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# Democratic School Management and Social Capital

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## Abstract

Social capital is the constructive potential of motivation, initiative and activation that emerges in the context of trust, solidarity, collaboration and goodwill. The potential for social capital to generate benefits for both individuals and organizations makes it worth investigating in order to better understand the processes that bring it into existence. This research assumes that democratic sub-processes in the organizational context will contribute to the development of social capital. Democracy, as an ideal of humanity, can contribute to the development of social capital since it allows people to express their own ideas, takes them into account, offers negotiation conditions in line with ethical and fair principles, requires information sharing and gives confidence. Commitment to democratic values in school management can make individuals feel safe and facilitate relationships. Therefore, this research aims to investigate the effects of democratic practices such as critical participation, transparency, justice, equality and accountability on the development of social capital. Research findings offer important implications for the effects of democratic processes on social capital development.

**Keywords:** Social Capital, Democratic School Management, Equality, Justice

## 1. Introduction

The democratic ideal involves a discussion process in which each member is aware of the expectations, interests or demands of others regarding any issue or problem that concerns the collective. These processes, wherein different parties encounter overlapping or conflicting interests, can be resolved by establishing a fair cause-effect relationship. Democracy can be expressed as a collective group dealing with issues and solutions in a reasonable interaction environment where everyone is equal and works together to decide on steps to be taken on the issues at hand (Youngs, 2002). This interaction requires an internalized justice reference in order to consider others' interests and not to suppress them with political games. From an ideal perspective, democracy is a tool that encourages justice. And according to Mncube, Davies, Naidoo (2014), democratic processes also require ethics and empathy.

According to Young (2002), participation in decision-making processes is at the very heart of democracy. For this theory-level claim to function in real terms, practices that will ensure effective participation must be implemented. But participatory decision-making processes can be troublesome considering conflicting demands and long negotiation processes are innate to their existence. Despite having drawbacks, they are still respected in light of

the instrumental opportunities that are offered to participants. As a result of inclusion: freedom of expression, equal participation, criticism and questioning of management, the obligation of managers to explain their actions, and acting with reference to justice make democracy the best form of administration. These elements, which make up the internal values of democracy, prevent administrators from arrogantly misusing power.

Democratic principles imposed from outside the organization or from the top are not sufficiently reflected in organizational action (Kensler, 2015). In order for democratic principles to be a reference to organizational action, they must originate from within. This requires well-designed decision mechanisms. Such mechanisms strengthen information exchange, increase participation and advance democracy. The fact that every member has the opportunity to influence decisions does not mean that this power is equal for all members. In organizational conditions, some members may have more power to influence decisions for a variety of reasons. In a well-designed participation mechanism, members have the right to express their opinions freely, ask questions and receive information, and everyone is open to listening to others' opinions. Thus, all members are empowered and motivated to participation (Cloke, Goldsmith, 2002; Senge et al., 2012; Kensler, 2015). In addition, organizational mechanisms that operate in accordance with democratic principles encourage members to act democratically (Weber, Unterrainer & Höge, 2020). For example, governance, which is an organizational practice, makes different options, information, approaches or evaluations visible. Elements such as respecting others, talking freely, being fair and respectful are the internal values of democracy. That's why, when evaluated as an arena where different approaches, information and interests converge, governance practices should be supported with democratic values in order to function effectively (Grandori, 2016).

Organizational democracy can be used for instrumental reasons, such as increasing the quality, performance, duty responsibility, and organizational commitment of decisions (Butcher, Clarke, 2002; Harrison, Freeman, 2004; Matten, Crane, 2005; Redburn, Buss, 2006; Yazdani, 2006; Fenton, 2011; Wang, 2018; Bilge, Barbuta-Misu, Virlanuta, Guven, 2020), but can also be preferred because of its social value (Kimber, Ehrich, 2011; Raelin, 2012; Kensler, 2015). Organizational practices related to democracy are carried out in accordance with principles such as empowered participation, fair treatment, transparency, accountability, and the right to choose (Fenton, 2012). The atmosphere of trust created by adhering to these principles frees people from the tension of expressing their own opinion. Democratic organizations are aware that the collectivity created by individuals is a power potential for the organization (Luhman, 2007). Organizations try to create an understanding, atmosphere and practices that will empower their members to be inspired by their creativity, increase their commitment and confidence, thereby ensuring their participation in organizational processes (Widener, 2010). Similarly, the atmosphere of respect that develops with the democratic operation in schools creates solidarity and cooperation, and consequently encourages the sharing of ideas (Pažur, Domović, Kovač, 2020). In this sense, it can be said that the interest in organizational democracy is related to positive results such as organizational productivity, increased communication and information sharing, otherwise known as a happy working environment. Participation in decisions makes it easier for individuals to adopt decisions. In addition, information sharing and the belief that the processes work fairly, together with transparency, help people to support decisions that do not even comply with their own wishes. The resulting environment of trust and open communication catalyzes the development of individuals' negotiation, interaction, productivity and cooperation skills. Therefore, it can be said that democratic organizations are closely related to the construction of social capital (Levine, 2007; Marsh, 2005; Paxton, 2002; Safari, Salehzadeh, Ghaziasgar, 2018). According to Bizzi (2015), 'social capital refers to the set of interpersonal relationships which create value for individuals in organizations. (pp.181) When considered in the organizational context, social capital contributes to individuals' extra role performance (Bizi, 2015), increase of information resources and creativity (Machalek & Martin, 2015). The opportunity for cooperation and interaction provided by social capital increases the welfare of school principals (Beusaert, Froehlich, Riley & Gallant, 2021), creates trust in working relationships (Leat et al., 2006; Behtoui, Strömberg, 2020), contributes to the job satisfaction (Edinger, Edinger, 2018) and professional development of teachers, and creates important results such as student success (Demir, 2021). Considering the consequences that create value for the school community in different areas, building social capital is essential for school effectiveness. The practices of democratic organizations that create interaction, cooperation and solidarity are inherently triggering mechanisms that develop social capital. In this line of reasoning, it is important to reveal the relationship between democratic organizational practices and the development of social capital. For this purpose, this study aims to reveal the relationship between organizational

democracy and its sub-dimensions and school social capital. In the light of the findings obtained as a result of the research, important inferences can be made about democratic organizational processes that can contribute to the development of social capital. The following questions will be investigated in the research:

1. What is the organizational trust perception of the participants?
2. What is the social capital perception of the participants?
3. Are there relations between organizational democracy and its sub-dimensions and social capital and its sub-dimensions?
4. Do organizational democracy and its sub-dimensions predict social capital and its sub-dimensions?

## **2. Theoretical Background**

### *2.1. Organizational Democracy.*

We live in an age when individuals attach importance to issues such as freely expressing their opinions, being independent and having a sense of importance. These expectations, which can be summarized as the desire to be seen as valuable, are made manifest in both public and private life. Individuals come to work environments with similar demands. Managers are responsible for overseeing organizations in accordance with the values and expectations of the contemporary people in terms of individual-organization integration. Democratic organizations help create working environments that will meet these expectations (Alshurman, 2015). Organizational democracy can be defined as an organizational form that includes participatory decision-making systems and is based on working principles such as respect for human rights, egalitarianism, transparency, justice and cooperation (Stohl, Cheney, 2001, Fenton, 2002; Monyatsi, 2005; Yazdani, 2006; Anderson, 2009; Mncube, 2009; Bean, Lemon & O'Connell, 2013; Nkiinebari, 2014; Nabatchi, Leighninger, 2015; Rhoads, Valadez, 2016; Sun, Song, 2016; Verdorfer, Weber, 2016; Thomsen, Olsen, 2017; Heath, Ihlen, 2018). It is essential that the members of democratic organizations are able to take active roles in organizational functioning without facing discrimination or suppression of their views from members with more power.

Organizational democracy is based on freedom rather than authority and control. Moreover, it is an idea developed around the human potential of the organization to achieve organizational goals (Fenton, 2011). Providing broad-based participation with the institutionalization of the effects of the organization members is the most basic features of democratically structured organizations (Wegge et al., 2010; Battilana, Fuerstein, Lee, 2018). Increasing participation with the democratization of organizations increases stakeholder feelings of satisfaction, responsibility and commitment; regeneration and change accelerate; performance improves; discordant employee behavior decreases (Butcher, Clarke, 2002; Harrison, Freeman, 2004; Matten, Crane, 2005; Redburn, Buss, 2006; Yazdani, 2006; Fenton, 2011; Fenton, 2012; Wang, 2018; Bilge, Barbuta-Misu, Virlanuta, Guven, 2020). Moreover, thanks to democratic participation in these organizations, social, moral and human value-oriented decisions can be made (Tse, 2009; Weber, Unterrainer, Schmid, 2009).

The main elements of organizational democracy are broad-based participation, different perspectives and intensive communication. However, some stakeholders may be reluctant to participate in decision-making processes or question organizational processes (Rizvi, 2005). Perhaps managers may not want to share the executive power they have gained. According to Varman and Chakrabarti (2004), because of this list of reasons, it can be difficult to overcome the establishment of a democratic understanding within the organization. It is possible for the members to internalize an organizational process with the reference of democracy by creating democratic practices within the organization. In this case, it becomes important to advance organizational democracy with systems that will encourage or enforce decisions, organizational communication, power sharing and negotiation processes.

Focusing on the processes that will eliminate the communication barriers between members is the first step towards democratizing an organization, as it creates relationships that lead to an exchange of information, and facilitates the expression of opinions and questions (Hoffman, 2002; Holtzhausen, 2002; Normore, Jean-Marie, 2008, Safari, Salehzadeh, Ghaziasgar, 2017). Increasing the flow of information in a democratic working environment improves the institution's ability to adapt to changing conditions and to cope with internal and external pressures (Holtzhausen, 2002), in addition to helping teachers be aware of all activities at school (Tse, 2009). Similar to

other organizations, democratization of schools is achieved by being more participatory (Lima, 2007; Mncube, 2009; Kensler, 2015; Rhoads, Valadez, 2016). Administrators are responsible for the creation of democratic school organizations. It can be counted among the founding elements of democratic school organizations that school administrators value different views, are transparent in school activities, promote the culture of openness, and create an organizational climate where different views can exist simultaneously (Törnsén, 2009). This democratization process can be considered as a kind of paradigm change in which the principal evolves from one-man management to an open, participatory, polyphonic management (Monyatsi, 2005).

## 2.2. Social Capital

Educational organizations necessitate the human factor as the dominant determinant. Wherever there are people, a lack of respect, understanding, cooperation, interaction and trust leads to inefficiency. This requires the social capital phenomenon to be handled carefully in educational organizations (Töremen, Ersözülü, 2010). Social relations are at the center of social capital conceptualizations. The aim is to achieve common benefits and more perfect solutions with social capital. For this purpose, it can be defined as a collectivity-embodied, broad participation and negotiation process, in which members demonstrate cooperation and commitment to common goals and values (Bhandari & Yasunobu, 2009). Social capital refers to the values and performance-enhancing benefits developed through human relations, which are immediately applicable to the organization (Hador, 2017). Social capital is closely related to networking. The resulting pool of interaction creates opportunities for personal and professional development that arise from meeting new people and exchanging ideas (Johnson, 2016). Social capital also provides better organizational functioning due to increased cooperation and easy circulation of information within the organization. This informal learning environment creates space for organizational development. For this reason, it is important for organizations to explore channels that will allow them to increase their social capital (Joseph & Totawar, 2021). According to Ramezan (2016), if social capital is to be developed in an organized context, it is necessary to focus on the internal processes and functions of the organization. Factors that bring people closer to each other and facilitate communication are important producers of social capital. In this sense, fair treatment, open and transparent communication, reliable administration that emerges with organizational processes in line with the requirements of democracy can enable school staff to communicate with each other and create beneficial social relations.

## 3. Method

This research aimed to examine the relationship between collaborative climate and school mindfulness. A relational design was preferred because the research approach is quantitative in nature.

### 3.1. Sample and Data Collection

The research population consisted of primary, secondary and high school teachers from the Istanbul province in the 2020-2021 academic year. The sample of this research consisted of 510 teachers working in public schools. The random sampling method, in which each element has an equal and independent chance of being selected (Özen & Gül, 2007), was used to determine the study group. Demographics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table1: Demographics of the participants

Gender	<i>f</i>	%
Female	265	52
Male	245	48
Total	510	100
Type of School	<i>f</i>	%
Primary School	104	20,4
Secondary School	140	27,5
High School	266	52,2
Total	510	100

Of all the participants, 52% (n=265) were female and 48% (n=245) were male. All in all, 52.2% (n= 266) of the participants were employed in high schools, 27.5% (n=140) in secondary schools and 20.4% (n= 104) in primary schools.

### 3.2. Data Collection Tools

The data of the research was used on two scales. The first of these scales was the Social Capital Scale developed by Kouvonen et al. (2006) and adapted into Turkish by Akyürek in 2021. The Social Capital Scale, which is a 5-point likert-type scale, consists of eight items. The Cronbach-alpha coefficient is .939 for the whole scale.

The second scale is the Organizational Democracy Scale developed by Geçkil and Tikici (2015). The Organizational Democracy Scale, which is also a 5-point Likert type scale, consists of five sub-dimensions: Participation-Criticism (8 items), transparency (6 items), justice (5 items), equality (6 items), accountability (3 items); that equates to a grand total of 28 items. The Cronbach-alpha coefficient is .956 for the whole scale, .918 for Participation-Criticism, .895 for transparency, .909 for the justice, .912 for equality, and .800 for accountability.

### 3.3. Data Analysis

The data obtained as a result of the research was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences Windows 25.0. Percentages, averages and standard deviations of the scales were tested with descriptive statistics. The first task was examining the data to determine whether or not it was normally distributed. Table 2 shows the kurtosis and skewness values.

Table 2: Kurtosis and skewness values

Sub-scales	Kurtosis	Skewness
Social Capital	-.223	-.830
Participation-Criticism	-.735	.370
Transparency	-.640	.634
Justice	-.406	-.794
Equality	-.570	-.623
Accountability	-.470	-.649

Kurtosis and Skewness values between +1.5 and -1.5 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013) were considered normal distribution. As the sampling is adequate according to the law of large numbers and the central limit theorem (N=510), the analyses were continued with the assumption that the distribution was normal (Harwiki, 2013; Johnson & Wichern, 2002).

#### 4. Results

The school mindfulness level in accordance with the thoughts of participants was determined with descriptive statistics. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Correlation analysis results

Variable	M	Sd	1	2	3	4
1.Social Capital	3.878	.971				
2.Participation-Criticism	3.794	1.004	.412**			
3. Transparency	3.713	1.015	.684**	.496**		
4. Justice	3.718	1.070	.692**	.319**	.748**	
5. Equality	3.736	.988	.704**	.442**	.763**	.797**
6. Accountability	3.695	.982	.730**	.422**	.731**	.757**

As shown in the Table 3, all variables identified in the study yielded high and significant means. In addition, there are positive and significant correlations between the social capital, which are the dependent variables of the study, and all independent variables. Table 4 shows the results of the regression analyses of all independent variables.

Table 4: Regression analysis results

	Independent Variables	B	t	p	F	Model	R <sup>2</sup>
	Constant	.664	5.246	.000			
	Participation-Criticism	.061	1.911	.057			
Social Capital	Transparency	.131	2.750	.006	161.307	0.000	.615
	Justice	.134	2.793	.005			
	Equality	.199	3.894	.000			
	Accountability	.340	7.316	.000			

The findings provide insight into the importance of sub-dimensions of the democratic organization in social capital. Table 4 shows that social capital was significantly predicted by transparency ( $\beta=.131$ ), by justice ( $\beta=.134$ ), by equality ( $\beta=.199$ ) and by accountability ( $\beta=.340$ ) which together accounted for 61.5 % of the variance ( $R^2=0.615$ ,  $F=161.307$ ,  $p<0.00$ ). According to the findings of the research, participation-criticism does not affect the social capital. As transparency, justice, equality, accountability increase, social capital increases.

#### 5. Discussion

Social capital, an important concept in the field of organizational management, refers to the working environments in which relationships that create value for individuals and the organization are fostered. The development of working relationships based on mutual trust and solidarity is key to creating social capital in the organizational context. In this sense, social capital creates individual and organizational value and is closely related to the quality of working relationships (Salajegheh & Pirmoradi, 2013). The support, trust, tolerance, cooperation and even goodwill that individuals show towards each other is an important resource for the organization (Karahanna & Preston, 2013). Mistrust in relationships between individuals can lead to negative emotions and behaviors. This can cause loss of energy, burnout, or deviation from organizational goals for both individuals and the organization. However, as a characteristic of positive social interaction, social capital provides organizations with strategic advantages in terms of human resources that are fundamental to the organization accomplishing its goals. Therefore, it is very important to explore the organizational processes, regulations and mechanisms that develop social capital (Milana, Maldaon, 2015). Processes that are based on trust and that encourage participation are

important in terms of creating social capital in organizations. In this respect, it can be said that organizational democracy is related to sub-processes that support and reinforce the development of social capital (Aykanat & Yıldız, 2018). Organizational democracy's commitment to fair and equal treatment, which allows teachers to express themselves freely and comfortably, can facilitate positive work behaviors. Therefore, this study sought to examine the effects of equality, justice, transparency, accountability and critical participation (which are the sub-dimensions of organizational democracy) on social capital.

First, the effects of the criticism-participation sub-dimension of organizational democracy on social capital are discussed. According to the findings of the research, the criticism-participation sub-dimension has no effect on social capital. The participation and criticism dimension includes the processes by which individuals criticize and participate in decision-making. For this, tolerance towards criticism must be internalized since it is a trigger for participation in the organizational democracy literature (Geçkil & Tikici, 2017). According to Geçkil (2013), criticism is explained as the negative or positive evaluation of organizational activities and procedures by employees at all levels and the ability of employees to express their evaluations comfortably.

Although criticism means carefully analyzing organizational processes in order to perfect them, it certainly carries some negative connotations. Effective and constructive criticism in an organizational context elicits the perfection of decisions and practices through considerable intellectual tension. It also has the potential to provoke emotionally-charged responses. The simultaneously-triggered components of criticism and anger can hamper intra-organizational interactions (Fineman, 2000). Also, in some cases, criticizing the administrator or the institution can be interpreted as a negative reaction (Uygun, 2020). In social relations, criticism is understood as the breaking of consensus (Ge, Tian & Zhang, 2016). In the Participation-Criticism sub-dimension of organizational democracy, there are statements about the level of criticism that the administration encourages and tolerates. Although criticism is an organization's means of self-analysis for the purpose of perfecting its practices, the participants may not have considered the participation-criticism dimension as a factor that increases the quality of social relations due to the aforementioned negative effects.

According to the findings of the research, transparency, which is another sub-dimension of organizational democracy, increases social capital. Transparency is the ability to learn and monitor all aspects of the work, transactions and decisions made by those affected (Geçkil, Tikici, 2017). One of the important stages of democratization, transparency is related to information sharing and ease of access to information. Sharing information about decisions, practices or operations leads to increased trust (Erkkilä, 2020; Heald, 2017). It can undoubtedly reduce anxiety levels of school staff regarding what they will encounter (Ergün, 2020). Uncertainty and incomplete information circulate in organizations where management is not transparent. This leads to the emergence of gossip within the organization. On the other hand, positive communication networks are more likely to emerge in transparent organizations where information sharing is common. This causes the rumors to decrease and the relationships to become stronger (Yalçınsoy, 2019). Transparency can be considered a social ground that enables beneficial relationships to be established through trust, cooperation, support and solidarity (Jahansoozi, 2006). Social capital is not a property that can be created and saved in the process. While certain conditions exist, it can be lost in some cases. Norms, processes, or practices that strengthen interdependence, such as stable and trusting relationships, are the most important producers of social capital (Bagnasco, 2012). The findings of the study also confirm this. It is quite possible that administrative understandings that seek to avoid uncertainty, suspicion and rumors will result in social capital.

The third sub-dimension of the organizational democracy scale is justice. According to the research findings, justice within an organization is one of the enhancers of social capital. According to David (2021), "organizational justice describes the views of employees on the fairness of treatment within an organization." Justice expresses an implication that ultimately correct results will be produced. These outcomes include processes for what people receive, how they receive it, and how they are treated. It is indispensable as it helps to overcome two important problems that have the potential to arise in social relations. First, individuals want to be seen as valuable and to know that their interests are protected when they collectively strive for a goal. Justice gives people confidence in the face of these concerns. Secondly, the power differential which arises when people of varying degrees of intelligence, ability or knowledge come together must be considered. When those possessing more of certain types



of power are not restricted in their use of it, weaker members may feel exploited. Exploitation can cause both psychological and financial harm to the individual and the organization because it may discourage across-the-board participation in organizational processes. Employees feel less at risk when social relations in an organizational context are subject to principles of justice (Cropanzano & Ambrose, 2015). It is important that administrators make an effort towards justice and that members realize this. Certainly, the unjust organizational climate creates negative effects on the values, attitudes, behaviors and relationships of the employees (Liao, Rupp, 2005). When organizational members perceive managers to be fair in their day-to-day decisions, their confidence increases, conflicts decrease, and team performance improves (Yean, Yusof, 2016). Moreover, unfair practices are a major source of stress for employees (Pérez-Rodríguez, Topa, Beléndez, 2018). Fair management creates a positive image of the organization, which enriches internal communication (Barekat, Gilavand, 2017; Oh, 2018) and increases performance (Naway, Haris, 2017). Imamoglu, Ince, Turkcan & Atakay (2019) concluded in their research that adherence to the principles of fairness in the distribution of procedures and resources has an effect on the commitment and performance of employees. Adherence to the principles of justice has curative, anxiety-reducing and reassuring effects on social relations. In this sense, as the research findings support, fairness can be an important variable in creating social capital.

According to another finding of the research, equality has an increasing effect on social capital, similar to the variable of justice. Equality is defined as all individuals having the same rights and advantages (Geçkil, Tikici, 2015). Equality is closely related to the impartial and non-judgmental functioning of the processes (Verba, 2006). It is also one of the conditions that brings individuals closer together through eliminating discrimination. Social capital is related to the development of such conditions that bind people together. In this sense, people's skepticism towards each other, the need to defend themselves, and the marginalization of others undermine the development of social capital (Cozzolino, 2014).

Lastly, the study showed that accountability, which is the last sub-dimension of organizational democracy, positively affects the development of social capital. Accountability means acting with a sense of responsibility to deliver an open, fair, equal and transparent performance (Jensen & Kennedy 2005; Callahan, 2006; Bovens, 2006; Bovens, Schillemans, Hart, 2008; Bovens, Schillemans, Goodin, 2014). It is important to determine whether managers in democratic organizations are doing what they have to do. In this respect, the critical approach is the most characteristic feature of democracies. Criticism requires tools to make it possible to question, change, and interpret manager behavior, so that information regarding the actions of the managers can be obtained. Accountability makes it possible to acquire knowledge and thus criticism, and ultimately, democracy (Olsen, 2013). Accountability reveals the ethical standards and current order by questioning the casual beliefs and power relationships that guide the actions of an institution (Olsen, 2017). It fulfills the requirements of democratic management by contributing to the development of accountability, responsibility, performance and ethical behavior awareness (Callahan, 2006). In particular, the fact that people in the management take responsibility for decisions and actions positively affect the behavior of subordinates (Lindberg, 2013). It creates a sense of responsibility and helps to take into account the expectations and needs of school stakeholders (Salvioni & Cassano, 2017). Accountability is associated with the development of social capital in that it encourages consideration of norms such as morality, ethics or law (Mohammadi, Nezhad & Golmohammadi, 2020). In this sense, the participants may have perceived accountability, which is a requirement of democratic organizations, as a variable that improves relations due to its role in reducing unlawful or unethical practices.

School administration in accordance with democratic values develops a sense of trust in all school members and unites them around a purpose (Alshurman, 2014). This is because fulfilling the requirements of democracy in an organizational context can improve communication, collaboration and commitment of individuals (Ahmed et al., 2019). Research findings point to the roles of transparency, justice, equality and accountability in the democratic processes as being foundational in the development of human capital. These processes are important democratic tools that school administrators should apply when it comes both to realizing the ideal of democracy and enriching social relations.

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