

# *Capitalizing on community music: a case study of the manifestation of social capital in a community choir*

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**ABSTRACT** There is an extensive literature on social capital and its generation and use in communities, but less is known about the ways in which social capital is manifested in community music settings. The literature suggests that social capital is evidenced through a range of 'indicators', including trust, community and civic involvement, and networks. This article reports the findings of a research project that examined the manifestation of social capital in a community choir in regional Tasmania. The study employed multiple data-generation methods including survey, field notes, and artefact-elicited, semi-structured interviews in a qualitative interpretive case study design. An analysis of narrative approach was used to interrogate data generated with the 27 members (the *Tutti*) of the 'Milton' Community Choir, and to identify those social capital indicators present. Through analyses of these data, findings suggest that the social capital indicators identified in the literature, specifically those of shared norms and values, trust, civic and community involvement, networks, knowledge resources, and contact with families and friends are present in the community choir. Further, a previously unemphasized social capital indicator, that of *fellowship*, is identified as a key component in fostering group cohesion and social capital development in the community choir.

**KEYWORDS:** *analysis of narratives, artefact elicitation, fellowship, qualitative, case study, semi-structured interviews, social capital indicators*

## *Introduction*

Community music organizations such as choirs and instrumental ensembles are an integral part of the social and cultural fabric of many communities (Veblen & Olsson, 2002). Despite this, the role of such ensembles in community engagement and development is not well understood. The phenomenon of social capital has been described as the 'glue that holds society together' (Serageldin, as cited in Grootaert, 1998, p. ii)

and is arguably one of the key outcomes of positive community music engagement and participation. This article examines the manifestation of social capital in a community choir in order to contribute to our understanding of the ways in which community music engagement and participation may shape community. Data collection techniques consisted of a 'Thoughts on the choir' survey, a demographic survey, field notes and semi-structured interviews. This article presents an 'analysis of narratives' (Polkinghorne, 1995) of extended semi-structured interviews conducted with the 27 participants in the 'Milton' community choir, the *Tutti*. The social capital indicators reflected in the data are presented, and emergent themes are grouped into categories relating to these social capital indicators. Through this analysis, a significant, yet previously neglected social capital indicator – *fellowship* – has emerged.

## *Theoretical framework*

### SOCIAL CAPITAL

Social capital, or 'social fabric' (Cox, 1995), has been described as consisting of patterns of social norms, networks and trust that encourage cooperation for mutual benefit, and serve to support major democratic organizations and economic growth (Putnam, 1993, 1995a, 1996, 2000).

Social capital may be subdivided into three forms, each with different characteristics:

- *Bonding* (Coleman, 1988; Giorgas, 2000; Kilpatrick & Abbott-Chapman, 2002; Lesser & Storck, 2001; National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), 2004; Portes & Landolt, 1996; Putnam, 2000, 2001; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000);
- *Bridging* (Beugelsdijk & Smulders, 2003; NCVER, 2004; Putnam, 2000, 2001; Woolcock, 2001; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000);
- *Linking* (Putnam, 2001, Stone, 2003; Woolcock, 2001; Woolcock & Sweetser, 2003).

Bonding social capital is described as 'a kind of sociological superglue' holding groups together (Putnam, 2000, p. 23). In this sense, bonding social capital is reflected in families or close-knit, common-purpose groups (NCVER, 2004). In such groups, bonding social capital enhances solidarity of groups with specific interests; however, it may also exclude individuals who do not fit group social mores or exhibit group norms and values (Putnam, 2000). Bridging social capital, a 'sociological WD-40' (Putnam, 2000, p. 23), is more outward looking than bonding social capital and facilitates 'relations between groups with significant differences' (NCVER, 2004, p. 37). Linking social capital emphasizes vertical links between organizations and 'people in power, whether they are in politically or financially influential positions' (Woolcock & Sweetser, 2003, p. 2). In this way, linking social capital facilitates the leveraging of 'resources, ideas and information from formal institutions beyond the community' (Woolcock, 2001, p. 4).

Coleman (1988) suggests that although individuals may use social capital to advance their own causes, interacting with others is still important as 'unlike other forms of capital, social capital inheres in the structure of relations between actors and among actors' (p. S118). Others (Van der Gaag, 2004; Van der Gaag & Snijders, 2004)

consider that the social capital of individuals may be pooled to benefit organizations and communities. Regardless of the perspective taken, whilst social capital may have a benefit for an individual, it is still a collective phenomenon requiring interaction.

#### INDICATORS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

The questions of how we tell if social capital is present for an individual or community, and how we measure its quantity and/or qualities, have been subject to considerable debate (see Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2000, 2002; Bullen & Onyx, 1998a, 1998b; Flora & Flora, n.d.; Fukuyama, 1999; Glaeser 2001; Glaeser, Laibson & Sacerdote, 2001; Grootaert & van Bastelaer, 2001; Narayan & Cassidy, 2001; Onyx & Bullen, 1997, 2000; Serageldin, 1998; Spellerberg, 2001; Stone, 2001; Van der Gaag, 2004; Van der Gaag & Snijders, 2004). Various indicators of social capital have emerged from this body of literature and have been grouped in a variety of ways including:

- participation, interaction and civic involvement;
- networks and connections;
- families and friends;
- reciprocity and obligations;
- trust;
- norms and values;
- learning; and
- membership of faith-based organizations.

Each of these will be addressed in the sections that follow.

#### *Participation, interaction and civic involvement*

Civic involvement as a social capital indicator involves active and positive voluntary participation rather than passive membership (Putnam, 2000). The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) in Australia suggests that 'social capital facilitates voluntary activity; which in turn generates more social capital ... a virtuous circle' (2003, p. 2). In this vein, Putnam suggests 'members of Florentine choral societies participate because they like to sing, not because their participation strengthens the Tuscan social fabric. But it does' (1993, p. 3). Such voluntary participation provides an environment in which networks may be developed.

#### *Networks and connections*

Networks and connections have been identified as an important indicator and component of social capital (Anheier, Gerhards, & Romo, 1995; Blakeley, 1997; Bullen & Onyx, 1998b; Coleman, 1988; Cox, 1995; Falk & Kilpatrick, 1999; Fountain & Atkinson, 1998; Giorgas, 2000; Kolankiewicz, 1996; Lesser & Storck, 2001; Norton, 1998; Putnam, 1993, 1995b, 1996, 2000; Schuller, 2000; Sirianni & Friedland, 1995; Stone, 2001; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). For Putnam (2000), social networks have value, and form the core idea of social capital theory (p. 19). Networks are invaluable to the formation of social capital within a community. This is evidenced in the connections within networks and attendant processes such as: sharing of resources and information; generation of obligations within one environment and accessing

payback; use of obligations within different environments; and the cultivation of mutual benefit. Networks facilitate interpersonal and inter-organizational transactions, communication, information sharing and reciprocity, and can be beneficial to individuals and to groups who have common interests and/or understandings. This interlinking of the lives and experiences of people facilitates social inclusion, efficient information flow, resource use, formation of groups, knowledge about others, and community cohesiveness for the mutual benefit of the individual and the community. Putnam (2000) suggests that family and friends provide the most intimate social network for most people (p. 274).

#### *Families and friends*

Involvement with family and friends is considered by many authors to be a strong indicator of social capital (Bullen & Onyx, 1999; Fukuyama, 1995; Putnam, 2000) and the initial source of social capital (Kerka, 2003). Indeed, family may be a form of social capital in itself (Putnam, 2000) and may play a crucial role in further social capital formation (Bullen & Onyx, 1999; Fukuyama, 1995; Putnam, 2000). Bullen and Onyx (1999) argue that trust, tolerance, pro-activity, and the capacity to develop networks and a sense of self-worth are developed in children and young adults within 'functional' families. It should be noted that this view of the benefit of family to social capital and associationism is not universally accepted. Fukuyama (1995) suggests that the strong family ties found in Asian societies such as Taiwan, Hong Kong and the People's Republic of China, lead to 'weak voluntary associations because unrelated people have no basis for trusting one another' (pp. 28–29). However, even in these circumstances, strong family ties do develop strong bonding social capital within the families themselves.

#### *Reciprocity and obligations*

Putnam (1993) holds that networks of civic engagement foster 'norms of generalized reciprocity' (p. 3) indicative of a more trusting society. When individuals participate in community activities or services there is often an expectation that others will reciprocate. Reciprocity is often regarded as indicative of a society rich in social capital (Blakeley, 1997; Bullen & Onyx, 1998b; Coleman, 1988; Falk & Kilpatrick, 1999; Fountain & Atkinson, 1998; Kolankiewicz, 1996; Lesser & Storck, 2001; Paldam & Svendsen, 1999; Portes & Landolt, 1996; Putnam, 2000; Sirianni & Friedland, 1995; Stone, 2001).

Obligation as a social capital indicator appears to be a subset of reciprocity and trust. Trust and the recognition that obligations will be repaid are seen as the pivotal point of the relationship aspect of social capital (Coleman, 1988, p. S102; Paldam & Svendsen, 1999, p. 7).

#### *Trust*

Trust in the form of general mutual trust that one might have for another, or trust that people will behave in certain ways, is a central component of most descriptions and definitions of social capital. Trust is also identified as a social capital indicator and a critical component of social cohesion (Ammerman, 1996; Blakeley, 1997; Bullen &

Onyx, 1998a, 1998b; Coleman, 1988; Cox, 1995; Dietz, 2000; Falk & Kilpatrick, 1999; Fountain & Atkinson, 1998; Fukuyama, 1995; Grootaert, 1998; Kolankiewicz, 1996; Lesser & Storck, 2001; Paldam & Svendsen, 1999; Portes & Landolt, 1996; Putnam, 1993, 1995a, 1995b, 1996, 2000; Schuller, 2000; Sirianni & Friedland, 1995; Stone, 2001; Wehlage, 2000).

Paldam and Svendsen (1999) define social capital as, 'the level of mutual trust existing in a group which might be extended to the whole of the society' (p. 3). For these authors, trust is a mutual expectation arising from cooperative behaviour based on community acceptability, and shared norms such as religious or justice values, professional standards and codes of behaviour. The benefits of trust as a facilitator of collective action are many. Wehlage (2000) suggests that, 'when people trust each other, and when they share values, expectations, and goals, they are in a position to organize themselves to achieve some collective goals – a common purpose' (p. 3).

Without trust, there can be no social capital. Trust has to be a norm – the product of, and a precondition for, social capital.

### *Norms and values*

Norms and values established within communities are considered important indicators of social capital as they provide a form of informal social control (Bullen & Onyx, 1998a, 1998b; Coleman, 1988; Cox, 1995; Falk & Kilpatrick, 1999; Fountain & Atkinson, 1998; Grootaert, 1998; Lesser & Storck, 2001; Paldam & Svendsen, 1999; Putnam, 1993, 1995a, 1996, 2000; Schuller, 2000; Serageldin, 1998; Sirianni & Friedland, 1995; Stone, 2001). For social capital to develop, a community has to have some degree of common understanding, acceptance, and sharing of common norms of action and values. Paldam and Svendsen (1999) suggest that self-enforcement of norms grows out of trust, 'because trust assures you that another individual will not take advantage of you even if he might get an economic net benefit from doing it, self-enforcement is possible' (pp. 7–8). Such self-enforcement leads to the suggestion that in social capital rich communities there is a feeling of safety, and crime is low. The acceptance of common norms of action and values by the participants within an organization, or community, facilitates the development of common understanding, and access to the shared knowledge and information that facilitates the development of a sense of belonging.

### *Learning*

Learning as a social capital indicator has been examined in depth. Balatti and Falk (2001) suggest that such learning occurs 'when the set of interactions calls upon existing knowledge and identity resources and adds to them. Changes in knowledge and identity resources i.e., changes in social capital, are indicators of learning' (p. 4).

Falk (2000) suggests that social capital developed through interactions facilitates learning, use of skills and knowledge, and 'promotes active and sustainable learning' (p. 2). Falk and Kilpatrick (1999) suggest that where there are sufficient quantity and quality of learning interactions, social capital is the result of learning interactions that take place during a learning event, in a 'particular socio-cultural context' (p. 6). Learning may take place not only with individuals, but also with groups within the

community, informally, as people go about their everyday activities (Falk & Harrison, 1998; Falk & Kilpatrick, 1999; Kerka, 2003). Learning not only results from the kinds of interactions that foster social capital (e.g., actions that develop trust, networks, shared norms and values), but also helps to facilitate the development of social capital by providing opportunities for social capital to be created.

### *Membership of faith-based organizations*

Membership of faith-based organizations is considered by some to be a social capital indicator (Putnam, 2000; Saguaro Seminar 2001). Ammerman (1996) suggests that faith-based organizations provide an environment in which members may develop leadership and political skills. Faith-based organizations deliberately foster connectivity as part of their social role.

To summarize, the indicators of social capital are many and diverse. Whilst the presence of all indicators outlined above is not considered necessary for social capital to be manifested within a community and/or organization, those of trust, and reciprocity and obligation, appear to be central to any account of social capital. The presence of other indicators appears to depend on the nature of the organization. In the following section, an account of the methods and techniques employed to identify those social capital indicators manifested in a community choir will be provided.

## *Methodology*

The study was designed as a qualitative interpretive case study (Stake, 1995) of a community choir in 'Milton', a regional Australian city.<sup>1</sup> Multiple data-generation methods including survey, field notes and artefact-elicited semi-structured interviews were employed to examine participants' experiences and perceptions, their accounts of interactions within Milton Community Choir (MCC) as individuals, and the interactions of MCC with other community members and groups. All members of the choir were invited to participate in the study and 27 members (from a total of 30) consented to participate. The first-named author (Langston) is the conductor of this ensemble, and has known the choir members in this capacity for some 20 years. MCC is a mixed-voice choir of (mainly) retired people. The choir's repertoire concentrates on large-scale choral works such as oratorios. Entry to the choir is open with no audition requirements. A feature of the choir is the recruitment of all soloists from within the membership. The choir is managed by a committee of members who select the repertoire and venues, and make all arrangements with venue owners. Entry to all concerts is free. Weekly rehearsals and regular performances form the major part of the life of MCC. Consequently, rehearsal and concert experiences are the key shared activity of the members.

### DATA GENERATION

At the commencement of the data generation, a short demographic survey was administered. This provided an overview of the age, musical education, musical experience and demographic characteristics of the choir members and served primarily to inform the structure of the interview schedule. The interview schedule was designed to elicit participants' accounts of their musical education, their engagement and participation

in community music organizations other than MCC, and their perceptions of their contribution to the choir and that of the choir to their lives and that of the Milton and regional community. The schedule was informed by the literature and provided an opportunity to probe the ways in which social capital was manifested and used in the participants' experience in and through the choir.

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 27 MCC members. The interviews took place in a location determined by each participant, generally the participant's home, and lasted between one and two hours. As the first-named author had developed a long-term relationship with each participant through their respective membership of MCC, these interviews were informal, relaxed, and generally conducted over refreshments. Artefact elicitation was employed in each interview, and involved playing a piece of music to the participants that was similar in style to the repertoire performed by MCC. Participants' reflections on their own experiences of performing this style of music and deep perspective of the experience of performing music were elicited. Thus, artefact elicitation provided a means of eliciting knowledge and attitudes that may have remained hidden during the interview process (Barrett & Smigiel, 2003), and enabled participants to 'externalise their knowledge that would otherwise remain inaccessible' (Teeravarunyou & Sato, 2001, p. 1).

Field notes were recorded at the conclusion of each interview and focused on capturing key non-verbal components of the interview and relevant contextual detail. The first-named author's long history with the participants ensured that rapport was present and strong (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000), that they spoke the same language (Fontana & Frey, 2000), the language of MCC and of music, and that access and interaction were facilitated. This long history also enabled the first-named author to reflect on the accounts of events provided by participants and to check these accounts against his own recollections and those of others.

The credibility of the data and interpretations was addressed through prolonged engagement, triangulation (multiple sources – 27 MCC members), and member checking procedures. All interview transcripts were transcribed and member checked by participants, and the findings of the study checked with the choir collectively. 'Virtuous researchers' regard reflexivity as 'synonymous with thinking critically about one's research practices ... wherein one identifies possible sources for the anxiety of influence' (Maton, 2003, p. 55). Consequently, the first-named author's role was acknowledged including possible influences on both participants and interpretation of the data. Similar kinds of critical analysis were applied to his role as researcher as that applied to participants (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2002; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Foley, 1998; Haskell, Linds & Ippolito, 2002; Ruby, 1980) and every attempt was made to remain open to new and/or surprising information. Constant dialogue between the two authors and challenging of data and interpretation assisted in this process of critical analysis.

#### ANALYSIS

Polkinghorne (1995), building on Bruner's work (1986), suggests two analytical techniques for narrative. The first, narrative analysis, takes data from a range of sources (e.g., descriptions and story fragments) and re-stories them 'by means of a plot into a story or stories' (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 12). The second technique (used

in this article), analysis of narrative, examines participant accounts (stories) as data and analyses the stories through paradigmatic processes. Consequently, 'paradigmatic analysis results in descriptions of themes that hold across the stories or in taxonomies of types of stories, characters, or settings' (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 12). The themes emergent from the data analysis are presented in the following.

## *Findings*

The analysis of narratives of the *Tutti* reveals a number of common features that equate to social capital indicators described earlier. These indicators include trust in a variety of forms, participation, interaction, civic and community involvement, friendship (that can sometimes be in the words of one choir member, Olivia, 'a bit like a family'), cooperation and collaboration. Networks, obligation and reciprocity, faith-based engagement, shared norms and values, learning, and the hitherto largely ignored social capital indicator of *fellowship* also emerge from the analysis of the data as recurring themes throughout the responses from the *Tutti*.

### TRUST

Trust appears in many forms. Competence trust (Hargreaves, 2003) as manifested through trust in one's own and others' capability, is an important aspect of the life of MCC. Its presence is appreciated and mentioned often as a characteristic of MCC. For example, when trust in the abilities of the members to perform solos, duets or quartets is demonstrated, opportunities are provided for personal growth, and for the development of collective efficacy (Bandura, 1986):

Whether you are trained or not, you are likely to be asked to take a singular part like a solo or duet, or something like that, straight out of the blue and this is great. There are very few choirmasters who will pick on someone who is untrained to do this sort of work. It gives everybody a new lease on life almost. They feel they can do this, and it gives everybody a lift. I think they come on much the stronger for it. You usually find in a choir that it is the trained singers, the ones who usually do the solos that are picked each time ... I think it helps the individual very much to develop. (Daniel)

The combination of trust and commitment (trust as the indicator that social capital is developing, and commitment as the element of social capital) is one way in which the presence of social capital is manifested within MCC. Many members speak of commitment in relation to 'loyalty and regular attendance and punctuality and paying attention' (Oliver). Contractual trust (Hargreaves, 2003) is concerned with meeting obligations and keeping promises, albeit implied promises made when joining MCC. William, a consistent and punctual attender, is adamant that reliability is a major factor if the group is to learn new works:

A good choir member should turn up reliably. You cannot rehearse anything if people are erratic. He has to be fairly consistent. It is not always possible to be there every time but they should be. I think they owe it to the group and to themselves to arrive on time and do their bit and then come back and do it week after week because otherwise it is very hard to learn new work and you have got to be prepared to do that. It is not much good being an erratic member. (William)

Trust influences the way members engage with each other, and builds as members become aware of the nature of others in the community choir, their skills and attitudes, likes and dislikes, and willingness to voice opinions. Gaining confidence through participation, trust in their own abilities and the abilities of others, and bolstered by the willing support given by others is important to singers of lesser competence. Such support builds bonding social capital through the development of internal support networks (Bandura, 1997; Sirianni & Friedland, 1995).

Implicit in the contractual trust between the choir and the community is a sense of reciprocity and obligation. For one member, reciprocity and obligation may be seen through the choir, 'almost educating people to the love of music, and to listen, and to expect' (Olivia). For others, the expectation of joy in participation and joy in listening to the major works they perform, and the expectation that MCC will be a focal point of any significant community or civic event, are important aspects of reciprocity:

In Milton ... it is the only choir that can do oratorio like ... *Messiah* ... *Creation* and ... Mozart's *Requiem*, and I get a lot of joy belonging to it and I think we give a lot of joy to people who come to hear us. (Oliver)

If social capital is seen as the glue that holds communities together (Blakeley, 1997; Falk & Kilpatrick, 1999; Fountain & Atkinson, 1998; Fukuyama, 1995; Grootaert, 1998; Serageldin, 1998 as cited in Feldman & Assaf, 1999) then MCC appears to embody social capital. A comment from one choir member resonates with Putnam's (1993) comment about participation in choral societies leading to the development of social capital.

[the choir] is a form of cement, if you like. It is a central point for musical expression in one way, or one phase of it anyway, in that people will join together either to do the particular piece or to listen to it. I think it has adhesive effect, if you like. (Daniel)

#### PARTICIPATION, INTERACTION AND CIVIC INVOLVEMENT

Participation, interaction and involvement in civic and local community activities are important to many members of MCC. One member suggests that 'as I look around the choir, they are all involved in other things apart from singing so therefore there is a good social [interaction]' (Grace). Membership of other organizations facilitates the development of networks, where membership overlaps different groups. The reasons for participating in community groups are many. For Luke, his motivation to participate is an offshoot of values gained as a child:

I think you catch it [a propensity to participate] ... it is perhaps also an offshoot of the values that you absorb as a child, and the values of people as valuable in themselves and in their own right, the values of caring, and being a member and a responsible member of the community. I think if you have these understandings and beliefs, you will be involved, and hence I think I am involved. (Luke)

By being involved with other groups, choir members maintain an active link with the community at large that helps to maintain a 'big picture' view of community opinions and attitudes, and facilitates good social interaction and networking.

#### NETWORKS AND CONNECTIONS

As has been discussed above, networks also facilitate community cooperation and collaboration for mutual benefit (Blakeley, 1997; Cox, 1995; Falk & Kilpatrick, 1999;

Fountain & Atkinson, 1998; Giorgas, 2000; Putnam, 1993, 1995a, 1996, 2000; Schuller, 2000; Sirianni & Friedland, 1995).

The development of networks and connections within the community is manifested through the members' participation in community groups and organizations outside MCC. Networks within MCC that link to these external networks facilitate choir performances. Many MCC members are also members of churches, and use their networks within the churches to provide venues and performance opportunities (community social capital development) for MCC:

I think one of the best was when the choir came to [my church to] sing [*Messiah*] for 'Voices for Hospice' last year, and having the congregation join in the 'Hallelujah Chorus'. (Charlotte)

By linking MCC's shared values of love for good music, love of singing together and valuing the fellowship of being with others, with those of the community, Charlotte is describing valuable bridging social capital. Meg suggests that her involvement with other organizations, such as churches, can facilitate MCC/community interaction and, consequently, networking. Her own church occasionally asks for performances from MCC, and Meg recognizes that others have similar networking capabilities and use them for the mutual benefit of MCC and community:

I am involved with a youth group, church groups of course, and the choir occasionally has been asked to sing at St Paul's, which they have taken up. Some of the other members of the choir have things with other churches and it is easy enough to organize a venue. I think some people have links with the brass band and if you want to do a choir (performance) with them, like we have done with the brass band, or even the concert band, then it is easier to coordinate and, as I said, I think they know what is going on. (Meg)

The acceptance of common norms of action and values by the participants within an organization such as MCC facilitates the development of common understanding, and access to the shared knowledge and information that facilitates the development of a sense of belonging.

Caring for and valuing others is a norm that is important to many members of MCC; for example, some do hospital visits, another leads the local Hospice Association as described earlier. The MCC secretary sends a card to sick members, and other members will 'ring up people to find out how they are and to make sure they are OK' (Laura). The interest in other members goes further than just a telephone call. Often members will take the responsibility upon themselves to:

pass on information if someone is not there. I guess there are bits and pieces that if there is a performance coming up, or [we] had a cancelled practice or something like that, and somebody is not there when the decision is made, I guess it is the other choir members' role really to make sure that everybody knows, and to pass on any information that they may need. (Meg)

Feeling valued by the community one belongs to and valuing others in the community are norms in MCC. As Laura said: 'Well they [MCC] have made me feel like they do [value me].' This type of comment is common among the participants. Some other members value others as having something special to offer the group:

When I look around the faces, they have all got something, a talent to offer, and they are all pretty well singing in tune, and obviously, that is what they want to express. (Grace)

Community leadership has been identified as a social capital indicator (Bullen & Onyx, 1998a; Saguaro Seminar, 2001). Many choir members hold formal positions (e.g., secretary, chairperson, treasurer or committee member) in local groups, and perform these roles as a service to the organization, rather than from a need to be recognized as a leader:

All my life I have been prepared to take on jobs involving coordination or organization and I am quite happy to continue doing that so I see myself in that sense as, well, I suppose you would have to use the word, one of the leaders of the choir. I don't think I want to be a leader of the choir, but there is a job there to do so I do it. (Luke)

#### MEMBERSHIP OF FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Faith-based engagement is a common feature of the lives of MCC members. Church involvement is seen as an opportunity to develop political skills (Putnam, 1993), and community and leadership skills (Ammerman, 1996). For joiners such as Luke, faith-based engagement provides just such opportunity. In the following excerpt, Luke is enthusiastic when describing how he sees himself as a joiner:

I am in the church [because] I believe in the church and that is my faith but even within the framework of the church, I am a joiner in that I am prepared to join this or that subgrouping or become involved. Usually, of course, in the church it is organizational but not all of it. So I am a member of the choir in the church, again because of what it can offer me and what I can offer it. And I guess there is a lot in saying that I believe that I have something to offer, and when I go to meetings, I am always one of those who do the talking. But damn it, if I haven't got something to say, there is no point in going to the meeting. If I have got something to say then I believe it and I will use every trick I know to make sure it is adopted, because if I don't have an opinion I should not be there, and if I do have an opinion, then I have it backed. So I don't know whether they are the characteristics of a joiner but that is the way I see myself fitting in. (Luke)

Social capital has been seen as the determining factor in how easily people work together (Paldam & Svendsen, 1999). Collaboration and cooperation for mutual benefit is fundamental to social capital (Blakeley, 1997; Cox, 1995; Falk & Kilpatrick, 1999; Fountain & Atkinson, 1998; Putnam, 1993, 1995a, 1996, 2000; Schuller, 2000; Sirianni & Friedland, 1995). Participants identified a willingness to collaborate and cooperate with others as part of a team and suggested that they gain great enjoyment from the product of their collaboration. In the following comments from Joseph about a successful performance, one can hear the manifestation of collective efficacy (Bandura, 1997):

The best [feeling] is when everyone is giving their best; everyone is trying; everyone is paying attention and even if you can't sing well, it is all going well because of that feeling of everyone coming together ... the fruition, I think that is something special. I keep coming back to the teamwork type thing when we are all finishing together and we are all on the right note and everything; that is a wonderful sound and a wonderful feeling. (Joseph)

The social capital of the individual member expands to broaden and develop the social capital of MCC, and that, in turn, contributes to the development of social capital in

the community. One way this is achieved is through MCC's willingness to benefit the community with the product of its learning via concerts and other public activities. Choir performances generate sufficient goodwill and trust within the community that the choir is often approached to perform for particular events, not only on its own, but also in conjunction with other community groups. MCC contributes to broadening community social capital and developing networks, through collaborating with other groups to present community-wide musical activities such as *Carmina Burana*, *Messiah*, *Braddon – a place of our own*, and *Those Were the Days*. Choir members value this contribution and often make remarks similar to Rachel's: 'I think the more we can do together the better the town will be.' Choir members also consider that the events foster network development through bridging social capital, as they bring a variety of people together who might not otherwise meet:

When we have something like *Carmina Burana* ... all these little groups come out to join forces. The orchestras and concert bands all come out and I think it is wonderful. I think the coast has such a lot of little groups and big groups that have such a lot to offer. I have got to know a lot of people from other choirs and places [and] people who I haven't seen for years. (Lucy)

#### SHARED NORMS AND VALUES

Shared norms and values are considered a major social capital cornerstone, as such features of community lead to a common bond (Blakeley, 1997; Falk & Kilpatrick, 1999; Fountain & Atkinson, 1998; Fukuyama, 1995; Grootaert, 1998; Paldam & Svendsen, 1999; Putnam, 1993; Schuller & Field, 1998). The shared norms and values of members of MCC help to develop a feeling of belonging, unity and binding together, and emerge as consistent themes throughout the data. Members stress shared norms of: caring for and valuing others; valuing reliable attendance; wanting MCC to do well and for soloists to improve; making positive comments about others in MCC, and about the way MCC is organized and rehearsals are run; being motivated to attend rehearsals; promoting networks within and outside MCC; being accepting and willing to adopt the norms and values of the organization; trusting in others; and cultivating community and civic involvement. Such positive emphases act as sanctions on members and encourage further positive attitudes and comments. Sarah expressed these aspects as follows:

You get to be able to share things. And that way, you kind of develop a level of sharing, which is not necessarily deeply intimate, but you get a level of sharing that binds people together, sharing common interests and common values: a love of music in its various forms and a sharing of common values, perhaps. Certain levels of expectations, standards that you have in the community. (Sarah)

Shared norms commonly expressed by the participants are those of taking part and participating with others, 'I like to take part. I like to see the choir doing a good job. If I can help rather than hinder then I am there' (Daniel). As Claudia expressed it: 'I enjoy singing. Just making music with other people is a good pastime.' For another, the experience is deeper than merely a pastime. Olivia is a very devout and committed Christian, and music is a meaningful expression of faith for her. Even when she first joined, and the difficulty of the music nearly scared her away, her love of singing as an expression of faith helped to involve her in the MCC and to grow through this membership:

I guess [I get] a very, very deep and spiritual and satisfying feeling from taking part. We came in on the *Magnificat* and I nearly ran away. But even the *Magnificat* now, you know, I can listen to it and appreciate it. Maybe not in a highly educated fashion but it is part of what my life is about. I like to sing and I like to go along and sing. I get annoyed when most of the time we are talking, because I come to sing. I like it best when we can just go ahead and sing and sing and sing. I like it when it is something that we are reasonably familiar with and I really enjoy the *Gloria*. I love that but there are many things that I have come to love that I never thought I could ever appreciate so much beautiful music, and I just like to be part of it. (Olivia)

#### LEARNING

Falk and Kilpatrick (1999) suggest social capital is the result of learning interactions that take place during a learning event, in a 'particular socio-cultural context' (p. 6). For Field and Schuller (1997, p. 17), the social nature of learning is a 'function of identifiable social relationships'.

Informal learning often takes place in community groups such as MCC, especially if there is high social capital as manifested by trust, reciprocity and common norms (Schuller & Field, 1998). Learning is a social capital indicator that manifests itself in several of the participants' narratives. Many members appreciate the opportunity to continue learning, and value a variety of learning experiences. In the following, Laura explains how informal learning through interaction with other choir members enables her participation:

My musical ability, as far as being compared to theirs, is next to nothing. I can't read music for a start as you well know, and when they find out I can't read music, they are quite astounded some of them. And so I say to Rebecca [another choir member], 'I know when the note goes up there, it is going up and when it is coming down it is coming down, but Tom talks about that middle E or F or whatever it is.' So they always help me, which I am very thankful for. (Laura)

In Lily's case, the learning experience of choral participation is part of lifelong learning in that:

education and learning too [are important]. And that is building knowledge in the community and, of course, they all discuss it [the choir]. And their conversation is on a higher plane than mundane things of what sort of jam you made yesterday ... So it [the choir] is a very rich experience actually and a process of learning. It is important to always be aware that you are forever learning and that you don't stop. And I suppose that is so in everything, because life is a complete learning program right through, isn't it? (Lily)

Other choir members remark on the progress in confidence that others have made, both in rehearsal and in public performance. Through the learning experience, MCC members develop a degree of understanding of their own or other people's competence as singers, by informal comparison with others. By learning from interactions with others, members learn from people who have a different approach to the music and performance (Hargreaves, Lieberman, Fullan, & Hopkins, 1998). This progress has been made possible, in one member's view, because of the feelings of support and, crucially, fellowship that that member gains from MCC. The learning experience is shared, supported by others, and seen as empowering, even through difficult circumstances:

I am amazed sometimes, on very, very bad nights, you know when you have inclement weather, and they come. They are still joyful ... and they are looking forward to it, and I think it is because they are learning. They are also gaining confidence. It is something that they can do with people around them to give them that confidence because they are not doing it alone. It is participation and they are doing it together and if you have got somebody standing to the left and right and front of you, supporting you, it is a support system, the choir. I love to learn and that is one of the reasons that I like to be in the choir. (Lily)

An opportunity to witness the skills and experience of soloists as they rehearse their piece in front of the community choir can be a valuable, informal learning experience. This opportunity often leads to awareness in participants of personal growth in their skills, and in those of others. This growth in skill may lead to an urge to experience new things, 'Sometimes when you are looking for solos it would be nice to hear "right Oliver, you do it" (Oliver). For others, the singing of a solo part is a terrific experience that boosts their self-esteem, the collective efficacy of MCC, and fits in with the norms of MCC. For some, mastery (Bandura, 1997; Ford, 1992) of the music is important, and singing solos gives an opportunity for growth and mastery:

The times that I have had a chance to sing a solo I can't tell you what it has meant for me in my own growth. So, I know that you will be aware of the nucleus of the choir that do solos, new solos, and that will boost their confidence. I think, Tom, that I'm getting more confidence now. I can remember listening to different choir members and thinking, 'How are they doing that? And what were they doing then?' I can almost do it now. (Isabella)

#### FELLOWSHIP

Fellowship, as a social capital indicator (Hanifan, 1916), has largely been ignored in recent literature. Within MCC, fellowship evolves from and, in turn, facilitates trust, friendship, mutual support, working together and the development of relationships. To some choir members, fellowship is as important as the music as it provides a focus for their attendance. Indeed, for Matthew, fellowship is the main aspect of MCC. When asked what he would tell someone about MCC, if he wanted to get that person to join, he said:

The feeling I get from being a part of that organization is the feeling of fellowship there, of contributing to something that is, to me, really worthwhile and there is a great sense of enjoyment if you really commit yourself to it. (Matthew)

Matthew goes on to link the fellowship aspect of MCC with the challenge that is provided by the repertoire:

From a social point of view, the general fellowship of it, to me has been very enriching and it's presented me with challenges as well through the sort of music that is done. I enjoy their company and their fellowship in general, really. (Matthew)

The data from this study suggest that fellowship is significant in social capital and group development. We suggest that fellowship is:

That feeling of trust, camaraderie, togetherness, friendship, warmth, support and deep appreciation of the feelings and needs of members within a group, organization or

community for other members of that group, organization or community. That feeling of fellowship is derived from shared interests, experiences, norms and values.

Fellowship appears to provide a mechanism for informal networking, knowledge sharing, caring and developing feelings of trust, evidenced for instance in participant comments about solos or chorus sections. Fellowship also provides an opportunity to learn about other members. By learning about others, members appear to forge a bond with others, to the mutual benefit of MCC and of the members themselves. When asked to comment on her motivation to participate in MCC, Lily responded:

It is a learning and friendship thing and also they wish to support one another. Because your friend's going, you will go too. So friendship among the members of the choir is very important and you get to know people. One of the choir in the front row had an antipathy towards another member. And now that that other person is actually standing next to them and singing, and they have come to like [each other] ... they have come to understand [each other] because they can hear them singing and in between, they chatter. Choirs chatter. (Lily)

Lily's comments cover a range of social capital indicators including learning, involvement with friends, and knowledge resources.

Olivia, who has been a member of MCC for a number of years, considers MCC to be 'a bit like a family,' and appreciates that long-term membership helps the fellowship within the choir. Olivia appears to be using fellowship not only in the secular sense of friendly feelings that exist between people with shared interests, and companionship, but also in the deep feelings that exist between people with mutual interests that are both spiritual and temporal. In her comments she, perhaps, expresses her own feelings towards the others, when describing the fellowship of MCC and the benefits of that support:

A lot of them have been here for a lot longer than me and it has a very strong fellowship, a very strong caring, loving attitude to one another plus there is a lot of humour there and we really enjoy being together and look forward to our Monday nights. And it is not just the singing, although the singing is a priority thing, but I think we enjoy being together; we enjoy the chatter; we enjoy the socializing and I think we could make a lot more of that ... because we have known each other so long. And there is that sense of community and caring, and it is not just while you are at choir, people get together socially during the week ... I think this has come out of their fellowship in the choir. It is very durable and strong, it is a life support, isn't it? (Olivia)

Members show a willingness to work as a team or cohesive unit in order to further the ends of the group and to ensure success. For some, fellowship might be seen as camaraderie, that feeling of goodwill, sociability and comradeship that grows from familiarity.

I think we all get a sense of camaraderie from it. I just think that generally we like each other. There is not much acrimony amongst members of the choir and then there is always the love of the music that we are doing and the sense of achievement when we have done something and done it well and given other people pleasure.

Within the community choir, fellowship creates an environment in which friendship, successful cooperation, trust, and shared norms and values flourish.

## Conclusions

This article suggests that choirs and similar organizations are strong community resources, crucial in the creation of social capital that benefits the whole community. Choirs that embody strong community connection, individual autonomy, bonds and fellowship greatly enhance the chances of successful creation of social capital, by binding together people of similar interests and backgrounds to create an environment of mutual cooperation, friendship and goodwill.

Social capital, as developed in MCC, has proven longevity and resilience. The more that MCC is called upon to fulfil a civic and community role and hence expend its stocks of social capital, the more social capital is generated, and the greater its stock of social capital becomes.

The findings of this case study have applicability primarily for this choir. However, the findings may also be transferable to other choirs and other group settings, especially when such groups also consist of members with similar backgrounds or possess common histories in terms of musical and community life experiences.

## Recommendations

This article highlights opportunities for further research in several areas. Little research has been undertaken on the social capital indicator 'fellowship' since Hanifan (1916) included fellowship in his description of important elements in people's lives nearly a century ago. The significance of fellowship to the MCC suggests that its presence, or absence, may play a significant role in the success or otherwise of other organizations and communities, particularly with regard to social capital generation and development. Further research is needed to explore the ways in which fellowship is manifested, banked, drawn upon and developed in other organizations and settings.

Milton may not be Putnam's (1993, 1995b) Tuscany, and the number of choral societies in the city may have little bearing on support that individuals or groups get from the local council. However, the data suggest that it is important to participate, and to support participation in community activities. Social capital and community well-being are enhanced in communities that have high community participation rates. The literature suggests that people who participate in community activities keep their minds and bodies active, live longer, and stay healthier than those who do not (Bygren, Konlaan, & Johansson, 1996; Johansson, Konlaan, & Bygren, 2001). Accordingly, the benefits of activities such as participation in the MCC may have particular significance at government policy level in terms of addressing the health and well-being of Australia's aging population.

### NOTE

1. 'Milton' is a pseudonym.

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