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Bowling Together -

Applying Robert Putnam's Theories of Community and Social Capital to Public Relations

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Abstract

Although the concept of Social Capital is by no means new, it has certainly spread more widely due to the writings of Robert D. Putnam. His writings have underlined the importance of civic engagement and social ties for the welfare of individuals and societies at large. Putnam's theories lay the foundation for an understanding of the broader societal functions of public relations, and offer useful concepts and ideas for both theory and practice. Putnam's theory of social capital posits that the success of societies greatly depends on the horizontal bonds of collaboration: only trust-filled long-term relations, such as associations and clubs, are able to generate the cohesion that brings societal benefits such as lower crime rates, increased health, happiness and even economic prosperity. Understanding how a sense of community is fostered is vital as society continues to polarize and it becomes the task of communication professionals to build bridges between opposing views. The creation and maintenance of organizational social capital can be seen as a foundation for public relations. In fact, organizations with reciprocal, trusting stakeholder networks can be understood as having high amounts of social capital, which in turn makes organizations resilient and anti-fragile even in a chaotic environment.

1. Introduction

What makes societies and organizations successful and collaborative? Robert Putnam suggests it is social capital, an invisible glue of societies formed on previous good experiences. Although Robert Putnam's writings on social capital and community building are well-known, his work is only beginning to be applied to the study of public relations (Sommerfeldt 2013, 1-12; Dodd, Brummette, and Hazleton 2015, 472-479; Canel and Luoma-aho 2017). Putnam's theory on social capital presupposes that the success of societies greatly depends on horizontal bonds of collaboration: only repeated, long-term relations are able to generate the cohesion that brings societal benefits such as reduced levels of crime, increased health, happiness and even economic prosperity (Putnam, Leonardi & Nanetti, 1993; Putnam, 1993; 2000; 2003; 2010; 2015). Accordingly, organizations with reciprocal, trusting stakeholder networks could be understood as having high amounts of social capital.

The topic of community building is timely, as society is increasingly polarized, citizens and stakeholders seem to be living inside their own media bubbles (Sloterdijk, 2011) and organizations struggle to balance the interests and needs of several different stakeholder groups in a globalized, unpredictable and fractured society (Canel & Luoma-aho, 2017; Luoma-aho, 2014). This chapter argues that Putnam's understanding of sense of society and social relationships help explain the future priority of communication professionals: to create and maintain organizational social capital.

The content of the chapter is as follows: First, the work and theories as well as the criticism toward Robert Putnam are introduced. Second, Putnam's contributions for public relations theory and practice are discussed through reviewing its previous applications and suitability. Third, a model deriving from Putnam's thinking of social capital creation is presented

and finally conclusions are drawn on the usefulness of his theories for theory and practice of public relations.

Robert Putnam and the loneliness of bowling today

Robert Putnam (1941-) is an American political scientist famous for coining the phrase "*Bowling Alone*", first in an article (Putnam, 1995) and later in a book (Putnam, 2000). Putnam's studies concentrate on democracy and society at large, and he argues that society today has seen a decrease in sense of community. Despite technological development and the new media, and in fact partly because of them (Putnam, 2000; 2015), people today have fewer interpersonal relationships than ever before. A generational shift has occurred, and in Putnam's example of USA, people have become isolated; they no longer belong to clubs and associations or do things together, but instead they even bowl alone. Similar challenges are globally emerging with urbanization and Putnam argues that people today have lost a sense of community, which makes collaboration and relationships difficult to establish and maintain. The reasons behind this according to Putnam (2000, 2015) include the changing family structure toward living alone and the suburban sprawl that has fractured people's spatial integrity and affected their free time and social relations. Moreover, the introduction of online and digital entertainment has "privatized" leisure time, and the newer generations have taken communal activities online lacking face to face meetings. Whatever the root cause, Putnam argues, we're slowly eroding the social networks vital for the welfare of societies and individuals.

To understand how this erosion happens, Putnam conducted a comparative study of successful and unsuccessful regional governments in Italy that had been established around the same time (Putnam, 1993 with R. Leonardi and R.Y. Nanetti, *Making Democracy Work*). He argued that the blame resided in the civic traditions and histories of the local populations. He

emphasized the importance of informal collaboration: a society with strong civic traditions and a participating population made for successful government as well a successful economy, whereas a weak and un-civic-minded society would only foster a corrupt government and lead to a cycle of poverty. Success was due to the social networks that generalized trust and trustworthiness among people.

What Putnam has been able to describe, is a link between institutional performance and the character of civic life (Putnam, Leonardi & Nanetti, 1993; Putnam, 2000), and therefore also contributed to the ongoing structure –agent controversy. While Putnam's theory is mostly about structure, he makes it clear that agency is the creator of structure: a civic community is characterized by civic engagement, political equality, solidarity, trust and tolerance as well as a strong associational life (Putnam, Leonardi & Nanetti, 1993). For Putnam, civic engagement is not only about politics, but refers to the different connections people have with the life of their communities. Putnam sees different clubs and associations as learning grounds for democracy: he claims that the social networks formed in associations generalize trust across society at large. In short, learning to trust people on a small scale will enable trust even on the societal level. This learning to collaborate and formation of trust, however, are not quick processes, but take place gradually over time, and as in the case of his empirical evidence of the regional governments in Italy, even centuries (Putnam, Leonardi & Nanaetti, 1993).

For Putnam, working together requires a bottom-up approach: what is important is not only how governments or organizations are managed, but how people in general behave. The key ingredient, what makes or breaks societies and different forms of organizations, can hence be seen as what Coleman (1988) and Bourdieu (1980) have earlier described as social capital (*SEE BOURDIEU IN CHAPTER X)*. In comparison to earlier theorists, only Putnam acknowledges the

larger societal impacts of social capital, whereas Bourdieu focused more on social inequalities, and Coleman on the links between social and human capital. Putnam was able to move beyond the existing understanding in his argument of societal benefits and impact: social capital did not only benefit the individual and their social relations, but resonated to the welfare of the society around them as well. In fact, the benefits of social capital range from decreased tribal conflict to improved voter turnout, lower transaction costs and higher citizen satisfaction (Putnam, Feldstein & Cohen, 2003).

Putnam defines social capital as "features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions" (Putnam, Leonardi & Nanetti 1993, p. 167). In short, social capital builds and maintains a thriving community, and it is social capital that decreases as a sense of society is lost. This loss (and preventing it) has been the topic of Putnam's later work, ranging from the popular culture invading politics (Clark, Putnam & Fieldhouse, 2010) and loss of equal opportunity for children (Putnam, 2015) to the richness gained from understanding of other religions (Putnam & Campbell, 2010).

Defining social capital

Social capital can be understood as a metaphor derived from other types of capital. Unlike physical capital referring to objects, social capital refers to "connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam, 2000, p. 19). Putnam argues that social capital is closely related to "civic virtue", enabling people to trust, collaborate, socialize, establish communities and live together in harmony. There are two ingredients hence for social capital: repeated social contact and common goals (Putnam, 2010; 2015).

For Putnam, social capital is mutually enforcing. "Effective collaborative institutions require interpersonal skills and trust, but those skills and that trust are also inculcated and reinforced by organized collaboration." (Putnam, Leonardi & Nanetti 1993, p. 180.) It is this trust that leads also to societal benefits such as stability and economic prosperity (Fukuyama, 1995).

The role of social networks

Networks are for Putnam the embodiment of past success at collaboration. According to Putnam's logic, it is record the of being trustworthy in previous interactions in a social context that makes reputational effects possible (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt & Camerer, 1998). Similarly, previous experiences of working together create expectations for the future which shape future reputation (Olkkonen & Luoma-Aho, 2015).

However, not all social networks are alike nor do they serve the same functions. Putnam (2000, p. 22-24) applies the distinction made between two different types of social capital: bridging or inclusive, and bonding or exclusive, social networks. Bonding social capital is the type that furthers in-group cohesion, whereas bridging social capital is understood as relationships with those outside the group. In Putnam's emphasis both are needed for organizations and societies to function.

Bridging and bonding networks represent different types of relationships. If a relationship is a way to survive possible threats posed by the surroundings, people and the environment, bonding social capital is for Putnam (2000) the superglue of groups and societies. It reinforces exclusive identities, and promotes in-group cohesion. It is easily formed, but runs the risks of becoming excessive. In fact, bonding social capital is often formed without any effort: like minds tend to gather together. Bonding social capital is necessary for organizational cohesion and

collaboration, as it enables the organization to function. However, as it is exclusive by nature, its consequences are not always positive (Ojala, Hakoluoto, Hjorth & Luoma-aho, 2006). Negative consequences of social capital include for example insider trading or exclusion from social groups, racism or discrimination of others, all of which may beneficial for their members, but not for those outside nor the society at large.

On the other hand, bridging social capital, the kind that is the most beneficial for a healthy but diverse society, is difficult to create (Putnam et al., 2003, p. 3). Bridging social capital is like oil for groups and societies; it smoothes relations between groups and individuals. Bridging social capital is close to what Granovetter (1973) calls weak ties, and related to what Burt (2002) calls structural holes in social networks: bridging social capital identifies networks that bridge social divides and promote heterogeneity in groups and societies. It reinforces inclusive identities, and thus runs less risk of excess.

As one of Putnam's central arguments in his early works states that television is a cause for decaying social connectedness, recent studies have looked at whether social media is building or destroying social capital. The results seem to be mixed, as it seems that those active online are also active offline, hence using technology to merely foster their social connectedness and increasing also face to face interactions (Sabatini & Sarracino, 2014). On the other hand, recent studies show that social media initiates upward comparisons (seeing others who are doing better than me) which produces many ills including jealousy and depression (Liu, Li, Carcioppolo, & North, 2016).

Critique of Putnam's works

Putnam's theory is rather normative, and he himself has been called naïve and illusionary to propose that re-establishing community would solve large societal problems. Overall, the

critique for social capital has ranged from the existence of the phenomenon and challenge of measuring intangible assets to the difficulty to prove causal relations and actual benefits of social capital. Critics have pointed out that with social capital forming over years and even decades, the cause-effect relation between it and social benefits remains unsure. Putnam himself acknowledges that fostering social capital is more complex that forming a bowling club (Putnam et al., 2003, p. 10). Collaboration makes no sense if you do not trust others to do the same: in societies where generalized trust in other people is low, collaboration is difficult and scholars speak of the social trap (Rothstein, 2003; Rothstein & Stolle, 2002; Luoma-aho, 2005). Putnam has answered this critique (Putnam et al., 2003) through providing examples where tough societies have been able to get people collaborating. These grass-root level experiences of working together are the building blocks of trust in society over time (Putnam, Leonardi & Nanetti, 1993).

The central tenets of his theories have attracted perhaps most criticism; critics are quick to point out that there is little convincing empirical evidence that getting people to work together and trust each other on a smaller scale would result in social capital for the whole community, and that bonding social capital has several disadvantages such as exclusion and even racism (Patulny, 2003; DeFilippis, 2001). In fact, the direction of causality has never been satisfactorily demonstrated: does social capital result from cohesive societies or does it cause societies to become cohesive? Putnam is taken to task for divorcing power from his concept of social capital, and for oversimplifying history, and critics note that Putnam's social capital does not tell the whole story of societies and their communication (DeFilippis, 2001).

Putnam has since addressed many of his critics, and there is a clear evolution from his earliest theorizing on social capital and community to his most recent publications on the

creation of social capital. For example, after *Making Democracy Work* was criticized for holding

true only in Italy, Putnam published *Bowling Alone* arguing that the same concepts held true in

the United States. Now, Putnam's thinking was criticized by those who argued that he was

ignoring new organizations and forms of social capital. Others further argued that many of the

organizations included were responsible for the supression of civil rights movements and the

reinforcement of anti-egalitarian social norms. By way of atonement, Putnam published *Better*

Together in 2003 with Lewis Feldstein. To answer critics of not understanding online social

networks, he published *Age of Obama* explaining the links between popular culture and politics

in contemporary society (Clark, Putnam & Fieldhouse, 2010).

Putnam has also been accused for bringing a forlorn message: in areas with a low sense

of community and little social capital, the process of re-establishing these is almost impossible. If

the social trap has been shut, creating trust becomes almost impossible (Putnam, Leonardi &

Nanetti 1993; Rothstein, 2003). Similarly, most recent books including *Our Kids - the American*

Dream in Crisis (2015) have been criticized for merely describing the problem of income

inequality, without touching the political decision-making contributing to inequality or bothering

to truly follow up and explain the politics involved in contributing to inequality.

While Putnam's message has not changed due to this critique, he has recently directed his

interest away from the description of social capital toward finding ways of creating and

maintaining social capital. *Better Together* (Putnam et al., 2003) and Putnam's active role in the

annual meetings of the Saguaro Seminar on Civic Engagement in America represent a search for

new possibilities of social capital creation. In *Better Together* he describes 12 different social

capital creators, from clubs, churches and organizations to networks and neighborhood pressure

groups, that all "involve making connections among people, establish bonds of trust and

understanding, building community… They all involve creating social capital: developing

networks of relationships that weave individuals into groups and communities" (Putnam et al.,

2003, p. 1). Similarly, *Our Kids* provides a clear message toward community producing rituals

including better daycare solutions, extracurricular activities at schools and support systems that

enable access to higher education for all. Such suggestions come close to the community

engagement ideals and CSR activities of public relations, and seem to both show the value of

early interventions that enable the formation of a sense of community and growing social capital.

Putnam's writings spell out that individualism has overtaken communitarianism, social

capital is diminishing, society is polarized, inequality is growing and a sense of community is

fading. If society is to prosper in the long run, a sense of community must be rebuilt and social

capital fostered (Putnam et al., 2003). The next chapter discusses the contributions of Putnam's

work for the theory and practice of public relations, and gives insight into the processes of

creating social capital.

Putnam for Public Relations

Putnam's theories are important, as they are able to explain the deeper meanings of

relationships for not only individuals and organizations, but also society at large (Taylor, 2011;

Willis, 2012). In Putnam's view, the vitality of a community can be estimated based on its social

interaction, and this can be seen to hold true for organizations as well (Luoma-aho, 2006). Social

capital hence provides a framework for measuring both "the value of intangible (e.g.,

relationships, reputations, trust) and tangible (e.g., financial profitability) outcomes of public

relations activities" (Dodd, Brummette & Hazleton, 2015, p. 473).

Putnam's thinking broadens the view of public relations, as he shows the long-term

effects of social relationships (Putnam et al., 2003; Hallahan, 2004): a common interest is able to

birth communities. The focus of public relations has often been on issues management and managing publics, but Putnam's view of communities is broader, some say even communitarian; communities consist of their own historic developments, aims and interests, and as such, can often not be controlled by organizational activities. For organizations, this poses a paradox: if communities are formed despite the organization, how to engage them in the organizational agenda without disturbing their formation (Luoma-aho & Vos, 2010)? How can public relations authentically help form communities online and offline to foster social capital?

Putnam is beneficial for public relations, as he concentrates on the societal level and the benefits of organizing for creation of social capital. This chapter argues that Putnam's thinking contributes to a metatheory of public relations, as it emphasizes in the spirit of communitarianism the importance of creating social capital (Hallahan, 2004; Wilson, 2001; Leeper, 2001). Moreover, Putnam provides for several practical ideas on the mechanisms of social capital creation, by describing the places and processes of building trust. For practitioners, Putnam offers a noble metaphor to build the identity of the field: public relations practitioners should be seen as creators and maintainers of organizational social capital.

Establishing community through public relations

What Putnam was at pains to emphasize, was the value of social networks, through which a sense of community is created (Putnam, 1993; 2000). It has been argued that through forming the necessary networks and connections for organizations and individuals, public relations plays a central role in maintaining a balanced society (Dodd, Brummette, & Hazleton, 2015; Luoma-aho, 2016; Sommerfeldt, 2013). Recent research focusing on these has covered areas ranging from the role of shared meanings (Yang & Taylor, 2013), and the role of the communication professionals (Dodd et al., 2015), to the relationships between corporations and their publics (Jin

& Lee, 2013) and even the society at large (Saffer, 2016; Taylor, 2011; Willis, 2012).

Building a sense of community through communication has been suggested to be the essence of modern public relations (Valentini, Kruckeberg, & Starck, 2012), but this remains ideal on several levels. Though it may be true that "public relations came about to fill a social vacuum created by the disappearance of community" (Kruckeberg & Starck, 1988, p. 43), public relations is not an aim in itself, but always supports the organizational strategy (Tench and others 2017). Putnam's thinking provides ideas of how this important task can be accomplished through creating social capital, whether on an organizational or national level. In fact, research focusing on communication professionals roles has shown that professionals are more active in producing social capital through what Putnam called individuals' "vigorous civic connections" than average citizens (Dodd, Brummette & Hazleton, 2015). However, for social capital to contribute to society, trust is to be reciprocal, and the community should benefit the public at large, not merely organizations aims (Valentini et al., 2012). Though these may overlap at times, that is not always the case in practice.

For Putnam, it is communication that creates belongingness, and it is reciprocal communication that keeps the relationship strong over time. He emphasizes the importance of strategic planning and the maintenance of reciprocal relationships for the survival of society at large (1993, 1995, et al., 2003; et al., 2010; 2015). Community does not happen by accident and neither does it prosper where it is not cultivated. In a similar manner, the cultivation of stakeholder relations ensures organizational survival.

The challenges public relations practitioners face today are not new. In fact, they resemble those faced by the early propagandists of the railroads in the 19th century: the need to "invite (a dispersed people) to act as a unified body" (Peters, 1995, p. 17-18). As Dimock &

Dimock noted already in 1953 (p. 403), the aim of public relations "is to satisfy all parties of interest- public, employees, and management included." This building of common meanings and generating goodwill among publics can be aided by creation of social capital (Willis, 2012).

Another historical background is provided by the sociologists of the 20th century Chicago School. They theorized about possible ways of re-creating and building the sense of community that had been lost in the formation of the big cities. Communication, they argued, was central for creating and maintaining a sense of community (Dewey, 1916; Cooley, 1909, 1918; McDermott, 1981; Damico, 1978; Mead, 1934 *SEE DEWEY CHAPTER X*)

These aims are well apparent in the recent trends of public relations development. Stakeholder thinking (Freeman, 1984; Mitchell, Agle & Wood, 1997), relationship building (Hon & Grunig, 1999; Wilson, 2001), relationship management (Bruning, DeMiglio & Embry, 2006; Ledingham, 2003; Ledingham & Bruning, 2000), corporate purpose (Arthur W. Page Society 2016) and social responsibility (Wilson, 2001; Leeper, 2001) all apply the ideas of community. The traditional management of publics and issues is turning towards ongoing interaction: building and maintaining a relationship between the stakeholders and the organization. This shift places more emphasis on those stakeholders with whom organizations have stable or frequent interaction, as they are the ones with whom a relationship can be built (Lahno, 1995; Luoma-Aho, 2015). In fact, Putnam himself highlights the importance of frequent interaction. He concludes, "Again and again, we find that one key to creating social capital is to build in redundancy of contact" (Putnam et al., 2003, p. 291).

Public relations or community relations?

A sense of community is challenging in a fragmented society where individuals withdraw into their own communication bubbles (Sloterdijk, 2011). People are less willing to work

together, and individual aims override common agendas (Putnam, 2000; 2005; 2015). One could

argue that commitment is no longer the norm, and that the concept of 'the general public' has

been replaced by diverse and fractured publics (Vos, Schoemaker & Luoma-aho 2014). As

publics fracture, there is a loss of shared meaning that in turn affects cultural, moral and political

standards and participation (Leeper, 2001; Saffer. 2016). The creation of shared meanings is a

central function of public relations (Taylor, 2011). In line with Putnam's views, public relations

can be understood as a tool for maintaining a balanced society: Public relations contributes to

society by making information available, by building relationships between possibly opposing

views and maintaining dialogue (Sommerfeldt and Kent 2015, 235-252) Hallahan, 2004; Burton,

1998; Cutlip, Center & Broom, 1999; Luoma-aho, 2005).

  In fact, Hallahan (2004) has even suggested that the field should be called community

relations instead of public relations. Public relations can be understood as having the

responsibility for creating, restoring and maintaining the societal linkages between governments,

civil society organizations and corporations (Sommerfeldt, 2013; Sommerfeldt & Kent, 2015;

Kruckeberg, 2006). Social capital serves through both the engagement process as well as

achieved outcomes, as engaging organizations contribute to empowered communities (Jin & Lee,

2013). The idea is related to what organizations were originally created for: reaching goals that

for the individual alone would be difficult or impossible. But achievement per se is not the point,

as associations and groups provide the satisfaction of belonging, a sense of loyalty and

community that motivates actions.

  If public relations aims at generating goodwill toward the organization, the amount of

social capital could also be a measure of public relations efforts (Hazleton & Kennan, 2000

(Yang & Taylor, 2013)). Public relations could profit from a redefinition: Public relations could

be understood as the practice of creating and maintaining organizational social capital. Ideally, this organizational capital can add to social capital for society at large.

Previous studies applying Putnam's theories

Putnam's theories on social capital and community have so far been only moderately applied to research and theory in the field (Dodd et al., 2015; Fussell, Jill Harrison-Rexrode, Ihlen, 2005; Kennan, & Hazleton, 2006; Jin & Lee, 2013). Some scholars have applied similar ideas with or without mentioning the concept of social capital. Among the most fruitful applications are the "Community Building Theory" by Kruckeberg & Starck (1988; 2001) and the writings on community as a foundation for public relations by Hallahan (2004). Recent authors see also public relations practitioners as restorers and maintainers of a sense of community (Dodd, Brummette, and Hazleton 2015, 472-479). Kruckeberg & Starck (1988, p. 24) define community relations as an "organization's planned, active, and continuing participation with and within a community to maintain and enhance its environment to the benefit of both the institution and the community". Public relations have often been accused of being too organization centered, and this definition is useful, as it highlights the benefit of both the institution and community (Valentini et al., 2012; Vos, Schoemaker, & Luoma-aho, 2014). Others apply Putnam's ideas of social capital. As intangible assets become increasingly important for success (Canel & Luoma-aho, 2017), social capital becomes a means through which more traditional forms of capital can be materialized in organizations.

Many applications of Putnam's thinking for public relations are vague, and provide little concrete examples of the benefits. A more utilitarian application of social capital in public relations research comes from Hazelton and Kennan (2000). They apply the concept of social capital in arguing for the contribution of public relations to the organizational bottom line.

Among the benefits of organizational social capital they list reduced transaction costs, improved productivity, efficiency, improved quality and customer satisfaction. Hazleton & Kennan also note the central role of social capital as a link between and a way to acquire other forms of capital. They present three dimensions of social capital they see as important for public relations: the structural dimension, the content dimension, and the relational dimension. Communication, they argue, is not only the foundation for the emergence of social capital, but also the "mechanism whereby the available stock of social capital can be accessed and expended to further various organizational goals and objectives" (Hazelton & Kennan, 2000, p. 83). To them, social capital is the property of a community.

Taylor (2011) suggest that public relations and dialogue are the means to build social capital which in turn makes societies better. The rare public relations scholars focusing on Putnam especially have focused on how social capital diminishes transaction costs for organizations (Fussell et al., 2006); how public relations practitioners themselves seem to be socially beneficial and active also outside their profession (Dodd et al., 2015) and how both bonding and bridging social capital are needed (Jin & Lee, 2013).

For me, social capital is an organizational benefit (Luoma-aho, 2016). I have defined social capital as "the extent of the resources available to an organization through networks of trust and reciprocity among its stakeholders" (Luoma-aho, 2005, p. 150). Elsewhere I have argued that communication with stakeholders has both instrumental as well as eigenvalue: not only do stakeholder networks enable organizational survival, but having established channels of communication and being heard in today's communication entrenched society are of value by themselves (Luoma-aho, 2005). Moreover, high trust, frequent stakeholders become faith-holders who can be understood as organizational social capital (Luoma-Aho 2015). What matters

is not the network alone, but what is at the other end of it. Social networks are social capital if, and only if, they contain potential benefit and resources for the organization (such as organizational legitimacy or good reputation) (Canel and Luoma-aho 2017).

Creating social capital

Public relations scholars and practitioners need to understand the processes of creating social capital, as they are actively involved in both creating it for themselves as well as the organizations they represent (Dodd et al., 2015). Communication has been suggested as the "symbolic mechanism for accruing, sustaining and expending social capital" (Saffer, 2016, p. 172). Therefore, relying on Putnam's theoretical-conceptual work and using civic engagement behaviors as a surrogate measure of social capital, results of this research make it reasonable to suggest that public relations professionals demonstrate an overall greater proclivity to engage in behaviors aimed at social capital (Dodd et al., 2015). Putnam emphasizes the importance of past experiences for the creation and maintenance of social capital. In fact, networks of civil engagement work by fostering reciprocity, facilitating coordination and amplifying information about the trustworthiness of other individuals; social networks embody past success at collaboration (Rothstein & Stolle, 2002). In Putnam's logic, successful collaboration stretches to facilitate also future collaboration (Putnam, 1993b).

To fully understand community, the experiences of its members must be captured (Cohen, 1985). Elsewhere co-authors and I (Luoma-aho, 2006; Canel & Luoma-aho, 2017) have operationalized Putnam's views of social capital through the concepts of trust and reputation, both of which reflect the members' experiences. Stakeholder trust and a good reputation among stakeholders are important resources for organizations; even social capital (Luoma-aho, 2005; 2006, 2016). Reputation as the sum of stories told about the organization among the stakeholders

(Sztompka, 2000; Bromley, 1993; Fombrun & Van Riel, 2003) shapes trust, the future expected

behavior of the organization (Seligman, 1997; Rothstein, 2003). Reputation and trust are both

formed within the context of continuous meetings and interaction between an organization and

its stakeholders. They are interrelated, as "Trust turns into reputation as the present turns into

history" (Luoma-aho, 2005, p. 142). Drawing on Putnam's arguments presented in *Making

Democracy Work* (1993), Figure 1 simplifies the process of social capital creation.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Figure 1 is a simplified and polarized model and hence has its limitations. However, since

it shows the importance of experiences and expectations (Olkkonen & Luoma-aho, 2014), it is of

value when considering Putnam's contributions to the study of public relations. The process is

cyclic, and starts with experiences, whether of a person, group or organization. These

experiences (whether mediated or personal) of working together, either good or bad, form a

reputation. Reputation carries with it certain expectations and facilitates willingness to trust

(Putnam, Leonardi & Nanetti, 1993; Misztal, 1996; Sztompka, 2000; Luoma-aho, 2006). The

level of trust results in high or low amounts of social capital, which in turn shapes experiences

and expectations and thus the possibilities for working together (Putnam, Leonardi & Nanetti,

1993; Putnam, 2000; Putnam et al., 2003).

Figure 1 is a suggestion of the social capital creation process. The model demonstrates

how past experiences turn into future expectations, which contribute to experiences. In line with

Putnam's self-fulfilling prophecy of social capital, stakeholders who expect good reputation, get

it in part through their own efforts and trust (Putnam, Leonardi & Nanetti, 1993). Fostering such

a society is one of the core responsibilities of public relations (Luoma-aho, 2016).

Once created, social capital feeds on itself (Putnam, 1993; 2015). Moreover, social

capital once created can be transferred from one setting to another (Dodd et al., 2015). However, it is important to remember that reputation may be either positive or negative: a good reputation creates trust whereas a bad reputation may diminish trust. Trust on the other hand is unequivocal: it exists to some degree or it is lacking. Whatever the content, the mechanism seems to hold. The organization-stakeholder relationship develops over time and a good reputation is formed through trustworthy conduct. Untrustworthy conduct or a bad reputation can be amended and improved over time with positive experiences. Research has shown, however, that it is much harder to reverse a negative reputation and poor trust than to repair damage done to a hitherto good reputation and high levels of trust (Sjovall & Talk, 2004).

Putting social capital to use

Putnam's theories on the importance of social connectedness and social cohesion provide a point of entry for public relations by highlighting the consequences of uncultivated relationships; not only are organizations and individuals affected, but also society at large. The building and maintaining of relationships is presumably close to what Putnam, given the emphasis he places on reciprocal relationships and trust, would see as 'creating' new social capital. The key in creating social capital is getting people to work together and trust each other on a smaller scale (Putnam et al., 2003). Important public relations functions, such as maintaining dialogue and creating a sense of community are achieved through communication, by building relationships among the stakeholders (Willis, 2012; Saffer, 2016). Organizations cultivating social capital aim at becoming the neighbors of choice for the communities around them. This process requires building relationships as well as establishing practices that enable exchange of expectations, concerns and issues. (Hallahan, 2004; (Olkkonen & Luoma-aho, 2014).

Social capital has to be established before it can be used, and this amplifies the need for strategic public relations. Public relations should aim at a proactive process of building and preserving social capital, not the often applied (and reactionary) reconciliation of organizations with the community (Hallahan, 2004). Many of the ideas concerning civic involvement are related to public relations functions. In fact, the creation and maintenance of organizational social capital can be seen as underlying the theory and practice of public relations, as behind all public relations theories is the assumption that organizations benefit from good relationships with stakeholders. Already in 1998, Burton (REF?) called for public relations to assume a community-building role as this role will otherwise be taken over by other sources, whether activist, bloggers or journalists. Dialogue and interaction "can help make sense in the information flowing within a community and can help develop a healthier social structure. Public relations, with its firm grounding in communications approaches, is well positioned to take an active step in facilitating the two-way flow of communications within a community" (Burton, 1998, p. 39).

There are several aspects of Putnam's theorizing in addition to the model of social capital creation that could benefit the theory and practice of public relations. For example, Putnam's distinction between bridging and bonding social capital could be applied to better understand the value of communicating with both internal and external stakeholders (Jin & Lee, 2013). Bridging social capital describes the relationships an organization has toward its external publics, whereas bonding capital is needed for internal communication or the internal relations of the organization (Luoma-aho, 2016). Bonding social capital is good for the creation of a sense of community within an organization, as it promotes cohesion by "undergirding specific reciprocity and mobilizing solidarity" (Putnam, 2000, p. 22). Bridging social capital, or external stakeholder

relations as looser networks are "better for linkage to external assets and for information diffusion".

A stable organization needs both types of capital, and public relations should aim at ensuring the formation and maintenance of both kinds of ties. The ties should first be formed inside the organization (bonding), for example through a shared identity, as the organizational reputation among the external stakeholders is greatly influenced by the organization's internal reputation. Only after bonding capital is established, can organizations build bridging social capital. As well understood by network theorists, those with central roles in the social networks will be able to direct the crucial resource flows of information. Public relations practitioners should aim at becoming central in both bonding and bridging social networks related to the organization.

Public relations and Putnam's social capital have many features in common: they are long-term social functions that aim at goodwill and co-operation. They both aim to create a feeling of belonging, a "we-feeling". As intangibles and still in the process of development, both are concepts that can be overlooked and considered unnecessary during good times, but when crises arise they are critical for organizational or societal survival (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000; Putnam, 2003). Ideally, public relations practitioners turn bowling alone into bowling together, and their value will increase in the polarized future societies as they are equipped to build and cultivate long-term relationships with both external and internal organizational stakeholders (Putnam, Feldstein & Cohen, 2003). Despite these shared traits, applying Putnam's theories to the theory and practice of public relations does not occur without problems, and these problems are next discussed.

Problems with Putnam in Public Relations

A normative theory, Putnam's thinking contributes most to the ideals of public relations, not necessarily understanding current challenges. When theories are applied and borrowed across disciplines and even across sciences, the original problems the theories addressed can be forgotten. In the context of public relations, Putnam's theories run the same risk, yet offer something very valuable in return: a macro view of social processes and a better understanding of societal consequences of cultivating relationships.

Putnam's theories focus mostly on societal processes, causes for lack of community and interconnectedness of developments, which is both their strength and weakness. Many of the traditionally central issues of public relations research are not addressed. Putnam's thinking does not address how organizations could best build social capital, but rather the benefits and the importance of social capital. Neither can these theories be applied to describe the type of communication or its contents, but rather affirm that communication is beneficial in the long run. Putnam's theories provide no measure or proof for the benefit of public relations activities, but they give a name and value to the outcome, through the concept of social capital. The problem with all applications of Putnam's theories for public relations lies in the scope: while most scholars agree that social capital is an activator of other beneficial types of capital for organizations, almost all scholars apply Putnam's theories only in part (Dodd et al., 2015).

Social capital, as understood by Putnam, is always positive to those possessing it, but it can be harmful to those outside the group (Ojala, Hakoluoto, Hjorth & Luoma-aho, 2006). Moreover, with the emergence of fakeholders and other non-human or fake articial influence in the online environment, the quality of connections has to be re-examined (Luoma-Aho, 2015). In the case of bridging social capital, excess is seldom problem. However, in the case of excess

bonding social capital, external stakeholders may be feel ignored and the organization even

harmed through these feelings. In sum, social capital provides organizational efficiencies that

provide for long term existence and success. For public relations, social capital creation can be

modeled through the creation of trust and reputation among organizational stakeholders (Luoma-

aho, 2005; Hazelton & Kennan, 2000; Fussell et al., 2006). As with all new theories, one should

apply what is useful, and leave out what does not fit.

Conclusion

The thinking of Robert Putnam makes way for a deeper understanding of public relations

through introducing the importance of maintaining a sense of community (Dodd et al., 2015;

Luoma-aho, 2016; Saffer, 2016; Sommerfeldt & Kent, 2015). Putnam has been able to prove the

value of long term benefits of social networks, a result which still remains a work-in-progress by

public relations scholars (Yang & Taylor, 2015). Moreover, as Putnam focuses on the larger

societal benefits brought about by social relations, he reminds that publics and communities form

also without and despite organizational existence and action (Putnam et al., 2003; Hallahan,

2004). As the publics fracture, the process of creating a sense of community becomes of central

importance. The model of social capital creation presented in this article derives from Putnam's

theorizing, and marks a starting point for a more holistic development of public relations toward

communitarianism and social capital creation.

As social capital is created as a by-product of good social relationships "attempts to

merely build it may backfire" (Luoma-aho, 2016, p. 761). If, as suggested here, public relations

builds organizational social capital, then it is a necessary force not only for organizational

legitimacy, but for the prosperity of democratic society. As society around us polarizes and

fractures, social theories will continue to provide useful insights on the underlying logic of

societal processes for communication professionals. Public relations in today's society has the

potential for much greater influence than has thus far been acknowledged, for better or worse. As

the benefits of social capital become better known (relationships, interaction and collaboration)

the importance of social capital for the practice of public relations will increase. In fact, a new,

more holistic definition of public relations could be the creation and cultivation of organizational

social capital.

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Appendix 1

Life of Robert David Putnam

Robert David Putnam is a political scientist and the Peter and Isabel Malkin professor of Public Policy at Harvard University. Putnam is best known for his famous arguments of loss of community in modern society, which, he claims, has had several negative consequences. He has written many books, translated into altogether seventeen languages, including the best-selling Bowling Alone. Putnam's books rank high among the most cited publications for social sciences within the last several decades.

Putnam was born in Rochester, New York on January 9th 1941 to a moderate Republican family living in a small community. He graduated from the liberal Swarthmore College in 1963, where he met his wife Rosemary. Putnam studied with a Fullbright Fellowship at Oxford University, and earned his doctorate degree from Yale University in the 1970. Putnam has held many posts at university of Michigan and Harvard and served as chairman of Harvard's Department of Government, Director of the Center for International Affairs, and Dean of the John F. Kennedy School of Government. Putnam has received honorary degrees from Swarthmore and Stockholm University, and served on the staff of the National Security Council. Putnam has worked with the top political leaders and activist, and he is also the principal investigator of The Saguaro Seminar, and the 2006 winner of the Johan Skytte Prize in Political Science. Putnam continues his international career today lecturing globally and helping policymakers achieve more sustainable practices that foster community and enable social capital creation.
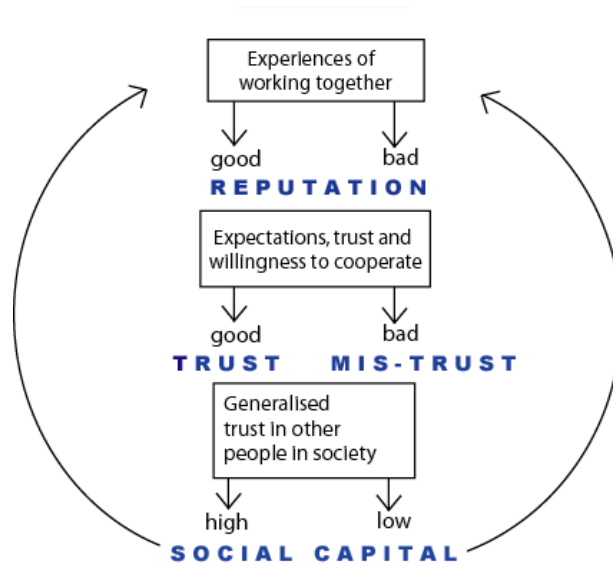
Figure 1. Model of the extremes of social capital creation.