administrative sciences

MDPI

Article

Exploring the Mystery of Relational Capital in an Organizational Context

Angel Eustorgio Rivera [1,*], Gibrán Rivera-González [1], Pablo Emilio Escamilla-García [2] and Javier Carrillo Gamboa [3]

[1] Unidad Profesional Interdisciplinaria de Ingeniería y Ciencias Sociales y Administrativas, Instituto Politécnico Nacional, Mexico City 08400, Mexico; griverag@ipn.mx
[2] Centro de Estudios Científicos y Tecnológico 13, Instituto Politécnico Nacional, Mexico City 04250, Mexico; peescamilla@ipn.mx
[3] Secretariat Office, World Capital Institute, Olivos 322, Jurica, Querétaro 76100, Mexico; fjcarrillo@worldcapitalinstitute.org
* Correspondence: aerivera@ipn.mx

Abstract: The relational perspective is a fundamental theoretical approach to understanding the actions of humans and organizations as they interact with others to survive. The concept of relational capital is used in management and strategic literature to highlight the importance of agents' interdependence. This paper aims to identify the dimensions of relational capital and their variables within the intraorganizational context, analyzing the importance of organizational management. This is qualitative research. Participant observation, 27 face-to-face semi-structured interviews, and principles of grounded theory were used to collect and analyze qualitative data. By breaking down RC into a more comprehensive concept, this study offers clear evidence of the identification and definition of two-dimensional, multivariable relational capital. Although these two dimensions and their variables are analytically separate, in this research, it is recognized that, in fact, they are highly interrelated. The research can be beneficial for those interested in the improvement of our organizations and society through the development and maintenance of mutual gain relationships over time.

Keywords: relational capital; intrafirm context; qualitative research

check for updates

Received: 6 September 2024
Revised: 4 February 2025
Accepted: 4 February 2025
Published: 7 February 2025

Citation: Rivera, A. E., Rivera-González, G., Escamilla-García, P. E., & Carrillo Gamboa, J. (2025). Exploring the Mystery of Relational Capital in an Organizational Context. *Administrative Sciences*, *15*(2), 49. https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci15020049

Copyright: © 2025 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

1. Introduction

The social nature of human beings is related to interdependent interactions with other agents. This relational characteristic of interdependence is the basis of every system, such as an organization. Thus, analyzing and studying the logic and nature of relationships is fundamental to improving our understanding of organizations. According to some authors (Palmer, 1997; Chatman, 1991; Schneider, 1987), humans are the principal agents in organizations since it is through their interdependent relationships that critical processes, such as information exchange, knowledge development, and organizational learning, are established and developed.

From an analysis of the organizational management literature, relational capital (RC) can be understood as the ability of an agent to positively interact with other agents, and it is characterized in terms of some components. To understand the RC concept, two approaches have been developed by authors. These operate at the interorganizational and industry level (macro) (Kale et al., 2000; Sarkar et al., 2001; Dhanaraj et al., 2004; Collins & Hitt, 2006; Castro et al., 2004; Delerue-Vidot, 2006; Johnson, 1999) and the intraorganizational level

(micro), which includes the analysis of strategic processes and the analysis of relationships between people inside organizations (Hayer & Ibeh, 2006; Yan et al., 2019; Inkpen & Tsang, 2005; Moran, 2005; Dwyer et al., 1987; Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998; Wasko & Faraj, 2005; Coleman, 1988; Wang et al., 2014; Rodríguez-Aceves et al., 2023; Granovetter, 1973).

The main objective of this paper is to provide a more comprehensive view of the RC concept via micro-level analysis. To accomplish this, we propose a grounded definition of RC and its components (dimensions and variables) within an intrafirm business unit's context, contributing to the development of a more concrete and operational concept. In this sense, this paper extends the RC literature by disentangling the elements, dimensions, and variables that represent this concept. In addition, this research improves our understanding of human interactions at the level of intrafirm business units.

This article is organized as follows. The first section discusses the theoretical background of RC. The second highlights the research methodology and a brief description of the context of the study is presented, along with the methods and procedures employed for data collection and analysis. The findings of the research are introduced in the third section. The fourth section discusses the findings in relation to the relevant literature and gives the theoretical contributions. Conclusions are presented in the final section, where research implications, limitations, and potential areas of further research are proposed.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Relational Perspective

The relational perspective assumes that relationships are important because they are the means through which agents exchange and distribute elements of value. The basic idea that the elements of organizations are interconnected and interdependent is the principal assumption in this approach. Relationships not only allow for the exchange of elements of value between social agents, but they also support key organizational processes. Some theoretical contributions (e.g., Vasileiadou, 2012) consider that the study of collaborative relationships between agents within an organization is fundamental to explaining the functioning and performance of these organizations. This relational view assumes that, to improve their performance, organizations need to collaborate with other economic and social actors (Dyer & Singh, 1998; Topal, 2015).

In organizational studies, the use of concepts such as social capital (Chang, 2020; Adler & Kwon, 2002; Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Inkpen & Tsang, 2005; Farr, 2004; McFadyen & Cannella, 2004; Mikovic et al., 2019; Moran, 2005; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Portes, 1998, 2000; Robertson et al., 2019; Weerakoon et al., 2019; Nicholson et al., 2004), collaborative advantage (Huxham, 1996), social networks (Rosenthal, 1997; Scott, 2009; Wasserman & Faust, 2009; Kilduff & Tsai, 2007), network relationships (Hsiao, 2019), knowledge networks (Du Preez et al., 2008; Phelps et al., 2012), network paradigms (Borgatti & Foster, 2003; Nonino, 2013), networks of practice (Soekijad et al., 2011), communities of practice (Lesser & Everest, 2001; Wenger, 1998; Wenger & Snyder, 2000), co-operative and mutual enterprise business models (Mazzarol et al., 2018), interdependence in knowledge integration (Chia-Yu, 2019), knowledge collaboration and knowledge sharing (Adarsh, 2018; Chen et al., 2018; Cheng & Chang, 2019; Han & Pashouwers, 2018; Phong & Hui, 2018), and relational capability (Weng & Huang, 2012), among others, provides evidence of the growing theorization about a relational perspective on organizations.

The following section discusses the concept of RC and its components.

2.2. Relational Capital (RC)

In the literature about relational capital, proposals can be found that address the concept at two different levels of analysis at least. The interorganizational and industry-

level (macro) and the intraorganizational level (micro) include the analysis of strategic processes and the analysis of relationships between people inside organizations.

With respect to macro-level proposals, authors such as Bontis et al. (2000) insist that RC is considered to be the knowledge embedded in the relation to stakeholders and its relevant value. In this regard, some other authors like Kianto et al. (2013) and Johnson (1999) argue that RC relates to the ability of an organization to interact with external stakeholders and business community members in a positive manner in order to stimulate the potential for wealth creation. Welbourne and Pardo-del-Val (2009), for example, use relational capital, from a macro-level perspective, to understand relationships between organizations as well as to identify the benefits of collaboration among firms and the value of such relationships (Pierre, 2010; Cegarra-Navarro et al., 2021). At the industry and inter-organizational levels, RC research primarily focuses on the study of processes of negotiation and collaborative agreements (Welbourne & Pardo-del-Val, 2009); the role of opportunism, commitment, and the protection of proprietary assets in strategic alliances (Kale et al., 2000; Delerue-Vidot, 2006; Aaltonen & Turkulainen, 2018); the role of firm competitiveness and performance (Mohammad et al., 2024; Corvino et al., 2019); the importance of corporate reputation (Castro et al., 2004); the value derived from the relationship between a business and its external stakeholders (Onge, 1996); the level of software and technological innovation capability (Madhavaram et al., 2023; Ryu et al., 2021; Durst et al., 2024); and the value creation and the transfer of tacit and explicit knowledge in alliances and joint ventures (Sarkar et al., 2001; Dhanaraj et al., 2004; Collins & Hitt, 2006).

On the other hand, with respect to micro-level proposals, authors such as Cousins et al. (2006) and De Silva et al. (2024) associate RC with strategic processes within organizations, such as informal and formal socialization processes. Some other organizational attributes associated with RC are peripheral vision in the business environment and technology-related knowledge and absorptive capacity (Cegarra-Navarro et al., 2016), financial performance (Iazzolino et al., 2018), library service assessment (Bracke, 2016), the creation of knowledge as a source of organizational advantages (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998), learning across the exchange interface (Kale et al., 2000), and the identification of dimensions and measures that can be used to evaluate buyer–supplier relationships (Ocicka & Wieteska, 2019).

In this paper, we pay particular attention to the proposals that address relational capital at the individual level. That is, we focus on the explanatory power of this concept, linked to nature, and the dimensions and variables that characterize the relationships between people that are established within organizations. In this case, RC is used to study the increase in knowledge and expertise within organizations (Hayer & Ibeh, 2006) and the structural power of CEOs (Yan et al., 2019). At this level of analysis, some variables are studied to understand and measure the quality of relationships between people inside organizations. Among the most important factors, we find mutual trust (Inkpen & Tsang, 2005; Moran, 2005; Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998), mutual reciprocity and commitment (Dwyer et al., 1987; Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998; Wasko & Faraj, 2005), norms and sanctions (Coleman, 1988; Wang et al., 2014; Rodríguez-Aceves et al., 2023), and tie strength (Granovetter, 1973; Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998). Our interpretation of RC in this work is derived from two approaches. First is the concept that Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) proposed, in which RC refers to those assets created and leveraged through relationships, and second is the concept that Rivera and Carrillo (2016) proposed, in which RC is represented by the quality or value of relationships that agents maintain with other agents in their environment. It is important to mention that the conception that we explore in this work only contemplates one of the three components of social capital (relational capital) and leaves structural capital and cognitive capital out of the analysis (Carr et al., 2011). In this study, we aim to provide a more comprehensive explanation of the main components (dimensions and variables)

of RC at the individual level. Rivera and Carrillo (2016), working based on Carrillo's characterization of K-events (Carrillo, 2002, p. 379), proposed an RC framework that states that the quality of the relationship between two agents relies on the development and measurement of certain combinations of components. According to these authors, the quality or value of relationships that agents maintain with other agents in their environment relies on contextual conditions, object characteristics, and the agent's perception. From the theoretical contributions presented above, it can be argued that the measurement of RC represents a complex task to perform and scholars from different disciplines have used different variables at different levels of analysis to carry it out. To our knowledge, none of these studies have focused on disentangling RC from a qualitative approach, and achieving this is precisely one of the strengths of our paper. From our point of view, there is sufficient opportunity to extend current research on RC understanding, conceptualization, and measurement, offering a more comprehensive explanation of its main and essential components. This paper investigates the dynamics between people in the intraorganizational context to analyze the nature of their relationships at the individual level of analysis.

The following section justifies the selection of the research methodology and describes how the different techniques and strategies shape an embedded single-case study.

3. Methodology

This study principally aims to answer the following question: What are the dimensions and variables of RC?

This study follows a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis to understand people's experiences regarding the establishment and development of their relationships in an organizational context. Although both positivist and interpretive traditions are concerned with the individual's point of view, we believe that detailed interviewing (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) allows us to become closer to the participants' perspectives. Interviews are complemented with participant observation and we are thus able to interpret the meanings that interviewees assign to their world (Creswell, 2007). To achieve this, this research empowers individuals to share their stories, listen, and present different interpretations of research participants with regard to the subject-under-investigation phenomenon.

3.1. Research Site

The research focuses on two intrafirm business units of a manufacturing group, integrating five business units. As shown in Figure 1, not all BUs of the industrial group are related.

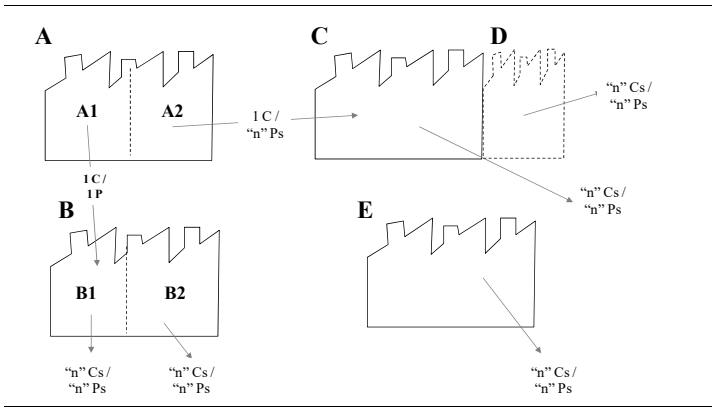


Figure 1. The business units under research and the industrial group. (**A**–**E**): different business units of the industrial group; 1C: one customer; 1P: one product; "n"Ps: several products; "n"Cs: several customers.

Given the interest of the researchers in identifying the dimensions and variables of relational capital, this research solely focuses on those relationships established by individuals from business units A1 and B1. A1 supplies different raw materials to B1. Constant communication and coordination between employees from the two BUs are necessary for the successful completion and delivery of products to final customers (see Figure 2).

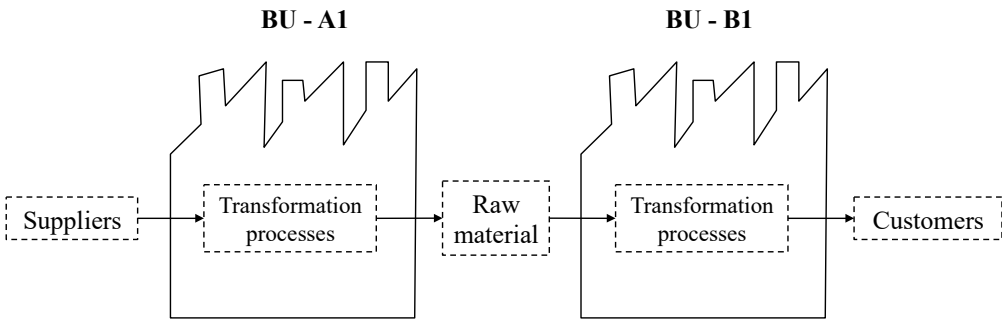


Figure 2. Dependence of production supply chain between business units A1 and B1.

These business units were chosen for three main reasons. As BU-A1 supplies raw material to BU-B1, the members of business units are expected to collaborate. This in turn proves to be a good research setting with which to analyze the quality of relationships between them. Yin (2003) suggests the adoption of a single case design (embedded in this research) when the case is representative or typical. The researchers believe this case to be typical of many other manufacturing business units (official classification; size; type; hierarchical structure; design, operation, and control of their operative, strategic, and support processes). Finally, and very pragmatically, the researchers obtained guaranteed access to the informants and complete support for the research.

The relationships established between staff from the two business units are critical for the proper functioning of both given the operational and administrative interdependence of their processes. Proper BU operation relies on four interconnected processes: (1) BU production programs; (2) BU product quality monitoring; (3) the requisition of purchasing and supply of raw materials in BU; and (4) various administrative activities and procedures (payroll, insurance, recruitment of staff, union issues). In these four processes, employees from both BUs are actively working together and communicating with each other. Frequent face-to-face interactions, occurring during formal and informal discussions and meetings, support these coordination activities.

Key actors were identified in the two BUs based on formal and informal interviews and talks, meetings, company records (purchase, sales, and consignment invoices and notes; production schedules; administrative and operative memos; legal and administrative procedures; some e-mails and telephone calls), and the daily observation of the activities taking place at the two BUs. In sum, 27 key actors were identified: 9 were from BU-A1 and 18 were from BU-B1. The relationships developed between key actors are manifested in different hierarchical levels. To ensure the reliability of the sample of the key actors selected, 30% random selection of the remaining members of each BU was performed (7 people from A1 and 24 people from B1) and we asked each member if they had any relationship with people from the other BU. In all cases, the answer was no. Moreover, during informal interviews and talks, the researchers asked all members if they had any relationship with another person from the other BU and in all cases the answers were also negative.

3.2. Research Design

A multi-method research approach allowed the researchers to capture a more complete, integrative, holistic, and contextual picture of the situation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Jick, 1979). Thus, the use of triangulation helps researchers understand the phenomenon under investigation because of the complementary nature of methods and the convergence and correspondence of research findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Greene et al., 1989; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Patton, 2002).

Given the nature of this research, a grounded theory approach was used to identify and define the dimensions and variables of the concept of RC. Informal interviews and participant observation were also conducted. After developing an initial understanding of the phenomenon, 27 semi-structured interviews were developed, recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed. From this phase, RC dimensions and variables emerged.

3.3. Data Collection

In order to collect data, participant observation and semi-structured interviews were conducted. Observation is important because it allows data collection about a specific phenomenon or situation in a "naturally occurring context" (Silverman, 2006) via the observation of and listening to the interaction or phenomenon as it takes place (Kumar, 2005). According to Jorgensen (1989, p. 12), the participant observation methodology is exceptional for studying processes, relationships among people and events, the events affecting the organization and people, continuities over time, and patterns. For 7 months, we undertook weekly periods of observation during field visits, performed at 15 h per week per business unit, to gain access to the inside view of informants in order to understand their "life experiences" when involved in interdependence activities. Additionally, field notes were taken, schemes and diagrams were recorded, and informal conversations and meetings took place with actors in the two business units. These field notes, schemes, and diagrams helped the researchers to understand some of the activities, processes, relationships, and conditions were observed during the research.

The researchers had dozens of informal conversations with the majority of key actors within the two business units. The content of these conversations varied widely, since people's activities and functions vary a lot. These conversations helped the researchers to enhance their understanding of the research context. After two months of participant observation, the researchers were allowed to attend some other meetings on planning and coordination processes in both business units.

Interviews are one of the most commonly recognized forms of qualitative research methods (Mason, 1998, p. 39) and they provide an effective method "to get the interview subject to talk a lot—openly, trustfully, honestly, clearly, and freely—○about what the researcher is interested in" (Alvesson, 2003, p. 17).

Twenty-seven face-to-face semi-structured in-depth interviews (Mishler, 1986; Chirban, 1996; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Bernard, 2002) were conducted with key members of the two business units. This kind of interview allows for open-ended questions and "enables the researchers to understand and capture the points of view of other people without predetermining those points of view through prior selection of questionnaire categories" (Patton, 2002, p. 21), thus, giving "voice to common people, allowing them to freely present their life situations in their own words" (Kvale, 2006, p. 481). With this method, the expectation was to understand the viewpoints of the participants and explore the meanings they attribute to their experiences, understanding, and views about the RC components. Despite the theoretical contributions linked to the variables and dimensions of RC, the authors consider that these contributions to have not deeply explored the complexity of the components that influence the relationships established between agents at the micro

level. This is why the design of the semi-structured in-depth interview uses open questions that allow participants to not limit their responses to the components that have already been theoretically identified. Because the semi-structured style of interviewing requires a rigorous set of activities in order to be a feasible method (Mason, 1998), all interviews were applied in similar conditions and the process followed a homogeneous procedure. This procedure was based on the researchers' previous experience, as well as on some authors' recommendations (Patton, 2002; Brenner, 1985; Mack et al., 2005; Mason, 2002). The researchers considered some important aspects before (planning), during (the interview), and after the interviews. Interviews were recorded and fully transcribed verbatim by the researchers. This activity enabled the researchers to be more fully immersed in the research context. Hence, it enabled a better interpretation of a participant's point of view, and it also helped the researchers to prepare for the next interview. The process of transcription included careful listening to the recording, after which it was transcribed in sections to ensure accuracy. The interviews lasted 40 min on average.

The focus of the interview was on the agent's perceptions and viewpoints about what they saw as critical dimensions and variables of RC. The interviews gave participants the possibility of introducing examples and their own experiences. The semi-structured interview script was designed and informed by the participant observation stage (see Appendix A).

3.4. Data Analysis

As mentioned before, grounded theory was adopted for the analysis of the interviews. Basically, one of the most important aspects of grounded theory is the coding stage, which aims to find patterns or themes within qualitative data. Some specific steps were followed to systematically find those patterns: a transcript stage, a data familiarization stage, a code generation stage, category and subcategory identification, a reviewing and refining stage, and stage for reporting findings.

Data familiarization consisted of becoming familiar with the data through immersion. This process was conducted by reading and re-reading the transcripts and by comparing the transcript with the actual recorded interviews to ensure the accuracy of the transcript. Code generation was the next step after the analysis of the interviews. For each interview, a preliminary analysis was carried out, using Microsoft Word, in which important words were highlighted.

By reading the interviews several times, notes, words, and phrases were highlighted. The process of creating themes was based on an iterative open, axial, and selective coding. In this stage, an "interpretative reading" (Mason, 2002) of all the interviews was carried out to better understand the meaning of participants' views by going beyond the participants' actual words. To guarantee the homogeneity of coding criteria, coding was constantly compared and validated at monthly meetings with experts in the social and relational capital area. Disagreements were reconciled through discussion.

Following guidelines for inductive research, after transcribing all the interviews, the researchers looked for common codes and categories throughout the interviews, reviewing and refining these categories and subcategories by comparing and contrasting the data across the entire set. To support the practice of comparative analysis, this research adopted two practical tools: a free list of ideas and quotations.

At the beginning of this process, we made a free list of common ideas, concepts, and themes. The researchers eliminated the repetitive ideas from this list, and then similar codes and themes were grouped together, leading to the construction of meaningful categories. Special attention was focused on comparisons of the similarities and differences identified by the various interview participants. To confirm the categories and subcategories that

emerged from data, and to guarantee their validity, findings were constantly discussed at meetings with experts and with key actors involved in the study. As in the code generation stage, disagreements were reconciled through discussion.

Moreover, data provided by participant observation also allowed the confirmatory evidence bias to be minimized and validity to be improved. These data also provided further confirmation and illustration of the categories and subcategories that emerged. In this study, according to theoretical saturation rules, theoretical saturation was considered achieved when no new open codes emerged from data, when the properties of individual categories were seen as being explainable by the social phenomenon reflected in data, and when the relationships between categories and subcategories were examined and confirmed by checking with the data.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

Before the data collection stage, all participants were informed of the purposes of the research and issues around confidentiality, their freedom to withdraw at any time, and the details of data storage, data access, and anonymity.

It was explained that all recorded transcripts of interviews were kept strictly confidential and were used in this research only. All interview questions were carefully designed, not only for the purpose of theory development, but also with the aim of protecting the privacy of individual participants. In both the data analysis and findings report stages, the identities of participants and business units were not revealed. A code of participants and business unit's names that included one letter and one number was created. These codes were used during these stages and participants' as well as business units' real names were kept in a separate file. All data were stored securely in the researcher's computer in a password-protected folder

3.6. Quality of the Research

Following the lead of some authors (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Patton, 2002; Lietz et al., 2006; Creswell, 2009), in this study, the researchers employed multiple strategies to establish trustworthiness and minimize the risk of avoidable errors. These strategies included triangulation, flexibility, member checking, peer debriefing, audit trailing, and the resolution of time and data collection instrument issues.

4. Findings

This section introduces findings regarding relational capital dimensions and variables that emerged from this research. For this purpose, the researchers adopted an iterative approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) of comparing and contrasting the data to build a grounded theory. The researchers constantly shuttled between the field notes, semi-structured interviews, and the theoretical framework that they were building to find support for their theorization and to detect any inconsistencies between intuitions and data.

During the research, two broad dimensions emerged and these helped us to characterize relational capital. The first dimension is labeled the agent dimension, and this refers to behaviors that can be attributed to a particular person, as perceived by others. This dimension in turn consists of 12 variables. Each of these variables relates to behaviors that enhance the quality of a relation between people from different business units.

The second dimension is labeled the context dimension and refers to the general perception of the atmosphere that prevails in the two business units with respect to some general conditions. It refers to situations that involve agreements, rules, norms, communication, and hierarchies, among other factors. It consists of 7 variables. Figure 3 shows the basic scheme of these two dimensions.

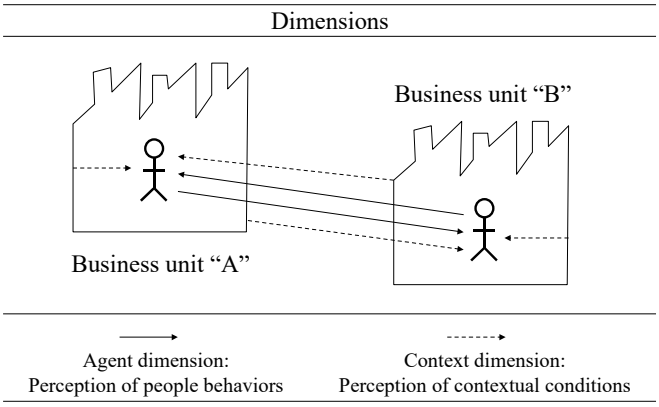


Figure 3. RC dimensions.

Figure 4 shows the key dimensions and variables of RC.

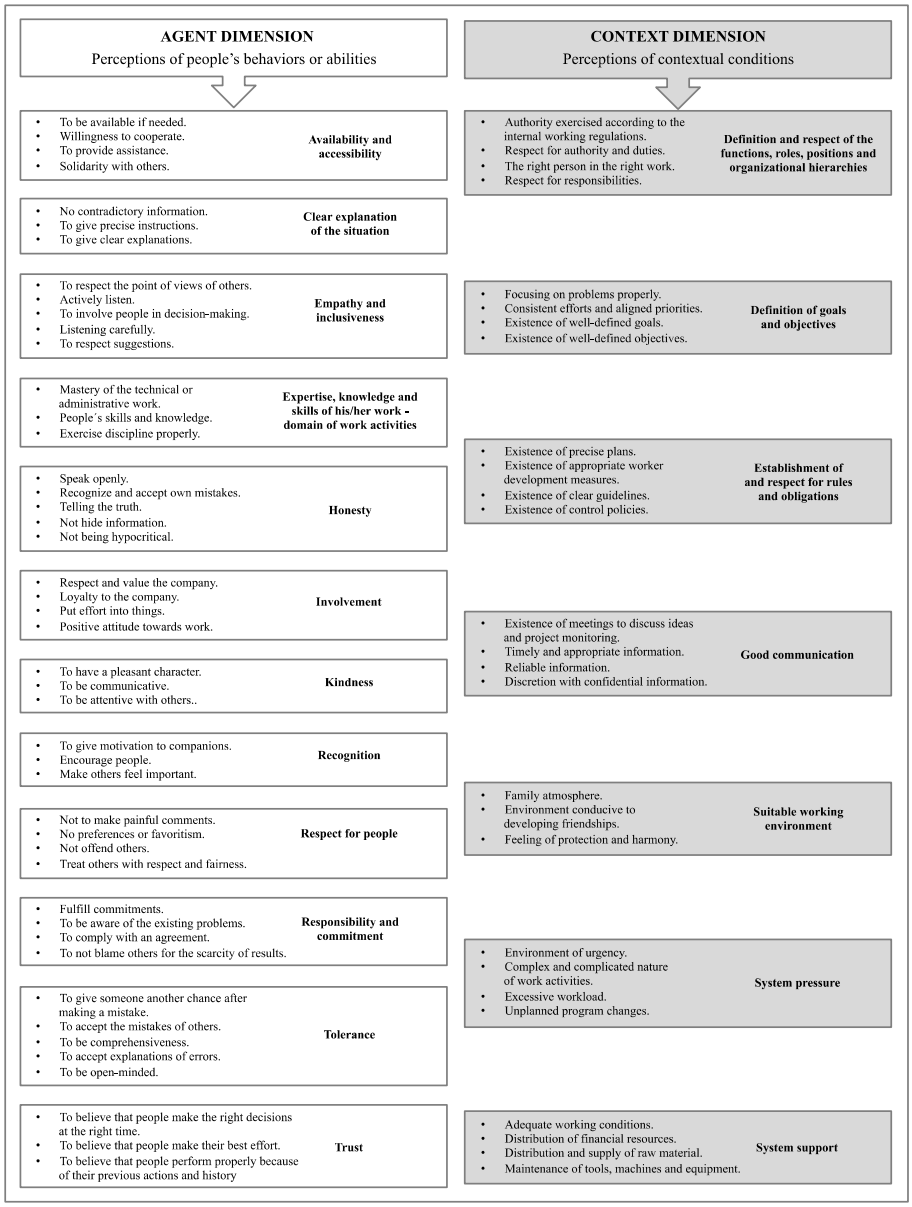


Figure 4. Dimensions and variables of RC. Note: listed in alphabetical order.

4.1. Agent Dimension

Availability and accessibility: An important variable for establishing quality relationships between employees from the two business units is a willingness to show availability and accessibility to others. This was shown by behaviors such as providing help and support to colleagues, showing willingness to cooperate, and solidarity with others. Moreover, the presence of this readiness to help others seems to be very important in the development of problem solving and in achieving the goals and objectives of business units. It is also fair to say that the lack of these features sometimes hampers relationships and the accomplishment of objectives by both business units.

Clear explanations: Participants value when other colleagues have the ability to give clear explanations of situations, whether operational or administrative, so that they can be solved properly. Due to the nature of the processes and activities of both business units, people must give precise instructions to each other to accomplish the objectives and goals of the company, and must also not provide contradictory information that may lead to confusion when addressing problems.

Empathy and inclusiveness: People consider the practice of respecting the opinions of others to be very important as it allows ideas to flow, agreements to be established, and decisions to be made. Participation by and knowledge from all contribute to a process of joint decision-making, in which suggestions and priorities from others, as well as listening to their proposals, are essential to maintain good working relationships and to achieve desirable objectives.

Expertise, knowledge, and skills: Mastering technical and administrative work-related activities is another important factor in establishing quality relationships. This can be achieved when constant discipline is developed to respond to the requirements of processes taking place in the business units. This in turn ensures that the work carried out will be suitable and that conflicts or frictions resulting from the lack of professionalism will be reduced. On the other hand, some participants argued that problems may arise when people do not master their technical and administrative activities.

Honesty: The variable of honesty was mentioned several times by participants as a key factor influencing the quality of relationships. This can be achieved by speaking openly, acknowledging mistakes, and not hiding information.

Involvement: Having a positive attitude towards work and the company involves employees seeking the development of quality relationships. Knowing which people are involved and which are not is very important for establishing and maintaining quality relationships between them. From the perspective of interviewees, the lack of involvement affects relationships because people do not pull their weight at work and do not have love for the company.

Kindness: There were several respondents who mentioned kindness as an essential ingredient in maintaining quality relationships. This kindness depends to some extent on people's involvement in a particular relationship, such as showing someone's disposition to be attentive to others. Moreover, there were several participants who mentioned that when people have hard-boiled, obstinate personalities, quality relationships cannot be established or developed.

Recognition: The disposition of people to make others feel important, to give words of encouragement, and to drive and motivate their peers is important when establishing and maintaining quality relationships. Some of the key actors in this research commented that good relationships are developed between people when they have the ability to offer words of encouragement and support to their peers in work situations. According to interviewees, in the business units, there is a need to boost recognition, which is critical for establishing quality relationships.

Respect for people: The existence of an attitude of respect for people and fairness is very important to maintain and develop quality relationships. Moreover, when persons have not been polite for any reason, the quality of relations tends to decrease.

Responsibility and commitment: Given the resource dependence between business units, respect for administrative scheduling and for agreements made is very important for maintaining cordial relationships. The establishment of commitments is typically developed in meetings routinely held in the business units. However, there is evidence that shows that there are situations that compromise establishing commitments, stemming from a lack of responsibility and commitment on the part of people and the cancelation of some of the meetings.

Tolerance: Some participants commented that tolerance is essential for the proper development of quality relationships. In this regard, the greater the tolerance between people, the better the quality of relationships between them. From the participant perspective, being tolerant requires people to have the disposition not to despair with people, to be understanding, to be open-minded, not to be stubborn and not to impose things on others, to accept others' mistakes and explanations, and to give colleagues another chance after making a mistake. Moreover, the lack of tolerance, exemplified by the imposition of ideas and narrow criteria in decision-making, sometimes deteriorates relationships and even prevents the achievement of the business units' objectives and goals.

Trust: Trust strengthens ties between people over time and promotes good relationships between them. It is derived from decisions taken by people over time and is supported by actions and past performance and therefore generates positive feelings that have an impact on people's willingness to develop a relationship. In thus study, trust also refers to the someone's beliefs that others make their best effort and the right decisions at the right time. Moreover, a loss of trust complicates the relationships between the staff of both business units.

Some evidence associated with each variable of agent dimension is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Evidence associated with variables of agent dimension.

Agent Dimension
Availability and accessibility
If it's missing to cover an area and that depends on you, why not help? That's why we are here on business units, it is the same company. I have always said that no matter where we are placed, the important thing is to help, we have to be available, what we want is to finish the job because we all are benefit, is the same company, we all work with the same company. (Interviewee B-2, lines 280–287)
There has always been an impetus for cooperation, at least when I've needed something or when I ask or someone ask me for support, we help each other. (Interviewee B-9, lines 182–184)
Clear and precise explanations
To avoid problems between the two business units in operational and administrative issues the supervisors from here [B1] were sent to there [A1] in weekly periods with the purpose of speak the same language, using the same terms. The idea was to speak the same language and know the process of A1. (Interviewee B-15, lines 415–418)
When there is a situation, I explain what is exactly needed and why it is urgent. (Interviewee A-3, lines 507–508)

Table 1. *Cont.*

Agent Dimension
Empathy and inclusiveness
When there is a problem, I try to improve the relationships bringing closer to the parts involved, as I see it, every opinion has transcendence. I try to ask for the information of one of the parts, and then the other part, and finally we gather to have an agreement. (Interviewee B-11, lines 99–102)
I know many people of both business units and I get involve with everybody. I always listen, mainly I listen. When I establish my relationships with persons I usually listen to their situations and I think they listen to me, too. I feel it is like that, for me, it is like that, and that's why I hardly ever get in conflict with them. (Interviewee A-3, lines 277–282)
Expertise, knowledge and skills of his/her work—domain of work activitiesAnother important feature to have good relationships is the knowledge of your area, your function. You have to solve the function and know how works each thing that you do in order to respond for them and to resolve them. (Interviewee A-3, lines 243–244)
We have people that despite their good will, their availability and their responsibility for doing things, lack of technical knowledge to solve important problems which are becoming more serious. I think sometimes we suffer from personal expertise to develop the full potential that the company has. (Interviewee B-3, lines 283–304)
Honesty
To have a good relationship I feel you always need to speak the truth. Never handle half-truths. (Interviewee B-4, lines 40–41)
The main thing in a good relationship is not to lie. (Interviewee B-8, line 129)
Involvement
I do this work because we are all involved here, because we all live here, because this is how the world moves. (Interviewee A-3, lines 339–341)
One of the strengths of A1 and B1 is that we are composed of pure hardworking people committed to this work. I think is hardly to find this kind of people in another place. I think if we haven't make an effort we would not be here. (Interviewee A-1, lines 217–219)
Kindness
You need to be fine to do the things right, arrive and say good morning, because a greeting counts a lot. (Interviewee A-5, lines 147–148)
I think the way as I get along with the staff here [A1] and from there [B1] is important because if you do not get along with them, or if you have no friends, may be they won't help me with the things that I need when I ask them. I get along well with them and I laugh with them. It's good to promote friendship. (Interviewee A-9, lines 38–47)
Recognition
I always try to tell my people that they are working very good, I congratulate them, and tell them they are doing a good job, I try to motivate them. (Interviewee B-13, lines 102–106)
My colleagues have told me that we needed to do this or we need to do that. I think that people need nice words, some extra motivation. Details matters and a little thing can have great impact on people's performance. (Interviewee B-15, lines 153–159)
Respect for people
I have always had the idea that regardless everything, even the most humble person deserves respect, because if you do not value people, things go wrong. (Interviewee B-4, lines 42–45)
To maintain a cordial and good relationship with people you must have a good behavior, if you treat them well, they are going to treat you well. A good behavior means to treat people well, without curses. I'm also strict and sometimes I have to call attention but not aggressively. (Interviewee A-5, lines 134–140)

Table 1. *Cont.*

Agent Dimension
Responsibility and commitment
I think that in order to have good relationships between us [A1 and B1] it is very important to make commitments and fulfill them (Interviewee A-1, lines 41–42)
One of the strengths of A1 is that they have faced many challenges even though they have problems. With all this shortcomings they have known how to solve their problems. That's a responsibility value that they have. (Interviewee B-10, lines 396–400)
Tolerance
You have to mediate people and then you have to give them opinions and options, you tell them how they have to work. We must accept that in life we are never perfect; there are many variables that change over time and we need to get adapted. (Interviewee B-10, lines 167–178)
A bad relationship exists when you arrive with a not opened provision to reach a point of agreement and you arrive at a more dictatorial or more energetic position without hearing the other point of view, I think it would be a bad relationship. (Interviewee B-5, lines 98–101)
Trust
I get along with them because there is trust; there is no anger with someone there. Trust means I can come and tell them if something is missing here or if we are not having any progress or anything. (Interviewee A-9, Lines 59–63)
Another feature that makes good relationships is trust. Previously the staff of A1 used to come here [B1] more often and they realized that things we told them were things that happened, then trust grew between us. They trusted in everything I told them. (Interviewee B-16, lines 207–211)

4.2. Context Dimension

Definition of and respect for organizational structures: The evidence suggests that once organizational structures are defined, and roles, responsibilities, and hierarchies respected, relationships among employees improve. By contrast, the lack of proper definitions of and respect for roles and responsibilities negatively affects the quality of relationships, causing internal friction. Although roles and responsibilities are formally assigned, sometimes these roles and the authority associated with them are not respected by people.

Definition of goals and objectives: The definition of goals and objectives clarifies the business units' efforts towards a particular situation. This fact makes it possible to solve conflicts that have seen the relationships between different actors in both business units deteriorate. People mentioned that two of the biggest problems in the business units and between them are the absence of well-defined objectives and goals and the lack of leadership on important organizational issues and decisions. During participant observation, it was clear that in some situations, the absence of these two aspects caused friction between employees from both business units and as a consequence harmed relationships.

Respect for rules and obligations: The establishment of and respect for rules and obligations are important for maintaining quality relationships. The existence of control policies and clear guidelines, as well as precise plans, allow for the development of activities in the organization. Moreover, participants of the two business units mentioned that many of the administrative and operative requirements and procedures are accomplished because of the existence of and respect for these rules and obligations. According to participants, the existence of rules, such as appropriate disciplinary measures, enables process improvement. However, the perception of the lack of rules in both business units allows people to act inappropriately, and in many cases this ends up affecting the quality of relationships.

Good communication: According to interviewees, one of the necessary conditions for the existence of good relationships between the two business units is good communication. From the interviewees' perspective, it is very important to have some sensitive information

treated as confidential if good relationships are to be maintained. However, this desire is truncated by gossip that compromises the quality of relationships.

Suitable work environment: One of the great virtues of business units, fostering the quality of relationships between them, is the existence of a suitable work environment. Some interviewees said that the work environment allowed them to establish quality relationships both personally and professionally. By contrast, the quality of relationships deteriorates if a negative working environment is perceived.

System pressure: Qualitative evidence supports the idea that relationships can be affected due to the organizational pressure that exists in both business units. The lack of time to address administrative or operational activities derived from the urgencies of orders or changes in production programs causes some relationships to deteriorate. Moreover, the evidence suggests that excess daily excess work results in the negation of some people's suggestions and needs. People become upset because they think that their company gives more priority to urgent issues than important ones.

System support: The adequate allocation of financial and technological resources would improve relationships between members from the two business units. When there is a scarcity of resources that are not under the control of employees from both business units, problems occur. As A1 depends on B1, when shortcomings are present, misunderstandings start to appear and therefore relationships between employees deteriorate over time. Similarly, inadequate equipment maintenance leads to frictions and discussions in both business units, and as a result it is impossible to conclude some production programs satisfactorily. This in turn negatively affects the establishment of good relationships.

Some evidence associated with each variable of context dimension is presented in Table 2.

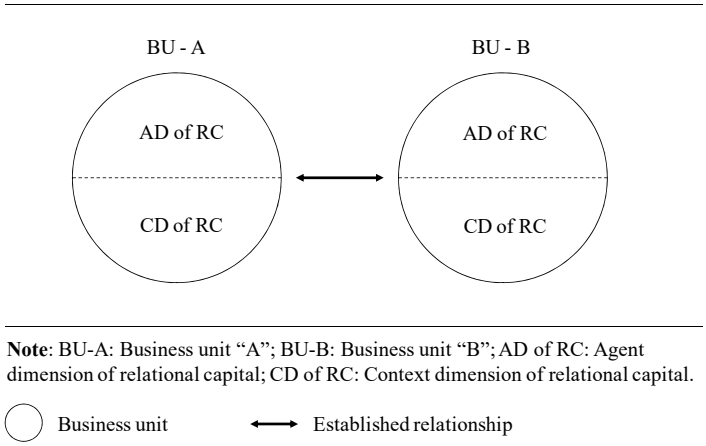
Table 2. Evidence associated with variables of context dimension.

Context Dimension
Definition and respect for functions, roles, positions and organizational hierarchies
People from B1 should acknowledge that it is not possible for one person from [A1] to solve all problems. Solutions must be requested to the right person because one person alone cannot solve all situations. If I were they, I would ask the right question to the right person. Bad relationships and frictions have been developed because they [B1] demand results from people who are not directly involved in the process or problems they want to solve. (Interviewee A-4, lines 218–230)
One characteristic of good relationships has to do with recognition of the roles that people play within the business units. It is necessary both, to have the knowledge of the activity performed by each employee and to respect the boundaries delineated by defined responsibilities and functions of each position. (Interviewee B-11, lines 68–72)
Definition of goals and objectives
I think that we need a leader to give order and direction to our plans. If we all work together in the same direction, things would work much better. We lack of a person who can guide us. For me, all we need is a leader who clearly defines objectives and goals. A leader that goes ahead and says: faster, slower, turn right. (Interviewee B-8, lines 469–487)
I believe that we lack someone who guides us and helps us define the objectives of the business units. I think a lot of energy is dispersed in vain, trying to figure daily things out and sometimes at very high costs. It is necessary to focus all our efforts towards particular goals, but firstly we need to define those goals and objectives. We must define how far we want to go and what it takes to get there. (Interviewee B-3, lines 246-255)
Establishment of and respect for rules and obligations
We need rules and internal control to improve our relationships. I think it could greatly improve the internal control. We could develop internal control policies to improve the information flow and that there is no duplication of work. (Interviewee B-9, lines 228–253)

Table 2. *Cont.*

Context Dimension
Everyone sees A1 as a simple factory in which there are no rules, people do whatever they want. I think that business unit A1 must have more rules to have better relationships. (Interviewee A-4, lines 298–299)
Good communication
Communication is very important in all senses. We all need to be on harmony in order to do our best. Many differences can appear, but communication will help us understand diminish those differences. We need to listen to the people more than anything else. (Interviewee B-4, lines 197–200)
I think there are things that happen in business units that we don't need to know. For example, if B1 has some financial or labor problems, we don't really need to know about it, because that information can be misunderstood. I believe that both business units must be more discrete about sensitive aspects because this information affects people's performance. A lot of information is filtered from B1 to A1, and that is not good. (Interviewee A-1, lines 171–180)
Suitable working environment
The environment we have here at the company has allow us to develop and maintain good relationships. This is very important because if you don't get along you're your colleagues, things do not work out. (Interviewee B-12, Lines 79–83)
We have friendly relationships here. We work together in a comfortable environment and we stick together in the company. Due to the family atmosphere, we have made good friends. (Interviewee B-2, lines 45–48)
System pressure
The relationship with other people can be good or bad depending on what kind of job and responsibilities you have. For example, if you are the person in charge of a key department everyone will ask you for support, and if a problem arise in that department your work pressure will increase and you will have some friction with people who are pushing you. Now imagine that solution does not depend on that person. The more the pressure you have, the less the help to others you can give. (Interview B-9, lines 304–311)
Sometimes I have to manage two different projects simultaneously. When that happens, I must divide my time by half and go back and forth in order to accomplish the objectives of the two projects. In this regard, one of the major problems we face has to do with the supply of materials and the need to coordinate both business units to solve this kind of situations. However, sometimes I have no time and people don't understand it. (Interviewee B-10, lines 41–44)
System support
Sometimes we are working very hard and fast. Suddenly we realize that we get ride of an important raw material. Due to the lack of these materials we have to stop working, and that certainly affects people's motivation and enthusiasm. Without any doubt, this fact in turn affects the quality of relationships between the personal from the two business units. (Interviewee A-6, lines 155–160)
When there is no enough money, they [B1] buy low quality materials that are cheaper. These raw materials cause operational problems here [A1] and things start go wrong. When this occurs, we blame the operators but I feel this is not fair. (Interviewee B-15, lines 419–427)

According to the evidence of this research, the quality of relationship between individuals relies on twelve agent variables and seven context variables. The majority, and probably the most important grounded variables refer to the agent dimension that is related to the willingness of a person to do something for someone else- people behaviors or abilities-. Most of the evidence found points to the agent dimension (see Figure 5).



Note: BU-A: Business unit "A"; BU-B: Business unit "B"; AD of RC: Agent dimension of relational capital; CD of RC: Context dimension of relational capital.

Figure 5. General representation of dimensions.

5. Discussion

This section presents the significance of the research findings by relating them to the relevant literature in terms of both theoretical contributions and empirical findings. In this research, by breaking down RC into a more comprehensive concept, we offer clear evidence of at least three important theoretical contributions: (1) this study develops a two-dimensional, multivariable conception of RC; (2) given those dimensions and variables, this study offers evidence of the definition of dimensions and variables that describe the quality of relationships between individuals from two intrafirm business units, improving our understanding of human interactions in these contexts; (3) although these two dimensions and their variables are analytically separate, in this research, it is recognized that in fact they are highly interrelated.

Even though some theoretical contributions exist on RC (Kale et al., 2000; Sarkar et al., 2001; Castro et al., 2004; Dewhurst & Cegarra, 2004; Dhanaraj et al., 2004; Moran, 2005), from the authors' perspective, those contributions are significant but incomplete, since they do not identify the dimensions and variables of the RC in an intrafirm context. In this sense, one of the most important purposes of this paper was to find evidence to the existence of a two-dimensional, multivariable RC concept (Rivera & Carrillo, 2016). It is two-dimensional because there are two broad theoretical categories of relational capital: the agent dimension, which involves some personal characteristics, and the context dimension, which involves some characteristics of the context where relationships take place. It is important to mention that although these two dimensions are analytically separate, the researchers recognize that many of the features described are, in fact, highly interrelated.

Despite the importance of social interaction in an organizational context and recognizing that the development of organizational relationships are important factors for a firm's growth and development (Mu et al., 2008; Tang et al., 2008), little is known about the characteristics that affect the quality of relationships between individuals from intrafirm business units. Generally, it is assumed that the development of good work relationships will positively influence some other aspects of the work. However, this hypothetical idea is meaningless if we do not know what elements must be considered to define the quality of relationships. More specifically, our study confirms the results of previous research that strongly associate the concept of RC with the value of relationships that agents maintain with other agents in their environment (Lagesa et al., 2005; Naudé & Buttle, 2000; Storbacka et al., 1994; Rivera & Carrillo, 2016).

Highlighting the role of RC, the authors believe the results of this research complement the work of other scholars who stressed the role of trust and personal interaction in organizational relationships (Gulati, 1995; Zaheer et al., 1998). The evidence in this research

shows, however, that RC is not only linked to agent variables in general, but also to context variables. This finding complements the work of Rivera and Carrillo (2016) who argued that the quality of relationships that agents maintain with other agents in their environment relies on the context conditions, the object characteristics, and the agent's perception. In this work, no evidence of the object dimension was found. Through internal interactions between intrafirm business units, firms can achieve a better understanding of their activities and processes that, in many cases, are the most important sources of new ideas and information, which can lead to better performance.

According to the findings, this study may not be only based on the RC literature but may also be connected to social science and psychology. In this regard, the view of RC the researchers develop in this research fundamentally supports the idea that some decisions that people make do not follow the *homo economicus* rationality. On the contrary, the evidence of this study suggests that the decision to establish quality relationships is based on emotional and social aspects. These results have interesting implications for the *homo reciprocans* concept proposed by Dohmen et al. (2009), since it supports the idea that reciprocity is one of the most common types of social preference. Moreover, our findings are consistent with authors who suggested that individuals appear to care about fairness, reciprocity, and cooperation (Fehr & Gächter, 1998, 2000; Fehr & Schmidt, 1999; Bolton & Ockenfels, 2000; Dohmen et al., 2009) when they make some important decisions. Hence, this research can also be important to behavioral economics science that includes the analysis of how socialization, networks, and identity shape people's behavior in organizations (Camerer & Malmendier, 2007, in Diamond & Vartiainen, 2007).

Our findings could also be important for the analysis of the family business literature, since our study is based on one such study. In the context of family firms, the role of RC is well documented in the academic literature (Cucculelli et al., 2019; Debicki et al., 2020). RC has been used to analyze family organizational environments where the richness of the familial ties is developed based on foundations of trust (Arregle et al., 2007), as well as a shared vision and purpose and similar norms and values (Pearson et al., 2008). Our findings contribute to the complex understanding of family relationships in the organizational context.

Another theory that has been used in several studies of human behavior is social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). Some authors (Bock & Young-Gul, 2002; Tiwana & Bush, 2005) suggest that social exchange theory is a useful theoretical lens for examining relational behavior because it was developed to explain why individuals engage in cooperative behaviors that are not formally rewarded by an organization. In this regard, consistent with those studies, the results of this research suggest that social factors are important predictors of relational behavior.

This research is also important to the current literature, which is making continuous efforts to determine the quality of relationships within the organizational context, with most of them being developed within the marketing paradigm. From this perspective, authors (Crosby et al., 1990; Lagesa et al., 2005; Naudé & Buttle, 2000; Storbacka et al., 1994; Wilson & Jantrania, 1994) have suggested some variables that can be used to measure the quality of a relationship. This study contributes to identifying 17 variables from the field, distributed in two dimensions, that affect the quality of relationships.

6. Conclusions

The multi-theoretical approach used in this research contributes to the literature because it provides insight into the elements necessary to establish and develop high-quality relationships between individuals from different business units. In this regard, this study's most important contribution is in the realm of theory building, associated with

the RC literature. This study also contributes to several streams of research. First, it adds to the RC literature by identifying its dimensions and variables. In this regard, one of the most important theoretical contributions of this research is the fact that the relational capital dimensions and variables are grounded definitions that emerge from the analysis of qualitative data.

In terms of methodological contributions, it could be said that in this research, participant observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and grounded theory were used to gain a better understanding of the quality of relationships between members in two business units, serving as research sites. Through these methodological tools, it became apparent that there are strong behavioral agent variables, as well as contextual ones, that impact the quality of relationships. The use of the collective application of these methodological tools to build a holistic understanding of RC dimensions and variables is a unique contribution of this study. No previous studies were found that applied the same combination of methods to describe and operationalize the RC concept. Therefore, the current study contributes to research practice by suggesting the adoption of a combination of methods with which to collect and analyze data to develop theory. In summary, this study contributed methodologically to current thinking about research practice through developing and testing a package of methods for collecting and analyzing data.

Although the most important implications of this study are in theory building, the results also indicate several practical implications that business units can implement to improve their relational practices. The dimensions and variables proposed in this research might be useful for practitioners interested in growing and learning through the development of RC variables that affect some aspects of intrafirm business units and in organizational context in general. The results of this research can perhaps be viewed as offering "relational key aspects" in understanding relational dynamics between people and functional areas of the organization.

This study can be beneficial for those in charge of the design and application of organizational relational policies; for nonprofit organizations that work to improve RC between significant agents in their organizations and around them; and for people in general who are interested in the improvement of our society through the development and maintenance of mutual gain relationships over time.

The main suggestions for those in charge of creating and maintaining relationships in organizations are to use the findings in this research as (1) a practice tool to help people establish and maintain quality relationships over time in order to improve their working environment; (2) a tool to organize and manage intraorganizational teamwork; (3) and a guide to design training courses to help participants and companies improve their relationships between themselves.

While the study makes important contributions to the RC literature, several limitations should be acknowledged. The first concerns the limited context within which the research was conducted. To obtain a richer view of the RC dimensions and variables, the researchers decided to study the phenomenon in-depth in two intrafirm business units. Therefore, the findings of this research could be related to the nature of these business units' activities. A second important limitation is the fact that this is a cross-sectional approach to data collection. This precludes the study of the temporal aspects of relationships. This is particularly important because relationships and networks change and evolve over time. Since this research reflects the findings of just a cross-sectional, embedded single-case study, more studies need to be undertaken in the future to confirm/refute the findings.

Furthermore, this research has the limitation of focusing on key actors in business units. It would also be interesting to investigate all participants in the two business units and, thus, enable a comparison between the two "complete" business units to see if there

is any difference. However, every attempt was made to be transparent and to reflect the participants' accounts of the research problem. We also recognize that even though we decided to use RC perspective at the individual level of analysis to understand relationships between people and the dynamics that those relationships imply, some other interpretations and concepts (i.e., social capital) can be used to do so.

This research study points to several potential areas that should be further explored by future work. In this sense, further studies are recommended in the following areas. First, in this research, a multi-method approach was adopted to answer the research question. Different methodologies can be used to generalize the substantive theory into a formal theory. In this regard, it is suggested that the findings in this research can be verified through deductive research in other complementary studies to assess the strength of the empirical support for this theory. Moreover, the substantive theory generated in the study could be expanded and generalized by investigating other business units, or even different companies, in other contexts and geographical regions around the world. The research findings of this study could be used as a theoretical foundation for this type of future work. The development of some longitudinal studies to evaluate changes over time across relationships and networks is also recommended.

Second, future work could explore the causes and consequences of relationships between RC variables and the performance of business units and, thus, gain a deeper understanding of the relational phenomenon inside organizations. It would be interesting to conduct studies to see whether relational capital variables can be a predictor of business unit performance.

Finally, the authors propose that the RC variables do not occur independently, but that these variables are convergent. It would be interesting to investigate how these variables jointly affect other variables in an organizational context.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, A.E.R.; methodology, A.E.R., G.R.-G. and P.E.E.-G.; validation, A.E.R. and J.C.G.; formal analysis, G.R.-G. and P.E.E.-G.; investigation, A.E.R. and G.R.-G.; resources, A.E.R. and J.C.G.; writing—original draft preparation, A.E.R.; writing—review and editing, A.E.R. and P.E.E.-G. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors on request.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Appendix A. Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Opening.
Introduction: My name is (name of the researcher) and I am doing a research about the concept of relational capital between intra-firm business units.
Objective: The purpose of this interview is to obtain information regarding your ideas about the concept of relationship (the way they are established and developed) as well as the necessary variables and conditions to establish quality relationships between people.
Ethical considerations: This interview will be recorded in a digital audio file and will be stored in a password folder at the researcher computer. It is important to say that the researcher is the only person able to access the computer. In order to ensure the confidentiality as well as the sincerity of your responses, this recording, as well as the notes I will take during the development of the interview will be, at all time, in researcher hands. Neither your name nor the content of your interview will be revealed since the findings of this research will be presented as general, non-personal, observations and conclusions.

Introductory questions.
Could you please tell me, what is your name, position and for how long time have you been working in this business (and business)?

What activities do you develop during your workday?

What are your main duties and responsibilities within the company?
[If the participants do not say anything, ask:]
a. Are you in operational or administrative area?
b. Do you like your job?
c. Why do you like your work?
d. How the work environment is?

Transition questions.
Do you have any relationship with other business unit personnel?

Could you please tell me the name of people from the other business unit you are in touch with?

To develop your daily activities, do you think that the relationships that you establish with your co-workers are important?

Why do you think it is important to establish relationships with colleagues from other business (A1/B1) unit?

Key questions.
Who are the key people in these relationships (issues of work, ideas and initiatives, social support)?

How are the two units of business (A1/B1) linked?

Do you think that there is a collaborative desire between business units?, why?
How would you describe the relationships that you establish with the staff of the other business unit (excellent, very good, good, regular, bad)?

What conditions or elements are necessary to evaluate a relationship as a good or bad? (mutual trust, mutual compromise, exchange of bilateral information, close interaction, prestige, exchange, mutual respect, reciprocity/fairness, friendship, etc.)

How would you evaluate the quality of these relationships with your other co-workers from this and the other business unit?

Do you think that the company encourages you and your classmates to establish relationships out of work activities?

In which cases do you think that the relationships that you establish with other business unit (A1/B1) staff has been affected?, what element would you mention?

What it is necessary to improve the relationships between this and the other business unit staff (A1/B1)?

Within the company, are there meetings involving staff from the two units of business (A1/B1)? How often these meetings are scheduled and how are they developed?

Ending questions.
If you had the opportunity to speak with the director of the company, what advices would you give him to promote relationships between colleagues of the two business units; what advices would you give him to develop or improve the transfer knowledge and information processes?

Through this study, I am trying to understand how people from different business unit, establish relationships between them and how do these people transfer knowledge. Before concluding this interview, is there anything you would like to mention, that it has not been previously addressed?

Thank you very much for you participation in this research

References

Aaltonen, K., & Turkulainen, V. (2018). Creating relational capital through socialization in project alliances. *International Journal of Operations & Production Management*, *38*(6), 1387–1421.

Adarsh, K. K. (2018). How do team conflicts impact knowledge sharing? *Knowledge Management Research & Practice*, *16*(1), 21–31.

Adler, P., & Kwon, S. (2002). Social capital: Prospects for a new concept. *The Academy of Management Review*, *27*(1), 17–40. [CrossRef]

Alvesson, M. (2003). Beyond neopositivists, romantics, and localists: A reflexive approach to interviews in organizational research. *The Academy of Management Review*, *2*(1), 13–33. [CrossRef]

Arregle, J. L., Hitt, M. A., Sirmon, D. G., & Very, P. (2007). The development of organizational social capital: Attributes of family firms. *Journal of Management Studies*, *44*(1), 73–95. [CrossRef]

Bernard, R. H. (2002). *Research methods in anthropology—Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (3rd ed.). Altamira Press.

Blau, P. M. (1964). *Exchange and power in social life*. John Wiley.

Bock, G. W., & Young-Gul, K. (2002). Breaking the myths of rewards: An exploratory study of attitudes about knowledge sharing. *Information Resources Management Journal*, *15*, 14–21. [CrossRef]

Bolton, G., & Ockenfels, A. (2000). ERC: A theory of equity, reciprocity, and competition. *The American Economic Review*, *90*(1), 166–193. [CrossRef]

Bontis, N., Chong Keow, W., & Richardson, S. (2000). Intellectual capital and business performance in Malaysian industries. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *1*(1), 85–100. [CrossRef]

Borgatti, S., & Foster, P. (2003). The network paradigm in organizational research: A review and typology. *Journal of Management*, *29*(6), 991–1013. [CrossRef]

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. G. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241–258). Greenwood.

Bracke, P. (2016). Social networks and relational capital in library service assessment. *Performance Measurement and Metrics*, *17*(2), 134–141. [CrossRef]

Brenner, M. (1985). Survey interviewing. In M. Brenner, J. Brown, & D. Canter (Eds.), *The research interview: Uses and approaches* (pp. 9–36). Academic Press.

Camerer, C. F., & Malmendier, U. (2007). Behavioral economics of organizations. In P. Diamond, & H. Vartiainen (Eds.), *Behavioral economics and its applications* (pp. 235–290). Princeton University Press.

Carr, J. C., Cole, M. S., Ring, J. K., & Blettner, D. P. (2011). A measure of variations in internal social capital among family firms. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, *35*(6), 1207–1227. [CrossRef]

Carrillo, F. J. (2002). Capital systems: Implications for a global knowledge agenda. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, *6*(4), 379–399. [CrossRef]

Castro, G., López, P., & Navas, J. (2004). The role of corporate reputation in developing relational capital. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *5*(4), 575–585. [CrossRef]

Cegarra-Navarro, J. G., Martinez Caro, E., Martínez-Martínez, A., Aledo-Ruiz, M. D., & Martínez-Conesa, E. (2021). Capacities, competences and capabilities as knowledge structures to build relational capital. *Kybernetes*, *50*(5), 1303–1320. [CrossRef]

Cegarra-Navarro, J. G., Wensley, A., Garcia-Perez, A., & Sotos-Villarejo, A. (2016). Linking peripheral vision with relational capital through knowledge structures. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *17*(4), 714–733. [CrossRef]

Chang, M. (2020). Can intergroup conflict aid the growth of within-and between-group social capital? *Journal of Management & Organization*, *26*(1), 52–74.

Chatman, J. (1991). Matching people and organizations: Selection and socialization in public accounting firms. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *36*(3), 459–484. [CrossRef]

Chen, M.-H., Wang, H.-Y., & Wang, M.-C. (2018). Knowledge sharing, social capital, and financial performance: The perspectives of innovation strategy in technological clusters. *Knowledge Management Research & Practice*, *16*(1), 89–104.

Cheng, Q., & Chang, Y. (2019). Influencing factors of knowledge collaboration effects in knowledge alliances. *Knowledge Management Research & Practice*, *18*(4), 380–393. [CrossRef]

Chia-Yu, K. (2019). Subjective interdependencies in knowledge integration. *Knowledge Management Research & Practice*, *18*(4), 394–404. [CrossRef]

Chirban, J. T. (1996). *Interviewing in depth: The interactive-relational approach*. Sage.

Coleman, J. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. Supplement: Organizations and institutions: Sociological and economic approaches to the analysis of social structure. *The American Journal of Sociology*, *94*, S95–S120. [CrossRef]

Collins, J., & Hitt, M. (2006). Leveraging tacit knowledge in alliances: The importance of using relational capabilities to build and leverage relational capital. *Journal of Engineering and Technology Management*, *23*, 147–167. [CrossRef]

Corvino, A., Caputo, F., Pironti, M., Doni, F., & Bianchi Martini, S. (2019). The moderating effect of firm size on relational capital and firm performance: Evidence from Europe. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *20*(4), 510–532. [CrossRef]

Cousins, P., Handfield, R., Lawson, B., & Petersen, K. (2006). Creating supply chain relational capital: The impact of formal and informal socialization processes. *Journal of Operations Management*, *24*, 851–863. [CrossRef]

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Sage Publications, Inc.

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.

Crosby, L., Evans, K., & Cowles, D. (1990). Relationship quality in services selling: An interpersonal influence perspective. *The Journal of Marketing*, *54*(3), 68–81. [CrossRef]

Cucculelli, M., Peruzzi, V., & Zazzaro, A. (2019). Relational capital in lending relationships: Evidence from European family firms. *Small Business Economics*, *52*(1), 277–301. [CrossRef]

Debicki, B. J., Ramírez-Solís, E. R., Baños-Monroy, V. I., & Gutiérrez-Patrón, L. M. (2020). The impact of strategic focus on relational capital: A comparative study of family and non-family firms. *Journal of Business Research*, *119*, 585–598. [CrossRef]

Delerue-Vidot, H. (2006). Opportunism and unilateral commitment: The moderating effect of relational capital. *Management Decision*, *44*(6), 737–751. [CrossRef]

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. Sage Publications.

De Silva, M., Rossi, F., & Searle, N. (2024). How do firms shape their interactions with universities to build structural, human and relational capital? A mixed-method study of UK firms that interact with universities. *The Journal of Technology Transfer*, 1–36. [CrossRef]

Dewhurst, F., & Cegarra, J. (2004). External communities of practice and relational capital. *The Learning Organization Journal*, *11*(4/5), 322–331. [CrossRef]

Dhanaraj, C., Lyles, M., Steensma, K., & Tihanyi, L. (2004). Managing tacit and explicit knowledge transfer in IJVs: The role of relational embeddedness and the impact on performance. *Journal of International Business Studies*, *35*(5), 428–442. [CrossRef]

Diamond, P., & Vartiainen, H. (Eds.). (2007). *Behavioral economics and its applications*. Princeton University Press.

Dohmen, T., Falk, A., Huffman, D., & Sunde, U. (2009). Homo reciprocans: Survey evidence on behavioral outcomes. *The Economic Journal*, *119*, 592–612. [CrossRef]

Du Preez, N., Louw, L., & Lutters, E. (2008). A knowledge network approach supporting the value chain. In *Methods and tools for effective knowledge life-cycle-management* (pp. 159–168). Springer.

Durst, S., Foli, S., & Edvardsson, I. R. (2024). A systematic literature review on knowledge management in SMEs: Current trends and future directions. *Management Review Quarterly*, *74*(1), 263–288. [CrossRef]

Dwyer, F. R., Schurr, P. H., & Oh, S. (1987). Developing buyer-seller relationships. *Journal of Marketing*, *51*(2), 11–27. [CrossRef]

Dyer, J. H., & Singh, H. (1998). The relational view: Cooperative strategy and sources of interorganizational competitive advantage. *Academy of Management Review*, *23*(4), 660–679. [CrossRef]

Farr, J. (2004). Social capital: A conceptual history. *Political Theory*, *32*(1), 6–33. [CrossRef]

Fehr, E., & Gächter, S. (1998). Reciprocity and economics: The economic implications of homo reciprocans. *European Economic Review*, *42*, 845–859. [CrossRef]

Fehr, E., & Gächter, S. (2000). Fairness and retaliation: The economics of reciprocity. *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, *14*(3), 159–181. [CrossRef]

Fehr, E., & Schmidt, K. (1999). A theory of fairness, competition, and cooperation. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *114*(3), 817–868. [CrossRef]

Granovetter, M. S. (1973). The strength of weak ties. *American Journal of Sociology*, *78*(6), 1360–1380. [CrossRef]

Greene, J., Caracelli, V., & Graham, W. (1989). Toward a conceptual framework for mixed-method evaluation designs. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *11*(3), 255–274. [CrossRef]

Gulati, R. (1995). Does familiarity breed trust? The implications of repeated ties for contractual choice in alliances. *Academy of Management Journal*, *38*, 85–112. [CrossRef]

Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (1995). *Ethnography: Principles in practice*. Routledge.

Han, J., & Pashouwers, R. (2018). Willingness to share knowledge in healthcare organisations: The role of relational perception. *Knowledge Management Research & Practice*, *16*(1), 42–50.

Hayer, J. S., & Ibeh, K. I. (2006). Ethnic networks and small firm internationalisation: A study of UK-based Indian enterprises. *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation Management*, *6*(6), 508–525. [CrossRef]

Hsiao, Y. (2019). Exploring service innovation and value creation: The critical role of network relationships. *Journal of Management & Organization*, *25*(1), 4–25.

Huxham, C. (1996). *Creating collaborative advantage*. Sage.

Iazzolino, G., Chiappetta, F., & Chiappetta, S. (2018). Relational Capital and financial performance: An empirical analysis on a sample of Italian firms. *Problems and Perspectives in Management*, *16*(1), 245–258. [CrossRef]

Inkpen, A., & Tsang, E. (2005). Social capital, networks, and knowledge transfer. *Academy of Management Review*, *30*(1), 146–165. [CrossRef]

Jick, T. D. (1979). Mixing qualitative and quantitative methods: Triangulation in action. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *24*(4), 602–611. [CrossRef]

Johnson, W. (1999). An integrative taxonomy of intellectual capital: Measuring the stock and flow of intellectual capital components in the firm. *International Journal of Technology Management*, *18*, 562–575. [CrossRef]

Jorgensen, D. L. (1989). *Participant observation—A methodology for human studies* (p. 15). Applied Social Research Methods Serie; SAGE Publications.

Kale, P., Singh, H., & Perlmutter, H. (2000). Learning and protection of proprietary assets in strategic alliance: Building relational capital. *Strategic Management Journal*, *21*, 217–237. [CrossRef]

Kianto, A., Andreeva, T., & Pavlov, Y. (2013). The impact of intellectual capital management on company competitiveness and financial performance. *Knowledge Management Research and Practice*, *11*(4), 112–122. [CrossRef]

Kilduff, M., & Tsai, W. (2007). *Social networks an organizations*. SAGE Publications.

Kumar, R. (2005). *Research methodology: A step by step guide for beginners*. Sage.

Kvale, S. (2006). Dominance through interviews and dialogues. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *12*(3), 480–500. [CrossRef]

Lagesa, C., Lagesb, C., & Lagesc, L. (2005). The RELQUAL scale: A measure of relationship quality in export market ventures. *Journal of Business Research*, *58*, 1040–1048. [CrossRef]

Lesser, E., & Everest, K. (2001). Using communities of practice to manage intellectual capital. *Ivey Business Journal*, *65*(3), 37–41.

Lietz, C., Langer, C., & Furman, R. (2006). Establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research in social work: Implications from a study regarding spirituality. *Qualitative Social Work*, *5*(4), 441–458. [CrossRef]

Mack, N., Woodsong, C., MacQueen, K. M., Guest, G., & Namey, E. (2005). *Qualitative research methods: A data collector's field guide*. Family Health International.

Madhavaram, S., Appan, R., Manis, K. T., & Browne, G. J. (2023). Building capabilities for software development firm competitiveness: The role of intellectual capital and intra-firm relational capital. *Information & Management*, *60*(2), 103744.

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (1999). *Designing qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Mason, J. (1998). *Qualitative researching*. Sage Publications.

Mason, J. (2002). *Qualitative researching* (2nd ed.). Sage.

Mazzarol, T., Clark, D., Reboud, S., & Mamouni Limnios, E. (2018). Developing a conceptual framework for the co-operative and mutual enterprise business model. *Journal of Management & Organization*, *24*(4), 551–581.

McFadyen, M., & Cannella, A. (2004). Social capital and knowledge creation: Diminishing returns of the number and strength of exchange relationships. *Academy of Management Journal*, *47*(5), 735–746. [CrossRef]

Mikovic, R., Petrovic, D., Mihic, M., Obradovic, V., & Todorovic, M. (2019). Examining the relationship between social capital and knowledge usage in the nonprofit industry. *Knowledge Management Research & Practice*, *17*(3), 328–339.

Mishler, E. (1986). *Research interviewing: Context and narrative*. Harvard University Press.

Mohammad, S. M., Warkentin, M., & Motamed, S. (2024). Do human capital and relational capital influence knowledge-intensive firm competitiveness? The roles of export orientation and marketing knowledge capability. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, *28*(1), 138–160. [CrossRef]

Moran, P. (2005). Structural vs. relational embeddedness: Social capital and managerial performance. *Strategic Management Journal*, *26*, 1129–1151. [CrossRef]

Mu, J., Peng, G., & Love, E. (2008). Interfirm networks, social capital, and knowledge flow. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, *12*(4), 86–100. [CrossRef]

Nahapiet, J., & Ghoshal, S. (1998). Social capital, intellectual capital, and the organizational advantage. *The Academy of Management Review*, *23*(2), 242–266. [CrossRef]

Naudé, P., & Buttle, F. (2000). Assessing relationship quality. *Industrial Marketing Management*, *29*, 351–361. [CrossRef]

Nicholson, G., Alexander, M., & Kiel, G. (2004). Defining the social capital of the board of directors: An exploratory study. *Journal of Management & Organization*, *10*(1), 54–72.

Nonino, F. (2013). The network dimensions of intra-organizational social capital. *Journal of Management & Organization*, *19*(4), 454–477.

Ocicka, B., & Wieteska, G. (2019). An exploration of the measurement of relational capital in supply chains. *Operations and Supply Chain Management*, *12*(3), 143–152. [CrossRef]

Onge, H. (1996). Tacit knowledge: The key to the strategic alignment of intellectual capital. *Strategy & Leadership*, *24*(2), 10–14.

Palmer, J. (1997). The human organization. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, *1*(4), 294–307. [CrossRef]

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Pearson, A. W., Carr, J. C., & Shaw, J. C. (2008). Toward a theory of familiness: A social capital perspective. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, *32*(6), 949–969. [CrossRef]

Phelps, C., Heidl, R., & Wadhwa, A. (2012). Knowledge, networks, and knowledge networks: A review and research agenda. *Journal of Management*, *38*(4), 1115–1166. [CrossRef]

Phong, B. L., & Hui, L. (2018). Fostering knowledge sharing behaviours through ethical leadership practice: The mediating roles of disclosure-based trust and reliance-based trust in leadership. *Knowledge Management Research & Practice*, *16*(2), 183–195.

Pierre, L. (2010). Interorganizational IT investments and the value upstream relational capital. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *11*(3), 406–428.

Portes, A. (1998). Social capital: Its origins and applications in modern sociology. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *24*, 1–24. [CrossRef]

Portes, A. (2000). The two meanings of social capital. *Sociological Forum*, *15*(1), 1–12. [CrossRef]

Rivera, A. E., & Carrillo, F. J. (2016). Relational capital wealth in an organizational context. *Knowledge Management Research & Practice*, *14*(4), 434–444.

Robertson, J., McCarthy, I., & Pitt, L. (2019). Leveraging social capital in university-industry knowledge transfer strategies: A comparative positioning framework. *Knowledge Management Research & Practice*, *17*(4), 461–472.

Rodríguez-Aceves, L., Mojarro-Durán, B. I., & Rivera, A. E. (2023). Enabling knowledge sharing through relational capital in a family business context. *Journal of Knowledge Economy 14*, 2156–2186. [CrossRef]

Rosenthal, E. (1997). Social networks and team performance. *Team Performance Management*, *3*(4), 288–294. [CrossRef]

Ryu, D., Baek, K. H., & Yoon, J. (2021). Open innovation with relational capital, technological innovation capital, and international performance in SMEs. *Sustainability*, *13*(6), 3418. [CrossRef]

Sarkar, M. B., Echambadi, R., Cavusgil, T., Preet, S., & Aulakh, P. (2001). The influence of complementarity, compatibility, and relationship capital on alliance performance. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *29*(4), 358–373. [CrossRef]

Schneider, B. (1987). The people make the place. *Personnel Psychology*, *40*, 437–453. [CrossRef]

Scott, J. (2009). *Social network analysis—A handbook* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.

Silverman, D. (2006). *Interpreting qualitative data: Methods for analyzing talk, text and interaction*. Sage Publications.

Soekijad, M., van den Hooff, B., Agterberg, M., & Huysman, M. (2011). Leading to learn in networks of practice: Two leadership strategies. *Organization Studies*, *32*(8), 1005–1027. [CrossRef]

Storbacka, K., Strandvik, T., & Grönroos, C. (1994). Managing customer relationships for profit: The dynamics of relationship quality. *International Journal of Service Industry Management*, *5*(5), 21–38. [CrossRef]

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basic of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.

Tang, F., Mu, J., & MacLachlan, D. L. (2008). Implication of network size and structure on organizations' knowledge transfer. *Expert Systems with Applications*, *34*(2), 1109–1114. [CrossRef]

Tiwana, A., & Bush, A. A. (2005). Continuance in expertise-sharing networks: A social perspective. *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management*, *52*(1), 85–101. [CrossRef]

Topal, C. (2015). A relational perspective of institutional work. *Journal of Management & Organization*, *21*(4), 495–514.

Tsai, W., & Ghoshal, S. (1998). Social capital and value creation: The role of intrafirm networks. *Academy of Management Journal*, *41*(4), 464–476. [CrossRef]

Vasileiadou, E. (2012). Research teams as complex systems: Implications for knowledge management. *Knowledge Management Research and Practice*, *10*(2), 118–127. [CrossRef]

Wang, H. K., Tseng, J. F., & Yen, Y. F. (2014). How do institutional norms and trust influence knowledge sharing? An institutional theory. *Innovation*, *16*(3), 374–391. [CrossRef]

Wasko, M. M., & Faraj, S. (2005). Why should I share? Examining social capital and knowledge contribution in electronic networks of practice. *MIS Quarterly*, *29*, 35–57. [CrossRef]

Wasserman, S., & Faust, K. (2009). *Structural analysis in the social science—Social networks analysis—Methods and applications*. SAGE Publications.

Weerakoon, C., McMurray, A., Rametse, N., & Arenius, P. (2019). Social capital and innovativeness of social enterprises: Opportunity-motivation-ability and knowledge creation as mediators. *Knowledge Management Research & Practice*, *18*(2), 147–161. [CrossRef]

Welbourne, T., & Pardo-del-Val, M. (2009). Relational capital: Strategic advantage for small and Medium-Size Enterprises (SMEs) through negotiation and collaboration. *Group Decision and Negotiation*, *18*, 483–449. [CrossRef]

Weng, R., & Huang, C. (2012). The impact of customer knowledge capability and relational capability on new service development performance: The case of health service. *Journal of Management & Organization*, *18*(5), 608–624.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning and identity*. Cambridge University Press.

Wenger, E., & Snyder, W. (2000). Communities of practice: The organizational frontier. *Harvard Business Review*, *78*, 139–146.

Wilson, D., & Jantrania, S. (1994). Understanding the value of a relationship. *Australian Marketing Journal*, *2*(1), 55–66. [CrossRef]

Yan, W., Schiehll, E., & Muller-Kahle, M. I. (2019). Human and relational capital behind the structural power of CEOs in Chinese listed firms. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, *36*, 715–743. [CrossRef]

Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods* (3rd ed., Vol. 5). Applied social research methods series; SAGE Publications.

Zaheer, A., McEvily, B., & Perrone, V. (1998). Does trust matter? Exploring the effects of interorganizational and interpersonal trust on performance. *Organization Science*, *9*, 1–20. [CrossRef]

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.