

**SOCIAL CAPITAL BUILDING AND QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA UNIVERSITIES: Perception of Human Resource Practitioners.****Bashir Aboaba Mojeed-Sanni\*****School of Management, Cardiff Metropolitan University.****Adeniyi Temitope Adetunji & Kayode Akindele Ogunleye\*****Department of Business Administration, Bowen University Iwo, Nigeria, email:****Abstract**

This paper aims to explore social capital building concept in Nigeria universities. The assertion that social capital increases performance, productivity and innovation can lead to quality improvement as studied in past literatures. However, awareness of how human resource personnel relates social capital building to quality improvement is yet to be established. This herald the need to fill the gap in knowledge as it relates to social capital building in Nigeria universities. This paper uses a qualitative approach to investigate HR practitioners' knowledge of social capital building in their university in order to expand our knowledge of how social capital building is carried out. 12 head of human resource unit were selected from 6 Nigeria universities, 2 from each of the universities (federal, state and private). The selection was based on a common share value in terms of age, commonality and disciplinary balance. Qualitative approach was adopted within which semi-structured interview was used as the sole instrument for the research. The finding revealed that HR practitioners in Nigeria Universities do not fully reckon with the need for social capital building in Nigeria universities, as they only identified with four indicators (that is friendship relationship, commitment, identification and knowledge sharing) out of the seven social capital building indicators. The finding also revealed difference in organisational culture between public and private universities with respect to social capital building. The researcher also reveals that the majority of human resource personnel in Nigeria Universities were unsure if it is their responsibility to ensure dyadic/personal trust exists amongst employees.

**Keywords:** Social Capital, Organisational Social Capital, Human Resource, human resource Practitioners, Social Capital Building.

**Introduction**

In today's context government have continue to make effort to improve the quality of services render by universities in the country in order to met up with government and populace demand for quality education. Among this efforts Adetunji (2015a) posit that government of Nigeria have made several policies all in the name of improvement and to provide better services. Likewise Adetunji and Adetunji (2015) pointed that in an attempt for government to improve the services rendered within the university, the Nigeria government have passed on the responsibility to the private owners through deregulation policy. However, both kind of ownership (public and private) have continued to support

the community by creating jobs and developing fresh graduates. The question raised by Adetunji (2015b) is what kind of graduates Nigeria University are producing. In other to provide answer to this sort of questions and fill a gap, this study considers the role of human resources practitioners who employees the staff who are meant to transform the student into a sound mind. The study enquiry into human resource involvement in social capital building of the university is owing to the view these universities are run independently and, in some cases, privately.

A major issue raised in past literature (Salmin, 2001; 2009; Ogundare, 2009; Obasi, Akuchie, & Obasi 2010) that affects quality education provision in Nigeria universities are staff relationship with students, students to staff ratio, and indiscipline of student in terms of examination malpractices. Issue of staff relationship with students includes sex with female students and collecting money from the male student for marks. These issues have raised concern about the position of human resource personnel who employs the staff, to know whether or not they left their duties half-done after employing the staff by not considering social capital building for their university. These approaches that is enquiry into social capital building as it relates to quality management will increase or have positive effect on productivity of staff, which in turn will have positive impact on quality of service provided. What quality means in this context will be value for money, above standard that is going extra mile to improve what is normal (Adetunji, 2015a). Therefore the major part of the literature for this study will focus on social capital building.

### **Research**

Institution of higher learning, especially privately-owned, operates more or less like a typical organisation that is essentially set up to provide superior services to the market place which in turn enhances the profitability level of the enterprise (Inyang, 2011). Whilst seeking competitive advantage in the market place, organisations are pressured to devise means to add value to their most important asset - people, a view consistent with soft model approach of human resource management that assumes that employees are valued assets and source of competitive advantage through their skills and abilities (Storey, 2007; Akdere, 2003). Interestingly, the growing clamour for quality improvement and management through collectivism in work place, team working and cohesiveness, networking and collaboration can neither be over emphasized nor can it be ignored. Similarly, changes in business, world economy, political and social landscape of university education provision in Nigeria, especially the introduction of privatisation policy, has increased the competitiveness of university education in the country (Adetunji & Mojeed-Sanni, 2015). It inadvertently demands that university management through the human resource unit build social capital as a distinctive organisational competence (Patnayakuni, 2008). Hence, building and developing a university's social capital entails conscious effort from personnel in the institution, as such, it is crucial to investigate today's personnel, especially human resource personnel's attitude and degree of awareness of the concept of social capital in their day-to-day activities.

Social capital refers to the resources available in and through personal and business networks. These resources include information, ideas, leads, business opportunities, financial capital, power and

influence, emotional support, even goodwill, trust and cooperation (Baker, 2000). The idea that social capital increases institution/organisational performance, enables employees to get better jobs, better pay, and faster promotions through the social capital that they build is the driving force attracting businesses to further investigate and explore the opportunities and possibilities that social capital may present (Van Buren, 2008); (Akpotu, et al., 2010). From organisational perspective, the relevance of social capital building is encapsulated in the evolution of organisation theory – the movement from traditional bureaucratic theory of the organisation to the rational systemic view of the organisation, culminating in the ground breaking Hawthorne’s theory of the human relations movement; the latter actually paved the way for organisations to invest in the development and promotion of policies, procedures and practices that emphasise “people” – that is, people-oriented organisational activities (Farnham, 2010). These give credence to the soft approach to human resources management - where human resource management in the university recognises employees as a resource worth investing in, and tends to focus on high commitment/high involvement human resource practices, and the resource base view of the firm, in this case a university, and ultimately, signalled a departure from the generic (traditional human resource functions) approach to human resource management to the more robust and contemporary distinctive approach to human resource management that focus on managing people to deliver institutional objectives that is not an exclusive reserve of human resource professionals – as it involves and requires collaboration with line managers (Farnham, 2010). The relationships that make university work effectively constitute social capital. Social capital consists of the trust, close relationships, respect, and mutual understanding developed in the structure and content of social relations, leading to goodwill and solidarity (Kale, Singh & Perlmutter, 2000; Adler & Kwon, 2002). This is associated with a common sense of purpose and strong norms of cooperation (Cohen & Prusak, 2001).

Van Buren (2008) relates organisation social capital to the value created by and for a firm through its internal relations among and within employees, as well as its external alliances and reputation, which he called ‘relational wealth’. One of the key strengths of any organisation faced with competitive pressures and dynamic operating environment (such as applicable in Nigeria University) is the ability to leverage on its internal resource, which human (employees) relations and interactions is a pivotal source. Van Buren (2008) suggested the firm’s ability to its (a) relationships with and among internal stakeholders (employees), (b) external alliances (with suppliers, joint venture partners, alliance partners), and (c) reputation of its employees individually and collectively is a source of competitive advantage. Complementary to Van Buren’s suggestion for firm’s creation of source of competitive advantage; Sirmon, Hitt and Ireland (2007) asserts that organisation social capital benefits the firm both in the access it provides to external resource (bridging social capital, i.e., ‘outside-in’ intangible resources) and in facilitating internal coordination (bonding social capital, i.e., ‘inside-in’ intangible resources). Bearing in mind that since no firm has total control of all the resources that it needs to survive and compete effectively in the market place, and that firms resources needed to be bundled and leveraged (Arregle et al., 2007) hence, firms must acquire or gain access to needed resources from external sources and facilitate the coordination of activities and projects across various functional units, effective decision making processes, and the implementation of the resulting decisions (Hitt, Lee & Yucel, 2002).

**Human resource Practitioners and social capital building**

Akdere (2003) posit that social capital theory has lately activated attention and interest in the field of human resource development as more organisations are becoming aware of the importance of social interactions and relationships at work. As a result, there are an increasing number of studies about social capital in human resource development albeit, such studies were predominantly focused on large and multinational organisations (Storberg-Walker, 2007). Human resources management is potentially business personnel issues, especially employment/hiring, education, evaluation and rewarding of employees and provision of safe, ethically acceptable and just and fair environment for them, it is a function which has become a key element of the strategy of every organisations, especially in a learning environment in their efforts to establish and maintain their competitive edge on the market (Ceranic & Blaženka, 2009). Hence, human resource practitioners (more importantly, practitioners in academic environment) need to recognise the existence of two organisations within any business: the formal organisation and the informal organisation. Khan and Katzenbach (2007) argues that formal organisation consists of the structures, hierarchies and processes that are set down on paper and in job titles, while the informal organisation is made up of a complex network of relationships between employees in different departments or business units and at different levels of seniority within the institution. Khan and Katzenbach stressed that formal organisation is largely based on predictions of how work will happen. But increasingly, work doesn't really happen that way. It's like getting dressed according to the weather report and not adjusting when you step outside. By contrast, they opine that informal organisation relates to how the company actually operates. It is things like culture; networks, relationships and the emotional motivation people have for work that is not related to bonuses or pay - all those things that are hidden.

Murray (2006) stressing the need to foster informal networks; and look at 'internal network leaders' – that is people who are essentially connecting people. They might be human resource, admin officer, lecturer, but they're the ones that have a sense about things going on in one part of the university that others don't have a clue about. Therefore, as leaders in organisations, human resource practitioners cannot be obviated from the essential ingredient for shaping the organisational culture: as the leader figure, which successfully gets followers to adhere to a certain style of thinking, interacting and behaving (Ruiz, Martinez & Rodrigo, 2010). Furthermore, benefits of social capital building to organisations heralded the need for human resource practitioners to create an environment where social capital can be fostered, utilised, and enhanced to increase organisational performance and productivity (Akdere, 2003). In considering business organisations it has been reported that social capital facilitates inter-unit resource exchanges and product innovation (Camps & Marques, 2011) the creation of intellectual capital and cross functional team effectiveness reduces turnover rates and organisational dissolution rates, strengthens lecturer's relations, head of department networks and inter-department learning (Mele, 2003).

**Methodology**

This paper gathered practical evidence from middle management officers in Nigeria universities (these officers essentially perform human resources responsibilities), using six Nigerian universities (three public and three private). A purposive selection technique was used to choose six universities studied. In agreement with the research aims, this paper chose to interview human resource personnel in each university; they are known as senior officers in the registry department of any university. Human resource personnel play important roles in the university in determining whom they recruit for the university business as well as supporting the university to achieve her best as center of learning. A qualitative approach was suggested appropriate to fill the gap identify in the literature, that is, determining human resource personnel's awareness of the indicators of social capital building in their university, in other to expand our knowledge of how social capital building can be use to improve quality. An approach that many study of this nature will not consider. This paper gathers information from using a qualitative approach. Therefore, the data presented in this paper were collected from human resource personnel with each personnel involved having at least 10 years of work experience in the unit. Their position as head of recruitment unit for the university and the responsibilities, duties and roles performed in social capital building was the key reason for their selection.

This selection technique was ideal as it was essential to get rich data from those who have the understanding of social capital building in the university. However, the data from the survey are restricted in that the review covers only issues related to social capital building and quality management in the Nigerian universities. The opinions of the 12 informants who took part in the study were very robust as they were senior officers of the university; thus, their involvement in recruiting staff contributes to social capital building and quality improvement of the university and made their views relevant to the study. In this paper the selection of those involved in the activities of the university intensified the genuineness of the findings obtainable. The presentation of data relating to social capital building that supports quality improvement studied in this paper increases the authenticity of the study, while human resource personnel daily duties and position in recruiting staff in the university is assumed to increase the trustworthiness of the findings. The outcomes were analyzed and considered using descriptive analysis. This paper does not claim that the findings can be generalized to other institutions outside Nigeria but does claims the generalizability of the six universities that were reviewed within Nigeria.

Table 1: Field survey

Site narration				Participants	
Class	Owner	Type	Category	HHRU (1)	AHHRU (2)
Public	Federal	Agricultural	A	-	*
		Technology	B	*	*
	State	Agricultural	C	*	*
		Technology	D	*	-
Private	Private	Denomination	E	*	*
		Sole-proprietor	F	*	*

The first criteria used to arrange the universities selected for this study was their period/year of establishment. Public universities were allocated A–D, while private universities were allocated E–F. Thus A = federal university (agriculture), B = federal university (technology), C = state university (Agriculture), D = state university (technology), E = private university (denominational), F = private university (sole proprietorship). 1 = head of human resource unit (HHRU), 2 = assistance head of human resource unit (AHHRU). Therefore A1 is the head of human resource unit from federal agricultural university, B1 is the head of human resource unit from federal technology university, and C1 is the head of human resource unit state agricultural university. D1 is the head of human resource unit from state technology university, E1 is the head of human resource unit from the private denominational university and F1 is the head of human resource unit from the private sole proprietorship university. A2 is the assistance head of human resource unit from federal agricultural university, B2 is the assistance head of human resource unit from federal technology university, and C2 is the assistance head of human resource unit state agricultural university. D2 is the head of human resource unit from state technology university, E2 is the assistance head of human resource unit from the private denominational university and F2 is the assistance head of human resource unit from the private sole proprietorship university.

### Findings

During the interview section, the participants were asked of their opinion about how social capital building can developed in Nigeria universities. The participants from public universities express there ignorant of not knowing what their duties are except to recruit staff based on need or instruction from the university management. Four of the participants from a public universities also agree that the major duties perform by the human resource personnel in their university is to recruit and promote staff as agreed by the institution policies on promotion (A2, B1, B2, C1). Likewise three participants from private university also make a similar assertion by pointing that the role is centre on academic and non academic staff recruitment and promotion (E1, E2, F2). Surprisingly, participants mentioned that

*How do I teach academias what to do (D1).*

Three other participants agree in their statement that university is not run like any other organisation therefore making it difficult to integrate all function of human resource management.

A participant from a private university lamented,

*We in the human resource unit knows our job but we deals with people who are sometimes above us, more qualify than we do, you know this culture is all about respect. You must respect them (I mean the professors and doctors) otherwise you may be the first to be shown exit from the system (B2).*

Four other respondent make a similar response to the behaviour of staff they recruit after they have taken over the job, one of them highlight that

*Take for example I sat at the board that recruit the last vice-chancellor of this university, all the other professors that was involved in the process were just saying yes sir, how will you handle a situation like staff misconduct for example. I can confirm to you that none of the applicants answer the question according to human resource standard rather they deviate from original question. My colleagues and I in the meeting were not allow to say a word rather than been a spectator. Tell me what is human resource in this kind of process (F1).*

Five of the participants both from public and private university were of the view that human resource practitioners did not agree that it is their responsibility to encourage effective and affective social interactions at work. Because they have less say after the employment letter have been given.

One of the respondents mention that:

*Tell me what to do if we place an advert for a position and the vice-chancellor of the institution turn round and say to you as human resource officer that I have interest in that position or even send a curriculum vital with his signature on it to you and request for your comment (E2).*

A respondent from a public university who claim supports the respondent from a private university statement expressed:

*I will never play with my job, but we do not recruit any staff, staff are short listed and recruited by the vice-chancellor, governing council member and top officials in the university, so what social capital building responsibilities do we have towards those influential staff (C2).*

A question was asked if human resource personnel understands their duties clearly, quite lot of the respondent do make assertion that they know that they should be well involved in promoting and encouraging friendly relationship between employees. However two respondents from a public university were of the view that human resource personnel responsibility especially in the university is something that requires more attention in other to bring sanity back to the institution if quality will be put into what is done in the university (C2, D1). One of the respondent stresses further,

*I think, if human resource can not hire and fire staff in the university like other sector then it will be difficult to tell who is to do what and no one will be held responsible for any wrong doing rather everyone will continue to be blamed (C2).*

Another respondent from public university added,

*I think it is time human resource personnel need to be more concerned about what is happen in the university (B2).*

Few respondents agree that for social capital building to improve quality of services offer especially in the university then employees' commitment and identification with organisation's purpose and mission need to be identify as part of university social capital building plan (A2, B1, C2, D1, E1, and F2). While three human resources personnel from private universities believe that it is essential for human resource personnel to identify individuals who are committed to the organisation and understand the purpose and mission of their organisation in other to develop a quality culture (E1, F1, and F2). Another respondent who claimed that human resource personnel know there job but other hindrance factors like you find in any other job is what is affecting there productivity mentioned that

*I can tell you now and then that participation in quality improvement is a collective effort and this efforts need to meet group objectives, through this collective activities individual can achieve his or her goals through identification with the group, department or unit work for and also towards the group objective and goals (B1).*

Respondents from a private university mentioned that even if we continue to blame other factors that we cannot control, what about our own involvement as personnel (E1, E2).

*I think on most occasions we are not interested in non-work activities that might influence employees' organisational commitment that can positively affect employee performance (E2).*

Nonetheless, if you don't believe in a course you can never make a different, says head of human resource unit from a public university (D1). Another respondents from a private university was indifferent to this opinion, he expressed that,

*I think we shouldn't just get involve in recruitment/selection only, it our responsibility to train or facilitate training that will development staff on the job as a functions of social capital building that will facilitate quality improvement or sustainability (F2).*

Furthermore, it was found that majority of human resource personnel in Nigeria universities believe training and development programme should be focus to develop a sense of belonging as well as social nature of work rather than on the efficient process of work. In other words, there is partial acceptance among the respondents that the use of human resource recruitment and selection, training and development if effectively carried out is a function to social capital building that will in turn improve quality provision of the Nigeria universities.



## Conclusion

Nigeria universities' human resource personnel' understanding and awareness of social capital building as a precursor to quality improvement in Nigeria universities is somewhat partial. Although most of the participants claim that the power above them do not allow them to function effectively which have direct impact on social capital building that could increase level of staff/employees performance. However, even with a lot of hindrance faced by the human resource unit especially in the Nigeria university, it is evidence that there is need for Nigeria universities to fully grasp the importance of creating the conditions that engender social capital building environment as it cannot be taken for granted. The university management and human resource responsibilities should be stretched beyond the traditional human resource functions (such as, recruitment and selection, training and development) to include new functions that will develop elements of social capital building that will improve and shape Nigerian universities creation and evolution (such as employee engagement, motivation, remuneration and compensation and collective bargaining).

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