

A Framework to Examine Networking Behavior and Social Capital Formation in Agricultural Leadership Development Programs

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Introduction

A review of 55 agricultural leadership development programs by Russon and Reinelt (2004) found that “some of the most powerful and enduring outcomes of leadership programs are the relationships that are formed between participants in the program” (p. 8). These relationships facilitate the development of social networks (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Thus, many leadership development programs claim to enhance participants’ personal and professional networks through networking (Abington-Cooper, 2005; Black, 2006; Dhanakumar, Rossing, & Campbell, 1996; Diem & Nikola, 2005; Kelsey & Wall, 2003).

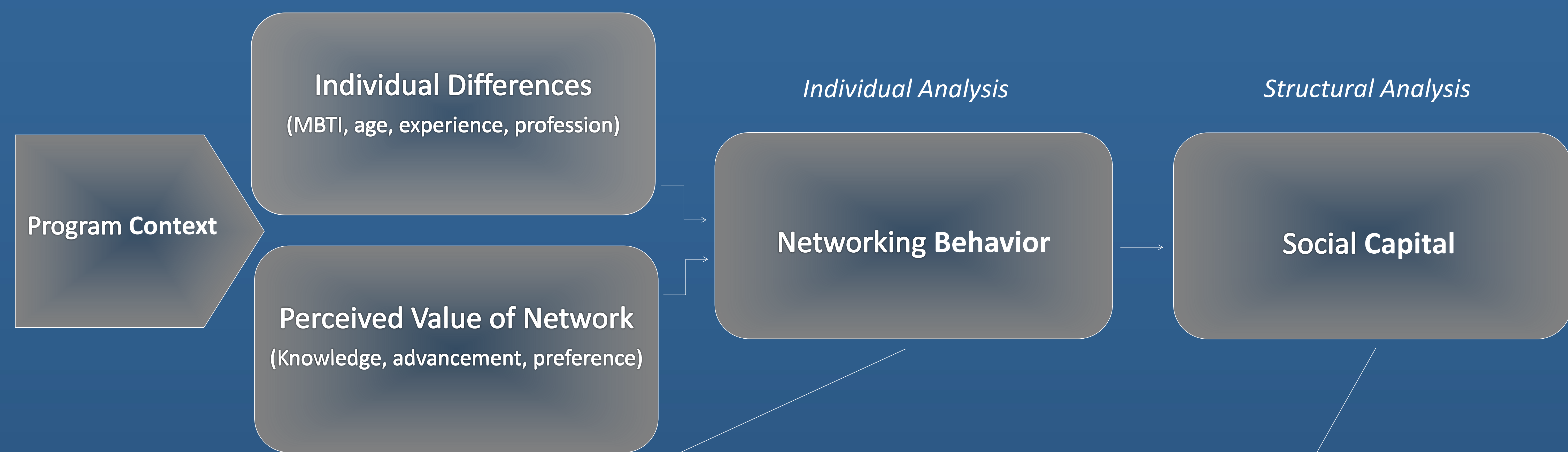
Despite the hypothesized relationship between leadership development and enhanced networks and networking there is little empirical evidence to support these outcomes (Van De Valk & Constat, 2011).

Methodology

This research synthesis followed Creswell’s (2009) steps in conducting a literature review. First, the following list of keywords was generated: leadership, program, evaluation, networking, social capital, and network analysis. The researchers used these keywords to conduct searches in the following digital databases: CAB Direct, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), Education Research Complete, and the Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA). During each stage of the process the results from database searches were cross-checked using Google Scholar to ensure accuracy.

The initial review of the literature yielded 243 results. The researchers examined these documents for relevancy and selected 102 documents for further investigation. The next iteration in the review process included an in-depth evaluation of relevance and rigor, which resulted in 54 peer-reviewed articles and dissertations that would be utilized in the research synthesis. To ensure a robust review, reference lists of these selected documents were scanned for sources not included in the initial review.

Conceptual Framework



Networking behavior involves building and using contacts with people in order to be successful in an individual’s career (Wolff & Kim, 2012). Networking is not considered a personality trait, but a set of interrelated behaviors that can be frequently and consistently exhibited by individuals (Wolff, Schneider-Rahm, & Forret, 2011).

Additionally, networking behavior is influenced by individual differences such as personality traits (Forret & Dougherty, 2001) and by situational variables, such as position or job function (Michael & Yukl, 1993). As such, networking can be classified as an individual-level construct that focuses on individual differences in behavior (Wolff, Schneider-Rahm, & Forret, 2011).

Networking behavior has been implicated as an antecedent to social capital formation (Kostova & Roth, 2003; Lin, 2008). Social capital and networking are distinct, but related, constructs that pertain to different levels of analysis (Wolff, Schneider-Rahm, & Forret, 2011). Both constructs consider benefits derived from social contacts; however, networking focuses on individual *behavior* to build and maintain social networks, while social capital focuses on the *characteristics* of these social networks.

Thus, social capital focuses on a structural level, where individual differences are not taken into account. These structural characteristics influence the availability of resources that provide support for leaders (Cadima, Ojeda, & Monguet, 2012; Ibarra & Hunter, 2007) and have been found to assist in problem solving (Senge, 2004), professional skill development (Wenger, 2000), increased civic engagement (Dhanakumar, et. al., 1996), and enhanced social capital (Burt, 2000).

Implications

Social networks clearly offer benefits, but the current body of research associated with leadership and the formation of networks as an outcome is insufficient (Day, 2001). This framework is a preliminary attempt aimed at improving the understanding of networking behavior and social capital formation. Understanding the processes associated with network formation, examining the relationship between networks and leadership development programs, and determining the value of these networks will provide significant contributions to the field of leadership (Kaufman, Rateau, Ellis, Kasperbauer, & Stacklin, 2010).

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