability of entities to take an effective action. It is a private good, which remains in the possession of individuals (Putnam, 2001) and has the dimension of the common good, because, according to J. Coleman (1988), it is hidden in human relationships. Thus, it determines the utilization of human capital (education and skills), and in turn, the innovativeness itself.

It is worth noting, that the concepts of social capital are generally recognized in the following areas of the organization of economic life (Gajowiak 2012):

- micro-social as a resource for individuals,
- meso-social as a resource for community groups, such as community self-government, or an enterprise,
- macro-social, as a factor of social development.

However, we must remember that social capital possesses a cultural background and in addition to genetic factors, its potential is determined by all the links in the chain of education (families, kindergartens, schools, universities). The next place of its development is located in companies, local authorities, business and other organizations.

Features that affect innovation appear everywhere the attributes of social capital are formed. In the process approach (Matysiak 2008) which deals with social capital as a resource unit, a positive or a negative role of the state in their development should be considered. According to the aforementioned author, it is a socio-economic system that determines the size of social capital and its utilization.

This paper is a part of the current research on the intangible resources of enterprises, the benefits they generate for companies and the environment and the value they create. It is an attempt to engage in a discussion about the so-called soft management of companies where the personality traits of managers, their norms and values that guide the employees and other attributes of social capital determine target effectiveness.

Attempts to operationalize social capital in world literature were discussed by the authors in earlier works. On this basis an original Multidimensional Analysis of Social Capital has been established. It states that social capital is the sum of 7 resources consisting of 42 attributes (Badanie… 2012). Their meaning is perceived at all stages of innovation management.

Firstly, let us note that the generation of innovation strategy and the search for ideas both require such attributes as creativity, confidence, cooperation and attitudes expressed in recognition of the achievements of others. During the creation of an innovative product, process or tools for marketing management, resources play a central role of social capital affecting the reduction of uncertainty as to invest in such innovations as trust, reliability, norms and values, as well as commitment.

On the other hand, entrepreneurial actions in market penetration, building informal relationships and associations, networks of formal relations between entities, all form the basis for the implementation of innovations. In such circumstances the following designations of social capital prove to be important: responsibility, predictability, fairness, openness, willingness, understanding and patience.

Therefore, it is possible to confirm the ability of social capital to innovativeness directly inherent in the existence and structure of the designations. This ability can also be indirectly described by entrepreneurship, understood as a set of empowered behaviors. These are: the development of an innovative environment, the identification of opportunities for implementation of an idea, reduction of risk, seeking financial support for innovation, shaping attitudes in the creation of ideas and the use of instruments in the process of commercialization. Therefore, the need to know the level and structure of social capital is important to stimulate the growth and development of protective barriers against loss. Even more important is measuring social capital within companies in relation to innovativeness through a survey research.

3. Results of empirical studies

3.1. An assessment of social capital in relation to corporate innovativeness in the light of replies provided by respondents

The first survey was conducted among 150 managers of six districts of Greater Poland. They were randomly selected from among layers of companies of different sizes from the population of 6.5 thousand. A layer was composed

of companies from the same county and of the same size (small, medium and large) measured by the number of employees. The sample ensures the representation of companies from various districts as it represents a high percentage of classes of the population. The study used a method of direct interview, and the questionnaire was based on the attributes. A literature study of the problem (Subramaniam, Youndt, 2005) served as an inspiration for the preparation of this tool.

Respondents were asked to rate the determination of attributes on a 5-point Likert scale. Their replies were described using the arithmetic mean (m). The methodology of work (see p. 1) adopted architecture of social capital formed by 7 resources, i.e. trust, credibility, norms and values, loyalty, cooperation, solidarity and participation. Therefore, social capital is a function of those resources, sc = f (r). Each of them has 6 attributes as dimensions (Kapitał… 2012). 10 attributes were analyzed regarding the link between social capital and innovativeness. Table 1 presents the results of evaluation for employees.

Table 1. Evaluation of the social capital of employees conducted by entrepreneurs on a scale of 1 (very low) to 5 (very high)

Rating of the social capital attributes of a company's workforce	Average rating
capabilities in terms of the industry	4.07
Skills	4.01
Reliability	3.82
Loyalty	3.79
confidence in the leadership	3.76
Credibility	3.68
efficiency, effectiveness of actions	3.67
openness to new information and ideas	3.56
Creativity	3.46
innovativeness (the number of solutions)	3.24

Source: own study

On the basis of the data contained therein it can be concluded that the respondents assess as good the first two competence attributes belonging to trust resource (Capital 2012). Also the following two attributes belonging successively

to the credibility and loyalty resource scored relatively well. However, the assessment of „openness to new information and ideas" belonging to the resource of norms and values, scored quite poorly. The attributes of creativity and innovation within the collaborative resource were rated as the weakest.

Similarly, the values of attributes of social capital in self-evaluation of managers cannot always be regarded as satisfactory (tab.2). This is particularly true in reference to trust, creativity and innovation, and collaboration, resulting in the rating of the number of deployed innovations.

Table 2. Manager's self-assessment of social capital

Statements	Average score
The degree of my commitment to work	4.53
I always keep secrets	4.53
I always keep promises	4.24
I participate in the self-improvement of my knowledge	4.23
Trust is an important source of competitive advantage	3.93
Trust is an important source of innovation	3.74
Number of innovations which I'm realizing is ...	3.51
I cooperate with scientific institutions	2.54

Source: own study

Next, it was assumed that within the network of relationships (i.e. within enterprises) the personal social capital increases by the added value and a group social capital is formed at a higher level. However, the research has not confirmed this, which indirectly indicates the lack of cooperation networks among employees. Some insight on this topic is reflected by the results of replies given by respondents of corporate social capital in (presented in tab.3).

Table 3. Average score of attributes of corporate social capital

Social capital attributes of an enterprise	Average score
interest in raising the level of skills and knowledge of employees	4.03
willingness to cooperate with other companies is ...	3.91

seniority and experience of managers to create new knowledge is ...	3.83
multidisciplinary expertise of managers affect innovativeness	3.73
contacts employee - manager increase the innovatory activity	3.72
the intensity of cooperation with other units due to trust	3. 67
the cooperation of companies in the industry provides the benefits of participation	3.45
our organizational knowledge is ...	3.43
strength of relations between employees generate new ideas and solutions	3.42
the degree of confidence in the company increases the sharing of soft resources	3.35
propensity to risk influences the creation of knowledge	3.05
our company uses patents and licenses to collect knowledge	2.59

Source: own study

Meanwhile, informal networks of relationships and informal relationships enable the generation of knowledge. Innovation is closely linked to the creative process in which the important role is played by the knowledge of employees and the knowledge hidden within the environment (clients, organizations), which, together with the skills and attitudes, leads to competence. In turn, both the creative skills and creativity are individual characteristics indicating the ability of potential employees. As a result new solutions, concepts and ideas are created. In the present study the average rating of these attributes indicates the shortcomings of an individual innovative capital, which includes the aforementioned attributes of social capital. It does not fully support the creative behavior of employees. As rightly noted by Wojtczuk-Turek, innovative capital is an individual and collective capacity to generate knowledge in the form of innovation (Wojtczuk-Turek 2010). Therefore, improving this situation should be reflected in more accurate matches of employees' competence to the kind of activities performed. This can be achieved by capturing and collecting information, creating new knowledge, exchanging ideas, discussing and improving relationships which facilitate cooperation. But here we encounter the barriers of trust, reliability, loyalty, integrity, and commitment (compare tab. 1 and 2). These designations are cultural in character (Stankiewicz, Moczulska 2012) and are a reflection of the efficiency of a democratic state (Gajowiak 2012).

In addition, innovative capital is also collective in nature. Its symptoms are visible in cooperation, in the process of acquiring knowledge from the outside, in the implementation of innovation, communication and collaboration with the science sector. Research shows low rating of such attributes (table 3).

And although it can generally be stated that innovative capital exists within the analyzed enterprises, it only remains on a medium level and is of medium efficiency measured with the number of implemented innovations.

Asking questions about the possibilities of this capital's growth, it was necessary to carry out the research concerning the barriers to innovation in the context of social capital.

3.2 Barriers to innovation in the eyes of entrepreneurs from Greater Poland

The second study conducted in 2011 regarded the intensity of the barriers to innovative activities currently occurring among entrepreneurs from Greater Poland in Section C of manufacturing[1]. The sample represented all entities with more than 49 employees and about 800-1000 entities with 10 to 49 employees proportionally to the number of companies in different sectors and groups.

As a result of the implemented drawing procedure, the research sample consisted of approximately 2,000 individuals randomly selected by the Regional Statistical Office in Poznań. All entities received questionnaires via postal service and 143 companies returned it. However, the post office returned approximately 500 letters with a note stating that a specified recipient did not exist.

The analysis included three problem groups concerning the impact of employees on companies' innovativeness. They concerned the following:

1) strengthening activities that contribute to innovation,
2) investing in the skills of employees,
3) inventive abilities of employees.

From the data presented in tab. 4 it becomes clear that since 2008 most companies have not taken any action to prepare and shape the pro-innovation attitude of its employees.

Those entrepreneurs who were asked about the involvement of their companies in activities shaping the pro-innovation attitudes of employees since 2008 in 75 cases pointed to the development of their versatility. This means that the employees were being prepared to conduct different activities without

1 http://www.stat.gov.pl/klasyfikacje/pkd_07/pkd_07.htm

any adaptation periods or learning. Such actions often reduce work monotony, increase the flexibility and personal responsibility (Prahalad, Rawaswamy 2005) and may improve work performance (Volberda 1999). An employee who occupies various positions develops his or her skills, relationships with co-workers and more easily adapts to new conditions and new teams. J. Oakland and R. Followel (1990) claimed, on the basis of long-term follow-up, that in most organizations the transition from the state of independence of an employee to cooperation goes through the following stages: poor sharing of information and ideas, the exchange of basic information, the exchange of basic ideas, the exchange of opinions and data, getting rid of fear, trust, open communication. It also encourages observation and the associations that may contribute to the formation of ideas, incremental innovations, especially in companies with quality management systems (Zalewski 2013).

Table 4. The companies which have taken actions towards the strengthening of the pro-innovation attitudes of their employees since 2008 in %

Type of action	Companies (in %)
knowledge and information management system	31.47
motivating employees to come up with innovative ideas	34.27
multifunctionality of employees	**52.45**
creation of teams to Implement innovative projects	25.18
creation of one's own or participation in online discussion forums	8.4
providing future users with an access to the testing of innovative products	13.99
inclusion of future users in a company's innovative activities	9.1
purchase and implementation of licensing, technology, etc.	26.58
analysis of market risk for implemented innovations	25.18
monitoring sources of innovative capabilities (new knowledge, changes in the market structure ...)	31.47

Source: own study

It turns out that every third enterprise initiated or strengthened the knowledge and information management system within a company, as well as the way to

motivate employees to submit innovative ideas. Creating the space of knowledge is the first step to building economic growth. According to H. Etzkowitz and L. Leydesdorff 1997, it is followed by the construction of the space for agreement and for innovation. The role of human and social capital here is not to be underestimated.

Every fourth respondent pointed to the importance of assembling teams to realize innovative projects, purchases or the implementation of new technologies, patents, licenses, utilities, etc., as well as monitoring sources of innovation capacity. Rapid increase in knowledge, technology and communication techniques all require the monitoring of both proximal and distant surroundings. They constitute the important components of economic growth and innovation (Zalewski 2013). However, as indicated by the results of other studies (Talaga 2013), in the period between 2002 and 2010 enterprises focused mainly on their internal knowledge. Such a behavior contributes to the persistence of a closed innovation model, in contrast to the paradigm of open innovation (Chesbrough 2003) and persistent lack of cooperation between the academia and industry. The situation is similar in many SMEs in the EU (Kocińska 2013) and fixes at a low level such social capital resources as trust and cooperation (Grudzewski et al. 2010).

In most cases entrepreneurs do not involve future users in product testing (although these products are created mainly for such users), nor are they involved in a company's innovative activity. Their needs had been recognized and described in the literature before (Hamel, Prahalad 1999). Such actions may include *prosumption* - the involvement of customers in the manufacturing process at the stage of self-assembly of such products as furniture (Jacyna 2006). The smallest number of responses regarded using the Internet as a forum for information exchange on the merits of creating innovative solutions. It is difficult to understand because social networks have been developing rapidly and are a good forum for sharing insights, opinions, needs, etc.

Replies to questions about investing in the skills of employees to support innovation processes were at a very similar level (they are presented in table 5). The level of employee competence is often a major source of competitive advantage for a given company. The intellectual capital of staff should also remain crucial in creating and supporting innovative processes taking place within a company. In recent years, the EU ESF programs have provided great opportunities to raise funds for the training of employees, developing their talents by participating in training courses, postgraduate courses, conferences, etc.

Table 5. The share of enterprises that have increased spending on improving the competence of staff to support innovation processes since 2008 (in %)

Type of investment	Enterprises (in %)
ability to work in a team	36.37
flexibility, efficiency	39.87
openness of communication	32.17
creativity (e.g. problem solving, originality of ideas)	32.17
possessed talents, intuition	19.59
entrepreneurship, perseverance, willingness to risk taking	21.68

Source: own study

The above summary of the replies provided by companies regarding the investment in staff development (in table 5) also reflects the relatively low level of involvement in this aspect. Only 40% of companies invested in improving the flexibility and efficiency of its employees. About one-third of them trained their staff in teamwork, openness in communication and the development of creativity. Only every fifth entrepreneur pointed to the investments in possessed talents, entrepreneurship, persistence and risk propensity - important factors in building competitive advantage through innovative approaches. All of these competences reflect social capital (Capital 2013).

Subsequently, the study covered the opinions of entrepreneurs about the innovative potential of employees expressed in a five point rating scale. The weighted average of individual questions ranged from 3.82 (the highest rating) to 2.47, while overall, the median stands at 2.97. Thus, it seems that no evaluation has reached any good level.

Table 6. Assessment of innovative potential of employees by entrepreneurs (1 - v. low, 5 - v. high)

My employees:	Distribution of ratings					Average rating
	1	2	3	4	5	
1. know that the management supports creativity	11	10	25	45	**52**	3.82

2. are convinced that the company needs improvements	6	19	27	**57**	34	3.66
3. feel that the company is open and willingly introduces new ideas	11	14	37	**48**	33	3.55
4. are aware that creativity affects their productivity at work	10	21	45	**47**	20	3.33
5. respect the originators	12	14	**52**	**52**	13	3.28
6. gain prestige when they are innovative	14	18	**49**	47	15	3.22
7. are aware of the role of innovation	10	28	44	**47**	14	3.19
8. know that a company develops when they suggest new ideas (goals)	12	21	**57**	38	15	3.17
9. know that seeking new solutions is part of their work	19	29	34	**40**	21	3.11
10. are offered creative improvement techniques, processes, products	17	24	**54**	40	8	2.99
11. are aware that their role is to implement commands and procedures	24	28	**55**	27	9	2.79
12. feel the reluctance of their colleagues when they propose new solutions	34	41	**44**	15	9	2.47

Source: own study

Three features of employees' potential (1-3) have achieved an average rating of over 3.5 resulting from faith, beliefs and feelings that creativity and new ideas, improvements and innovations are appreciated and supported by managers who, in turn, are characterized by openness. Only the first feature is characterized by a triangular distribution of ratings, and the other two are dominated by good ratings. Entrepreneurs are aware that the creativity of employees (4) affects the performance of their personnel. The strength of these ratings is to be divided equally between high and medium. Two other features (5 and 6) are rated similarly, and are similar in nature. It is about respect and prestige, with which co-workers praise originators and innovators. An average rating of 3.25 results from an advantage and balance of good and average ratings at the level of 50 indications. They are in line with the low average rating and the distribution of replies to the last question (12). Innovators and originators do not encounter any reluctance to cooperate (average rating 2.47).

The next three features (7-9) rated at a level close to 3.15 regard the awareness and knowledge of employees about the fact that innovations and new ideas facilitate the development of a company and remain their own duty.

The average rating of real innovation potential of employees manifested by complex proposals (feature no. 10) is almost one degree lower than the optimal (features 1-3). This indicates a loophole in potential that could decrease in size due to, for example, increased staff training.

Finally, it should be noted that in the eyes of managers the awareness among employees as to their role as passive executors of commands and compliance with procedures (feature 11) remains at a level below average. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that most of them feel active.

4. Conclusion

The survey points to medium and low ratings regarding the attributes of social capital of employees according to the managers of companies in Greater Poland. These shortcomings of individual social capital have not been reduced in the expected network process of value-added relationships reflected in a higher group capital. This results in an incomplete execution of the innovative function by its own attributes.

Surveyed managers have indicated medium and low ratings regarding the attributes of social capital of their own employees. These shortcomings of individual social capital have not been reduced in the expected network process of value-added relationships reflected in a higher group capital. Opinions of entrepreneurs on different forms of innovative potential of employees expressed in a five point rating scale have ranged from 3.82 to 2.47, and the average value stands at 2.97. Nevertheless, most companies have not undertaken any action to prepare and shape the pro-innovation attitude of its employees. Only a few companies have initiated or strengthened the knowledge and information management system, methods to motivate employees to submit innovative ideas or shaping the competences supporting innovative processes.

The results have confirmed the assumption of a barrier to the growth of innovativeness included in social capital. It is important to address the question regarding actions that can change this state. In reflection on this problem we find the need to identify causative factors that increase the potential for innovation and its efficiency by improving the level and structure of social capital in the future.

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Summary

Social capital as a determinant of business innovativeness

The problem of innovativeness and competitiveness of the Polish economy is rising to strategic importance in the new EU financial perspective for 2014-2020. It is strongly related to social capital. This paper contains the results of the research on the relationship between social capital and innovative companies and the existing barriers to the implementation of innovative functions by this capital in Greater Poland. The data used have come from independent studies carried out on two collectivities of managers. Each one was composed of about 150 participants. Surveyed managers have indicated medium and low ratings regarding the attributes of social capital of their own employees. These shortcomings of individual social capital have not been reduced in the expected network process of value-added relationships reflected in a higher group capital. Opinions of entrepreneurs on different forms of innovative potential of employees expressed in a five point rating scale have ranged from 3.82 to 2.47, and the average value stands at 2.97. Nevertheless, most companies have not undertaken any action to prepare and shape the pro-innovation attitude of its employees.

Only a few companies have initiated or strengthened the knowledge and information management system, methods to motivate employees to submit innovative ideas or shaping the competences supporting innovative processes. In reflection on this problem we find the need to identify the causative factors that increase the potential for innovation and its efficiency by improving the level and structure of social capital in the future.

Key words: *social capital, business innovation, barriers to innovation, innovation potential of employees.*

Streszczenie

Kapitał społeczny jako czynnik determinujący innowacyjność przedsiębiorstw

Problem innowacyjności i konkurencyjności polskiej gospodarki narasta do rangi strategicznego w nowej perspektywie finansowej Unii Europejskiej na lata 2014-2020. Ma on silny związek z kapitałem społecznym.

W artykule przedstawiono wyniki badań dotyczących relacji kapitału społecznego z innowacyjnością przedsiębiorstw i występujących barier w realizacji funkcji innowacyjności przez ten kapitał w Wielkopolsce. Wykorzystano dane z niezależnych badań własnych wykonanych na dwóch zbiorowościach menedżerów liczących po około 150 osób. Badani menedżerowie wskazują na średnie i niskie wartości atrybutów kapitału społecznego swoich pracowników. Te niedostatki indywidualnego kapitału społecznego nie zostały zmniejszone w oczekiwanym procesie sieciowych relacji tworzących wartość dodaną odzwierciedloną w wyższym kapitale grupowym.

Opinie przedsiębiorców o różnych przejawach potencjału innowacyjnego pracowników wyrażone w pięciopunktowej skali ocen mieszczą się w przedziale od 3,82 do 2,47, a uśredniona wartość kształtuje się na poziomie 2,97. Mimo to, większość przedsiębiorstw nie podjęła działań kształtujących przygotowanie i postawę proinnowacyjną swoich pracowników. Tylko nieliczne przedsiębiorstwa rozpoczęły lub wzmocniły system zarządzania wiedzą i informacją w obrębie firmy, sposób motywowania pracowników do zgłaszania innowacyjnych pomysłów lub kształtowanie kompetencji wspomagających procesy proinnowacyjne.

W refleksji nad tym problemem stwierdzamy potrzebę zidentyfikowania w przyszłości czynników sprawczych umożliwiających zwiększenie potencjału innowacyjności i jego efektywności poprzez poprawę poziomu i struktury zasobów kapitału społecznego.

Słowa kluczowe: *kapitał społeczny, innowacyjność biznesu, bariery innowacyjności, potencjał innowacyjny pracowników.*

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