

Employee Social Liability – More than just low social capital within the workplace

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Abstract

We describe a construct termed *employee social liability* (ESL); the antithesis of employee social capital. A conceptualisation of social liability does not yet exist and is the aim of this paper. We propose that ESL arises from workplace social networks and comprises of four distinct components: negative behaviour from others, distrust of others, unwanted social demands on resources, and a lack of reciprocity. Social networks, therefore, include some relationships that build an employee's social capital, others that create social liabilities and some relationships that might do both. An individual can, therefore, have high or low levels of capital and many or few liabilities. We propose that employees with high social capital and relatively few social liabilities should also have improved well-being and performance outcomes.

Key words: Organisational relationships, social capital, social liability, engagement, well-being, careers, network

The influence of other people in an employee's social networks has long been the subject of research interest from an organisational and psychological perspective. Under the umbrella of positive psychology, there is a rich body of research on positive, pro-social organisational behaviour which generally aims to identify situations that enable optimal human flourishing (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005; McDonald & O'Callaghan, 2008; Roberts, 2006). Positive psychology at work focusses on areas such as organisational citizenship (Bolino, Turnley, & Bloodgood, 2002; Wat & Shaffer, 2004), well-being (Arnold, Turner, Barling, Kelloway, & McKee, 2007; Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002) and creativity (Appelbaum, Iaconi, & Matousek, 2007). However, while there is a large and ever growing body of research on positive and pro-social organisational behaviour, the last two decades have also seen an explosion of research on negative workplace behaviours. This includes (among others) workplace deviance (Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Hershcovis & Barling, 2010; Lee & Allen, 2002), bullying and harassment (Einarsen, 1999; Einarsen, Hoel, & Notelaers, 2009; Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996), social undermining (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002; Duffy, Scott, Shaw, Tepper, & Aquino, 2012), incivility (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Hutton, 2006; Pearson, Anderson, & Wegner, 2001), and aggression and abuse (Hershcovis & Barling, 2010; Neuman & Baron, 2005). While studies using such constructs typically go to some lengths to conceptually define and measure them, there is, nonetheless, a conceptual overlap and redundancy in their definition and measurement. This has led to calls for construct synthesis and reintegration when studying the impact that co-workers have on each other (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008).

In answering this call, we draw on the notion of social capital (Adler & Kwon, 2002) as a theoretical framework with which to consider the many and varied ways employees impact one another, both positively and negatively. Social capital in the workplace is a construct that has received a great deal

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of recent attention in both the academic and practitioner literature, having been of interest to researchers for several decades (for example; Adler & Kwon, 2002; Andrews, 2010; Behtoui & Neergaard, 2012; Carr, Cole, Ring, & Blettner, 2011; Lazarova & Taylor, 2009; Maurer, Bartsch, & Ebers, 2011; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Oldroyd & Morris, 2012; Zahra, 2010). Social capital is a broad, multilevel term and, as such, has been described as an attribute of nations and geographic regions (Fukuyama, 1995), communities (Jacobs, 1961; Putnam, 1995), organisations (Leana & VanBuren, 1999) and individuals (Coleman, 1988; Coleman, 1990; Kouvonon et al., 2006; Labianca & Brass, 2006; Portes, 1998). However, in spite of this large body of research, evidence remains sparse on social capital as it pertains to the work context specifically. Given the amount of time that workers in the global economy spend at work, as opposed with interaction with neighbours or friends, this is an important gap (Suzuki et al., 2010).

Although social capital has been defined in many different ways, most researchers generally agree that relationships, networks, and norms are important dimensions of the concept. According to one view (the social cohesion definition), social capital is conceptualised as a group attribute and analysed in terms of those features of social relationships that facilitate collective action for mutual benefit. It is, therefore, seen as a characteristic of *social groups* rather than individuals (Kawachi, 1999); being derived from shared experiences which, in turn, foster mutual trust and reciprocity (Shortt, 2004). In contrast, the network theory of social capital holds that, because it is created in the connections among and between individuals, social capital is an asset of the *individual* (Coleman, 1988; Coleman, 1990; Kouvonon et al., 2006; Labianca & Brass, 2006; Portes, 1998). Our conceptualisation of social capital and liability, like that of Labianca and Brass (2006) and others, focusses on individuals' positions within social networks and the potential to improve their own outcomes, as well as those of their group, because of these social contacts (Burt, 2000; Coleman, 1990).

Although scholars have focussed on the benefits accrued from acquiring social capital, both in and out of the workplace, very little attention has been given to the potential all employees have to also acquire "liabilities" in their social and workplace networks. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to extend the concept of social capital to incorporate the potential liabilities that might accrue to individuals from their social network. First, we review the extant views on social capital at the individual employee level of analysis. A conceptual differentiation is then made between social capital and social liability, with the latter defined and expanded upon. Proposed antecedents and consequences of social liabilities are then explored, and a model to guide future research is presented. The paper ends with a discussion of the potential impact and importance on this construct for individuals and organisations.

Defining Employee Social Capital and Liability

Employee Social Capital

Sobel (2002) takes an individual, economic view of social capital, stating that social capital describes "circumstances in which individuals can use membership in groups and networks to secure benefits" (Sobel, 2002, p.139). This reflects the definition of Pierre Bourdieu (1986) who states

Social capital is an attribute of an individual in a social context. One can acquire social capital through purposeful actions and can transform social capital into conventional economic gains. The ability to do so, however, depends on the nature of the social obligations, connections, and networks available to you.

Glaeser, Laibson and Sacerdote (2002) also take an individual perspective but seem to confuse antecedents of social capital with social capital itself stating:

we define individual social capital as a person's social characteristics – including social skills, charisma, and the size of his Rolodex – which enable him to reap market and non-market returns from interactions with others. (Glaeser, Laibson, & Sacerdote, 2002: F438).

While individual characteristics may indeed make social capital easier to acquire, they are best thought of as antecedents to acquiring genuine social capital but with no guarantee that the returns will be obtained (in the same way that one may own a business but that venture may not make money).

Thus, employee social capital can be taken to be the sum of the resources that accrue to an individual, by virtue of possessing networks (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Most people are embedded in social situations and can, therefore, take advantage of the wider social relations in which their ties are embedded. We are specifically looking at the workplace as the context for the ties and are, therefore, focussing on individual employees as the level of analysis. If an individual's social capital is his/her network of social connections that assist them in functioning in society (Coleman, 1990), we can, therefore, define employee social capital as:

An employee's network of social connections that provides resources that enhance functioning at work (i.e. in their role as employees), assisting in achieving goals and likely to improve health and well-being.

Workplace social capital is generally conceptualised as comprising two constructs: trust and reciprocity (Kouvonen et al., 2006; Suzuki et al., 2010), and as being on a continuum from low to high. Therefore, employees with high levels of trust and reciprocity in their workplace relationships and social networks would be said to have high levels of social capital. Duffy et al. (2012; p. 644), state "...to thrive in work contexts, individuals must develop social capital, make high-quality connections with capable others, and maintain some positive standing in the work environment."

Trust

While trust remains a construct that lacks a universally accepted definition in organisational research, there is agreement that it is a psychological state with both affective and motivational components (Kramer, 1999). As an affective psychological state, trust (or lack thereof) is seen as developing from people's experiences over time, of how they have been treated or have seen others treated. Trust develops when the actions of others are expected to be beneficial or at least not harmful to one's own interests (Robinson, 1996). Trust also invokes conceptions of benevolence, predictability and fairness (Cunningham & MacGregor, 2000).

Mayer, Davis & Schoorman (1995) state trust is "the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other party will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party." For the individual, having trust in others reflects social capital in the sense that there is an expectation that others' behaviours will be beneficial to the self. Trust is, therefore, both an input to and an outcome of relationships. As a socio-emotional outcome of interpersonal relationships trust becomes, as Kramer (1999) points out, an important precursor to increased cooperation, altruism and extra-role behaviours between organisational members. Such behaviours in turn help sustain a climate of trust where, according to social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1976, 1987), employees respond in kind with behaviours that further sustain trust and commitment.

Reciprocity

The second component of social capital is reciprocity, measured by items such as, “would you say that most of the time people in your company try to be helpful, or that they are mostly just looking out for themselves?” (Suzuki et al., 2010: 1368). People will often evaluate their relationships, particularly workplace relationships, in terms of investments (such as time spent, effort, and support offered) and outcomes (such as support received and favours granted). A central proposition of equity theory (Adams, 1965; Blau, 1964) is that people have a tendency to seek reciprocity in relationships and will become depressed or distressed if they perceive the relationship to be inequitable (Bakker, Schaufeli, Demerouti, Janssen, Van der Hulst & Brouwer, 2000). Reciprocity exists when a person’s investments and outcomes in a given relationship are proportional to the investments and outcomes of the other person (Bakker et al., 2000).

Employee Social Liability

In this section we seek to introduce *Employee Social Liability* (ESL) as it relates to the accrual of, not resources, but “liabilities”. While social capital represents the benefits an individual accrues from their social network and the *positive* relationships they have with others (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), we propose that employees also have social liabilities which imply increased constraints or demands on resources in order to manage negative, taxing, or distracting relationships at work. Liabilities are those members of one’s network who, intentionally or unintentionally, pose a hindrance to their functioning and achievements at work. We build upon Labianca and Brass (2006), who defined liabilities in terms of individual negative relationships (or ties) as “the linear combination of strength, reciprocity, cognition, and social distance of each negative tie, summed across all negative ties.” (p. 599). We extend this to look at employee social liabilities in terms of workplace and individual *outcomes*, as any relationship (positive or negative) that hinders functioning at work, detracts from achieving goals, or which negatively impacts on health and well-being. Importantly, these relationships may or may not be ‘negative ties’ per se; a distracting, time consuming but otherwise friendly colleague could be a liability, and so too could a close friend whom most others in a social network despise. Further, we widen the focus to all organisational relationships (comprised of other employees, colleagues, clients, supervisors, etc.) and propose that an employee’s experience of and exposure to negative or unhelpful workplace behaviours or individuals will contribute to the acquisition of social liabilities.

Employee social liability (ESL) can be thought of the antithesis of social capital in the workplace. Related to the definition offered for of social capital, in the current paper we therefore define employee social liability as: “An employee’s network of social connections that hinder them in their functioning at work, detracting from achieving goals and likely to negatively impact their health and well-being.”

ESL is a composite construct that we propose is comprised of four components. We see social liabilities arising from a range of situations within an employee’s social network, some of which may be temporary, giving rise to transient social liabilities, while others are more endemic and serve as a more sustained source of hindrance, distraction, and stress. These situations include having negative relationships and interactions with others, dealings that are characterised by a lack of reciprocity and low cooperation, individuals that engender distrust, people who serve as distractions from one’s tasks or who are otherwise unhelpful, and those who display, at different times, varying combinations of such qualities. A social network can, therefore, be (or become) dysfunctional in many ways. For example, there may be negative relational norms (such as non-disclosure, favouritism, undermining, or sabotage), it could contain individuals with whom negative relationships exist, or where there is a

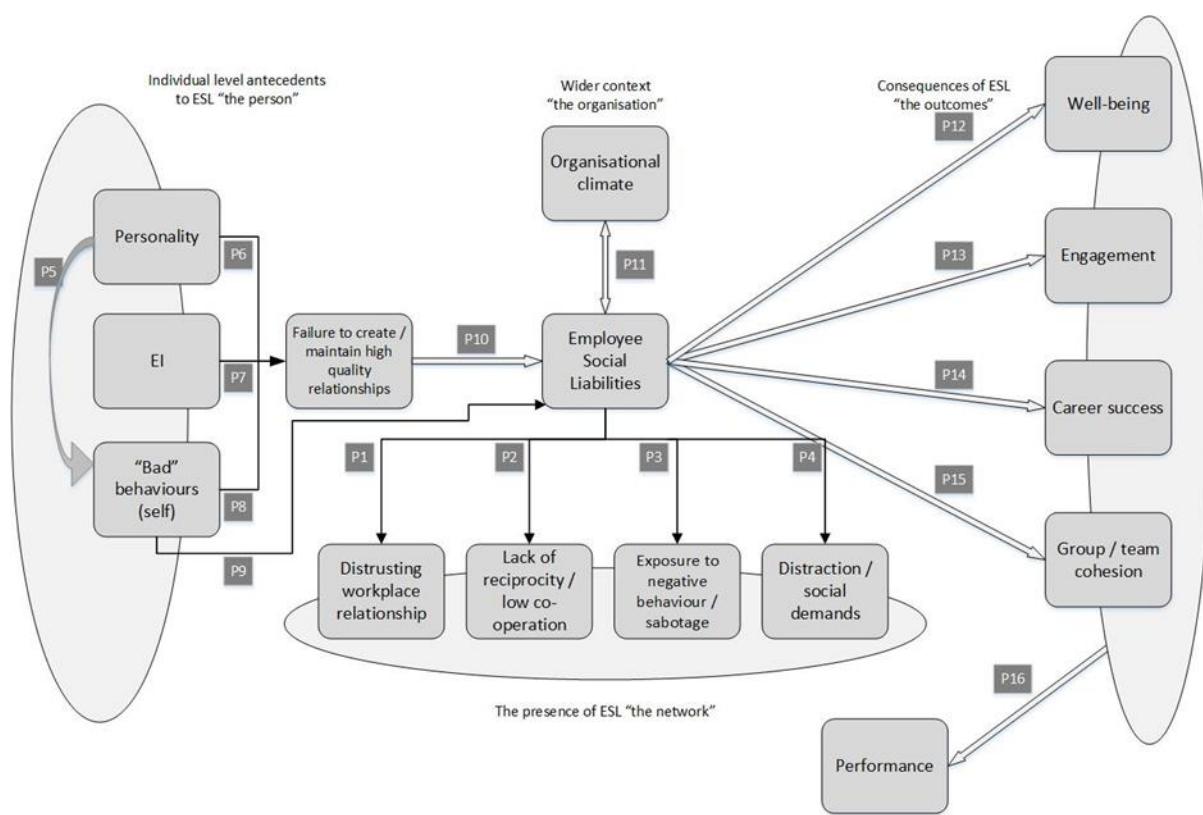
lack of trust and/or reciprocity. We propose that social networks with such features, instead of adding to an individual's social capital, can instead be considered a social liability.

Expanding on the above, we propose that ESL is a higher level construct made up of four components, which are:

1. distrust and suspicion of colleagues,
2. lack of reciprocity and cooperation from colleagues,
3. exposure to negative relationships and/or interactions at work, and
4. high social demand and interpersonal distractions at work.

The first two components are closely (negatively) related to existing social capital measures (trust and reciprocity) but the second two would be unique to the higher level ESL construct. Each is described below. And are shown graphically in Figure 1 (Path 1 to Path 4).

Figure 1: Relations among ESL, individual differences (the person), organisational climate (the organisation), and organisational consequences (the outcomes).



1. *Distrust in work relationships (Path 1)*

Because the actions of others may generate perceptions of vulnerability or threat, it is then reasonable to suggest that individuals will become defensive of the self if they have distrusting relationships with others. We, therefore, see distrusting relationships as a form of social liability for the individual. This liability is a function of the extent to which individuals perceive the behaviour of others as (a)

threatening or increasing a sense of vulnerability; (b) harmful to one self-interests; (c) undermining their efforts and competency at the job; and (d) unfair, self-serving, and unsupportive.

Research into trust and distrust in organisations is not new. Salient here is the early work of Deutsch (1960) who differentiates between trust and distrust, conceptualising trust as an individual's confidence in the intentions of a relationship partner as well as the belief that a relationship partner would behave as they hoped. Deutsch viewed distrust as, not simply a lack of trust, but rather as actual suspicion; confidence about a relationship partner's *undesirable* behaviour. Distrust "entails a state of perceived vulnerability or risk that is derived from individuals' uncertainty regarding the motives, intentions, and prospective actions of others on whom they depend" (Kramer, 1999, p.517).

Therefore, distrust is understood to be the belief that others will *not* act in one's best interests and further, may even engage in potentially injurious behaviour (Govier, 1994). We include these elements in our concept of distrust and, if present, they will likely be a source of social liabilities in the employee's workplace social network.

2. Lack of reciprocity and low cooperation from colleagues (Path 2)

As previously stated, trust is an important precursor to reciprocity and cooperation between organisational members. Such behaviours, in turn, help sustain a climate of trust where, according to social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1962, 1987), employees respond in kind with trusting, committed behaviours. On the other hand, if employees experience distrust they will likely also believe that colleagues will not reciprocate favours, and cooperation will be low, negatively impacting on productivity and goal attainment.

Those within a social network who do not reciprocate or who act uncooperatively will contribute to social liability for their colleagues. The implication is that, because things done for others will not be reciprocated, this creates a sunk social cost that will never generate a return. Low cooperation means you cannot ask others to help out, leading to a climate of low social support in the network which adds to the demands on an employee rather than acting as a resource.

3. Exposure to negative relationships and interactions at work (Path 3)

Labianca and Brass (2006) proposed *negative social capital* (negative relationships with others that detract from work and well-being) as being important when examining social networks. Negative social relationships are characterised by the intensity of dislike an employee has towards or perceives from others in their collegial relationships. Further, these authors maintain that these negative relationships can have greater power than positive relationships to explain workplace outcomes (Labianca & Brass, 2006)).

In terms of negative interactions, ambivalent relationships (or *frenemies*); i.e., relationships characterised by both positivity and negativity have been found to be among the most stressful to manage (Duffy et al., 2002; Uchino, Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Bloor, 2004; Uchino, Holt-Lunstad, Uno, & Flinders, 2001). Although it would be nice to think that supportive and friendly relationships would not also be undermining, research suggests the opposite; that people often experience both support and conflict or undermining from the same person (Duffy et al., 2002; Duffy et al., 2012; Gottlieb & Wagner, 1991). When interactions with others in your social network are inconsistent, this can result in perceptions of relational insecurity as well as a lack of control, trust, and predictability in the relationships (Duffy et al., 2002).

Duffy et al., (2012) investigated undermining in the context of envy in the workplace, hypothesising that when employees experience envy, they will be more likely to engage in undermining behaviours, so long as they are also relatively less psychologically connected (socially identified) with their colleagues and are not prevented by strong norms discouraging undermining. Duffy, et al., (2002) conducted a study where police officers filled out a survey about how often their closest colleagues undermined and/or supported them. Officers who felt undermined were, unsurprisingly, less committed at work, experienced more physical health problems and were more likely to take unauthorised breaks and be absent from work. Being undermined was a major source of stress, and when the underminer was also, at other times, supportive, recipients experienced even lower commitment, had more health issues, and missed comparatively more work.

An explanation for this is that when a colleague is a consistently selfish or undermining, individuals know what to expect, and can devise strategies for minimising interactions and avoiding collaboration. But if that colleague takes in some situations and gives in others, it is harder to avoid the relationship altogether, Duffy et al., (2002) state "...it takes more emotional energy and coping resources to deal with individuals who are inconsistent in their provision of support and undermining behaviors" (p. 337). Such resource expenditures, we argue, go beyond merely subtracting from one's pool of capital, but instead create on-going liabilities with one's workplace social network that saps resources in the form of time, emotional energy, and cognitive load.

4. Distraction and other social demands (Path 4)

One potential cost to an individual with high capital comes from the proportionally greater number of requests from others in their social network for advice and information. They are the "thought leaders" and "experts" and people turn to them for help (Oldroyd & Morris, 2012). For example, Oldroyd and Morris cite Grove (1983: 67), who describes the constant request for information and advice received by managers as "the plague of managerial work." Similarly, Perlow (1999) demonstrates that frequent coworker interruptions experienced by high performing, visible software engineers ultimately led to what she calls a "*time famine*"; they had too many information requests and could no longer properly perform their jobs. The other source of social demand is from time wasters, chatters and distracters. In a study of managerial attitudes to workplace friendships, 17 per cent of managers felt that these relationships resulted in distraction from work and over half believed that they caused or contributed to gossip (Berman, West, & Richter, 2002). It is possible that workplace designs that allow for distracting and unwanted interpersonal interactions, such as 'hot-desking' and open plan offices, will increase employee social liabilities. Maintaining interpersonal relationships in these contexts potentially generates social process losses at the expense of job task achievement.

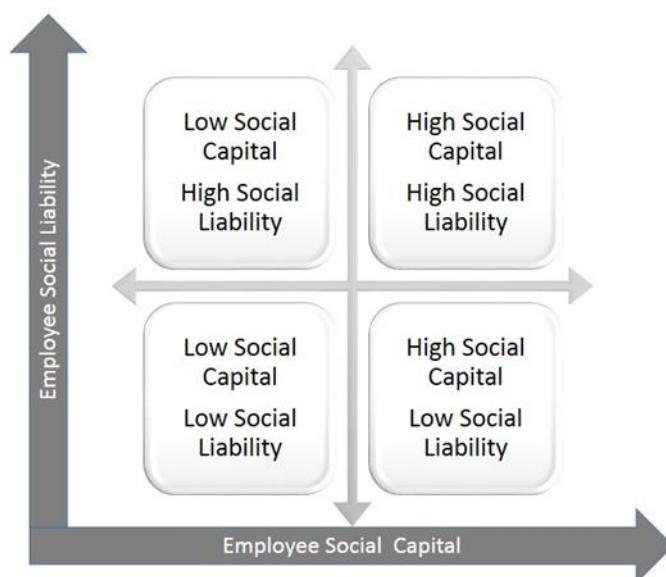
It is worth noting that Berman et al. (2002) differentiate between "close" friendships and "casual" friendships at work. Casual friendships tend to require less maintenance and involve fewer distractions than close or best friends, thus, they may provide a sounding board, promote teamwork, and help to accomplish work-related tasks without the distraction or obligations to spend time that are associated with best friends (Berman et al., 2002). We propose that the very close friends in one's social network, though they may provide the greatest social capital, also contribute relatively more to an employee's social liability because of the additional demands such friends can place on resources.

A two factor theory

Thus, in any given social network, there will be some relationships that build social capital, and other relationships that create a liability (or even relationships that may be beneficial but, at times, might become a liability). We propose, therefore, that an individual will have some measureable amount of

both capital and liability. Increasing the former while reducing the latter should improve individual well-being. It is not a “zero sum” game; we do not suggest that social liability necessarily detracts from social capital. Indeed, high levels of both would be extraordinarily resource consuming (in terms of managing both positive and negative relationships). Low levels of both would not help, but neither would it necessarily hinder an employee’s organisational life, other than being excluded from potentially valuable social networks (Putnam, 1995). Figure 2 shows our proposed matrix. Employees can be placed within any of the four areas depending on the level of social capital and liability and the implication of this is described below.

Figure 2: Proposed ESL / ESC matrix structure



1. *Low Social Capital / High Social Liability*

This is the “worst” scenario for an employee. They may be part of a dysfunctional work group or team, with no reciprocity and distrust (low social capital) as well as negative relational norms (such as non-disclosure, undermining, and conflict). Team members may be low status, unskilled and poorly networked (i.e., be able to offer little in the way of useful connections or information). There may also be some relatively enjoyable relationships that do little but distract from work (i.e., chatting, non-work activities, and gossip). There may also be people in the network who dislike or are in competition with the individual, and who engage in non-disclosure, favouritism, bullying or sabotage (high social liability).

2. *High Social Capital / High Social Liability*

This scenario would potentially be very consuming in terms of emotion, effort and time. This person may be part of a well-functioning work group or team, there would probably be reciprocity and trust among some of the members (high social capital) and possibly some positive relational norms (such as information sharing and cooperation). The network would include visible, high status, skilled and

well networked individuals (i.e., “useful” connections). However, there may also be some relationships that do little but distract from work (chatting, non-work activities, gossip) or that are valuable but “expensive” in terms of effort and time. There may also be people in the network who dislike one another or are in competition, and who engage in non-disclosure, favouritism, bullying or sabotage.

3. Low Social Capital / Low Social Liability

Someone with this type of network would probably be part of a dysfunctional work group or team, or alternatively would be quite socially isolated at work, perhaps in a virtual or nominal team with little interaction or task interdependence. People would perhaps work independently of and isolated from others. There would be low reciprocity and distrust (low social capital) as well as negative relational norms (such as non-disclosure, favouritism, bullying or sabotage). This may also describe loners in organisations who actively withdraw from joining social networks; or who may be highly task focussed and prefer to work alone. Team members, if any, may be low status, unskilled and poorly networked and, though the team members do not actively work against one another, neither do they distract from work.

4. High Social Capital / Low Social Liability

This is the “best” scenario. This person will be part of a well-functioning work group or team. Members would be trusting, and effort and interactions would be reciprocal. There would be positive relational norms (such as information sharing and cooperation). Team members would probably be visible, productive, high status, skilled and well networked, easily able to provide benefits to one another at work and, perhaps, in a wider social context. The team members do not actively work against one another, nor do they distract from work, interpersonal interaction is positive, useful and work-related.

In sum, we propose that high employee social liability is qualitatively different from “low social capital”, and that being able to conceptualise and measure it within a workplace context will be useful both from an individual (working well-being) and organisational (organisational climate, productivity) perspective.

In the section that follows, we examine the relations among employee social liability and organisational issues including, cohesion, engagement, career success, organisational climate, well-being, and performance.

Antecedents to Employee Social Liability (ESL) in Organisations

The antecedents of ESL will originate from two sources, the individual and the organisation. We propose that some people, as a result of their personality, social skills and/or work related behaviour will go through life acquiring relatively more liabilities. These are perhaps those individuals that others would describe as being less “likable”. In addition, there are organisational factors beyond interpersonal interactions; the wider organisational context or climate will either support or suppress various behaviours of organisational members. There may be zero tolerance for the social demands of off-task communication, others may allow, or even encourage, competition between employees, and still others encourage trusting and collaborative workplace behaviour. All will be likely to have an impact on whether a particular employee will acquire liabilities as a result of their behaviour.

Failure to manage / maintain high quality relationships

The primary antecedent to the presence or acquisition of social liabilities is likely to be characteristics in an individual that relate to skill in, and focus on, maintaining good and long lasting interpersonal relationships – or, more precisely, a lack thereof. That is to say, characteristics related to having “low quality” relationships in one’s social network.

Relationship quality has been measured in numerous ways by organisational researchers in the last 50 years (e.g., Carmeli, Brueller, & Dutton, 2009; Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975; Duchon, Green, & Taber, 1986; Sias, 2005; Wat & Shaffer, 2004). At a peer or collegial level is thought to be a product of variables, such as trust, support and self-disclosure (Kram & Isabella, 1985; Odden & Sias, 1997; Sias, 2005; Sias & Cahill, 1998), at the supervisor / subordinate level, it is most commonly measured in the context vertical dyad linkage (Dansereau et al., 1975; Duchon et al., 1986) and leader member exchange (LMX) and is a function of reciprocal influence, extra contractual behaviour exchange, mutual trust, respect and liking, and a sense of common fate (Deluga & Perry, 1994; Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen, Novak, & Sommerkamp, 1982; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Kang & Stewart, 2007; Schriesheim, Castro, & Cogliser, 1999). The three antecedents that we propose will impact on the quality of work relationships are personality, emotional intelligence and deviant workplace behaviours. Each is described below.

1. Personality

The Big Five personality dimensions (openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and emotional stability) predict how we operate within relationships, both in and out of the workplace. Agreeable people have been found to be relatively more considerate, forgiving, nurturing, and tolerant, while disagreeable people are more likely to be inconsiderate, vengeful, argumentative, and uncooperative (Colbert, Mount, Harter, Witt, & Barrick, 2004). Therefore it seems likely that disagreeable individuals will be more likely to engage negatively with others in the workplace, exhibit interpersonally deviant behaviour and, as a result, acquire social liabilities (Mount, Barrick, & Stewart, 1998).

Conscientiousness, along with agreeableness, is thought to play a role in emotional regulation in both interpersonal and work settings (Larsen, 2000; Salovey & Mayer, 1990) and extraversion, and neuroticism have been found to influence the likelihood that individuals will experience negative emotions, with those scoring as both introverted and high in neuroticism being more likely to experience negative mood (Larsen, 2000; Larsen & Ketelaar, 1989; Larsen & Ketelaar, 1991).

The recent literature on maladaptive personality in both clinical (Krueger, Derringer, Markon, Watson, & Skodol, 2012) and workplace (Guenole, 2014) settings also informs our propositions here. Given that maladaptive personality reflects the very extremes of normal-range personality constructs, it may occur too infrequently to be of use in predicting ESL widely, nonetheless, it gives weight to our proposition regarding the relationship between the Big Five and failure to create and maintain high quality relationships (Dilchert, Ones, & Krueger, 2014).

Proposition 1 and 2: Those with low emotional stability (negative affect), low extraversion (detachment), low agreeableness (antagonism), low conscientiousness (disinhibition), and high openness (psychoticism) will be more likely to both engage in deviant behaviours (Path 5), and also to fail in creating and maintaining high quality relationships (Path 6) (See Figure 1).

2. *Emotional Intelligence*

In the context of acquiring social liabilities, we are interested in the skills or characteristics of the individual that are likely to influence the initiation, management and maintenance of high quality relationships. Social and emotional competence are the most obvious antecedents to these abilities and the theory of emotional intelligence proposed by Salovey and Mayer (1990) provides a framework to examine these competencies. Emotional intelligence (as measured by the MEIS or the MSCEIT) has been found to be related to increased pro-social behaviour and positive peer relationships (Mayer, 1998; Salovey, Mayer, Caruso, & Lopes, 2001), and to negatively predict poor relations with friends, maladjustment and negative behaviour, particularly for males (Brackett, Mayer, & Warner, 2004). Consequently, we expect to find emotional intelligence to be negatively related to effective relationship creation and maintenance.

Proposition 3: Those with low emotional intelligence, particularly the factors associated with social competence, will have more low quality relationships and/or negative relationships, fewer high quality relationships and consequently relatively higher levels of social liabilities (Path 7).

3. *“Bad” behaviours*

Bad or deviant behaviour in the workplace has received a great deal of attention from scholars in recent years (Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Griffin & Lopez, 2005; Lee & Allen, 2002; Robinson & Bennett, 1995). Deviant behaviour can be defined as "...voluntary behavior that violates significant organizational norms and in so doing threatens the well-being of an organization, its members, or both" (Robinson & Bennett, 1995; p. 556). It includes verbal abuse, such as being quarrelsome (Albert & Moskowitz, 2014; Moskowitz, 2010) and aggressive (Hershcovis & Barling, 2010; Neuman & Baron, 2005), highly politicised activity, such as favouritism and gossip, withholding work effort, physical violence, bullying (Einarsen, 1999; Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Gardner et al., 2013), sexual harassment and even sabotage (Griffin & O’Leary-Kelly, 2004). Deviant behaviours which impact on the quality and quality of collegial relationships are termed interpersonal deviance whereas those which are more directly harmful to the organisation, such as working on personal matters, stealing from the organisation or “slacking off” at work, are termed organisational deviance (Bennett & Robinson, 2000).

Thus, not all deviant behaviour is related to interpersonal interaction so, as well as having a profound negative impact on the quality of collegial relationships, it is reasonable to assume that individuals engaging in organisational deviance would also acquire relatively more social liabilities in their networks through the negative perceptions their colleagues would have of their behaviour (i.e., stealing from the organisation, dragging out work to get overtime or spending too much time day-dreaming) (Bennett & Robinson, 2000).

Proposition 4 and 5: “Bad” behaviour will be related to deficits in creating and maintaining high quality relationships (Path 8) and there is also a proposed direct link from bad behaviour to employee social liabilities (Path 9).

Taken together (propositions 1-5) predict a relationship between the individual level factors and relationship quality / maintenance. As stated earlier, we propose that this higher level construct will be a key predictor of ESL.

Proposition 6: The failure to manage / maintain high quality relationships will predict whether or not employees acquire social liabilities at work (Path 10)

Organisational climate

Organisational climate can be defined as the shared perceptions and meaning attached to policy, practice and procedures, as well as the specific organisational behaviours that are rewarded, supported and expected (Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey, 2013). Alternatively, it can be conceptualised as the degree of trust, morale, conflict, equity, leader credibility, resistance to change, and scapegoating (Burton, Lauridsen, & Obel, 2004). We propose a two-way, interactive relationship between employee social liabilities and organisational climate, whereby a poor organisational climate will create an environment conducive to the existence of (or at least one tolerant of) negative relationships, bullies and deviant behaviours (Vartia, 1996). In addition, it is likely that a workplace where people are working against one another and acting in ways detrimental to their colleagues' careers and well-being (i.e. social liabilities) will be one that would be characterised as having a negative climate.

Proposition 7: Increased ESL in a workplace will have an impact on the organisational climate in an organisation, in addition, more negative or toxic climates will foster relatively more ESLs for employees (Path 11).

Consequences of Employee Social Liability

1. Well-being

Employee well-being is a multi-dimensional construct that goes well beyond job satisfaction to include notions, such as job-induced stress, fatigue, work-life conflict, and happiness (Boxall & Macky, 2014). Individual well-being is, in part, a function of the quality of the relationships an employee has with other people at work and in the wider community, influenced by the degree of trust, reciprocity, social support and cooperation experienced in those relationships (Grant, Christianson, & Price, 2007). Drawing on the Job Demands-Resources Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Bakker, Demerouti, de Boer, & Schaufeli, 2003; Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001), we propose that individuals with higher levels of social liabilities in their social network will be faced with increased demands on their resources in order to manage these relationships, thereby resulting in higher job stress and reduced satisfaction with the job. The more effort required to deal with these negative relationships, the greater the strain experienced (Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006). Adding to this, relationship difficulties at work could also negatively spill-over into non-work life resulting in work-life conflict (Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, & Brinley, 2005; Halbesleben, Harvey, & Bolino, 2009).

Proposition 8: Increased Employee Social Liabilities will decrease worker well-being at work (Path 12) (see Figure 1).

2. Work Engagement

The concept of engagement is relatively new and replete with conflicting definitions. At a general level, engaged employees invest physical, emotional and cognitive energy in their work, are psychologically present and absorbed in their work, are cognitively focused, and emotionally connected with others in the delivery of their tasks (Kahn, 1990, 1992). Extending this, we draw on Schaufeli and Salanova's (2011) differentiation between work and employee engagement in that the former deals with the relationship people have with their work, rather than with their occupation, role

or organisation. Kahn (1990) theorised that a direct psychological precondition of engagement is that of safety, with perceptions of social support and relationships primary influences of perceived safety. According to Kahn (1990), supportive managers and interpersonal relationships based on trust lead to experiences of psychological safety with others. On this basis, we posit that employees with a high level of social liability in their workplace social network are unlikely to also express high levels of engagement in their work. More, specifically, there is evidence that resources are important drivers of employee work engagement and that this relationship is reciprocal (Bakker, Demerouti, & Xanthopoulou, 2012). We, therefore, draw on the Job Demands-Resources Model to suggest a motivational process, whereby poor low-quality workplace relationships characterised by distrust, task distractions and low cooperation result in higher demands on resources to cope, leading to disengagement with work. At its extreme, social liabilities could, therefore, be manifested in increased emotional exhaustion and cynicism towards others. Furthermore, conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 2001) proposes that we strive to protect and accumulate resources. Employees with more resources than that needed to meet the demands of the job are more likely to be engaged employees (Halbesleben, 2011). We, therefore, argue that social liability demands decrease the available resources employees need to achieve their work tasks and goals, thereby reducing work engagement.

Proposition 9: Increased Employee Social Liabilities will decrease levels of employee engagement (Path 13).

3. *Career success*

It is widely accepted that social capital influences career success (Burt, 1992; Gabbay & Zuckerman, 1998) and the importance of using one's social networks in the achievement of career goals features regularly in both academic and practitioner literature. For example, Seibert, Kraimer, and Liden (2001) found that having the increased social resources that social capital provides enhances an individual's career through access to information, access to resources and career sponsorship. Lin and Dumin (1986) also established a strong link between social capital and career success. They found that access to desirable, high status occupations was provided by both having a strong social position (e.g., coming from a "good" family) and through social ties (friends and acquaintances).

We propose that social liabilities would also have an impact of career success, albeit a negative one. Because it is the antithesis of social capital, we propose that impact on one's career of having social liabilities would be far greater than that of simply having "low social capital". For example, having low status, unskilled, or very few members in your network would offer few social resources so would be unlikely to aid in your career progress, but neither would it necessarily be harmful. On the other hand, having someone who dislikes or does not respect you, and is willing to put effort into activities, such as negative rumour and gossip, sabotage and deliberate obstruction could actually do great damage your career.

Imagine if you will, a situation where a psychologist, previously working in the hospital system goes for a job within a private practice. It turns out that someone on the interview panel worked with her 10 years ago, supervising her as a new graduate. If this senior psychologist had a good experience of the supervisory experience, and respected the hard work and intellect of the candidate, she would likely recommend her to the rest of the panel before the interview even took place. The candidate would, almost without a doubt, be shortlisted for the position. On the other hand, if the panel instead heard that the candidate was slightly neurotic, a bit lazy, rude, and unsympathetic to clients, she would perhaps not even be offered an interview, and would have no chance to redeem herself or to show how she had changed in the intervening decade.

The above illustrates the power of social capital and social liabilities, respectively. On the other hand, having no social capital in this situation would perhaps be reflected by the case of an international candidate interviewing for the same job; a candidate judged solely by her CV and the interview. She would not have the advantage of a supporter on the panel (social capital), but neither would she be haunted and ultimately punished by a year of “bad behaviour” (Bennett & Robinson, 2000) as a new graduate (social liability). These examples illustrate, once again, the importance of conceptualising social liability as a phenomena quite separate from simply having low social capital.

Proposition 10: Increased Employee Social Liabilities will negatively impact long term career success (Path 14).

4. *Group/ team cohesion*

We propose that a negative relationship would exist between increased social liabilities and team cohesion, because many of the accepted antecedents to cohesion are less likely to take place in an environment characterised by negative social interactions.

Envy, for example, is both likely to elicit the acquisition of social liabilities, and has been found to reduce cohesion (Duffy & Shaw, 2000). We propose that the envy of others may mean that an individual will acquire more social liabilities. This is because envy includes the perception that a person lacks another’s superior achievement or belongings and, further, they either desire it or (importantly) they *wish the other lacked it* (Duffy & Shaw, 2000), necessitating ill feeling towards the envied other. According to Vecchio (1995), who adapted social psychology findings to a work setting, the potential reactions to envy at work may include sabotage, back-stabbing, harassment or ostracism of the rival, and bolstering one’s own self-image. Thus envy will logically create saboteurs, enemies and “haters”, individuals working against one another, fitting well with our conceptualisation of ESL.

In addition, numerous studies with a focus on cohesion outline indicators of cohesion that are conceptually opposite to ESL. For example, a feeling of identification and attraction to the group (Johnson & Johnson, 1991), group members getting along and helping each other (Koys & DeCotiis, 1991), and the presence of friendliness, helpfulness and trust (Boxx, Odom, & Dunn, 1991).

Proposition 11: Increased Employee Social Liabilities will decrease cohesion in the workplace (Path 15).

5. *Performance*

Extending the above propositions regarding the proposed impact of ESL on well-being, engagement, career success, and cohesion, we anticipate that these will mediate both team and individual performance. In turn, team and individual performance influence organisational outcomes (see Figure 1).

Proposition 12: Increased Employee Social Liabilities will have a negative impact on performance via reduced employee wellbeing, lower work engagement and low cohesion (path 16).

Conclusions

The research reviewed suggests that the acquisition of social liabilities could have profound negative and long lasting effects on individuals in several ways, including their well-being, performance and, ultimately, career success. Social liabilities can cause harm to individuals through exposure to negative acts, it will be likely to reduce collegiality through the acquisition of distrusting and uncooperative relationships, and the social costs inherent in distraction and social demands will reduce productivity and achievement in a variety of ways. A long term impact of ESL is the harm to the careers of those who acquire it; even if they change jobs or move to a different organisation. The “global village” and the rise of social networking mean that the ease with which people can be contacted and researched allows bad behaviour witnessed, and enemies acquired, to haunt an individual for decades after an event.

The propositions suggested in this paper are eminently testable and, therefore, provide future research directions towards understanding the effects of ESL at both the individual and organisational level. Before this can take place, however, a valid and reliable measure of ESL needs to be devised. A variety of measures of the four underlying components (social demand, negative acts, lack of reciprocity and distrust) exist and these must to be researched, reviewed and tested for their predictive power as parts of the higher level construct, ESL. The nomological network of this new construct needs to be tested and the resulting scale needs to be validated. This will be the aim of the authors moving forward with this project.

At the individual level, an awareness of the potentially destructive impact that social liabilities bring is of great importance. Most white collar workers and business owners are cognisant of social capital, if not by name, then by meaning. They know that creating relationship networks, knowing “useful” people, and being owed favours will help them, both in their daily work and in their long-term career. At the supervisory / management level, it is important that there is an awareness of the antecedents and potential outcomes of this phenomenon and to be aware of the variety of contextual and personal factors that engender a network filled with liabilities and how the damaging impacts of social liabilities might be managed.

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