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TO PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT**

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TO PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT**

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Social Obligation: Proposing a Compliment to Psychological Contract

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ABSTRACT

Every organization is composed of nested formal and informal organizations. Bernard (1938) conceptualized that informal groups arise in formal organizations and these informal groups evolve to become functioning informal organizations within formal organizations. Mainstream research in organization theory has focused primarily on formal organizations wherein employee-employer relationships guide employees' work motivations as in the construct of psychological contract. Psychological contract incorporates the mutual beliefs, perceptions, and informal obligations between an employer and an employee and explains why people work in organizations. However, psychological contract fails to explain what happens in organizations, where there is an absence of employee-employer relationships. There is a gap. Also, the construct is inadequate in explaining work motivations in settings that are predominantly informal organizations. We propose a ***construct of social obligation*** as an alternative to explain motivations to work in informal organizations. In this paper, we define social obligation as – *A set of reciprocal ties, responsibilities and consequent authorities that are primarily rooted in the uniform states of mind of individuals in the informal organization, which motivates work in those organizations.* We describe the constituent elements of social obligation as a set of ties that bind members to one another, which leads them to feel responsible for each other and for society at large and which further begets them the consequent authority of legitimacy to act and fulfill those responsibilities.

Keywords: Social Obligation; Informal Organizations; Psychological Contract; Social Ties

INTRODUCTION

Organizational sociologists and management scholars have long wrestled with divergent perspectives on why people commit to work in organizations and what happens to individual-organization relationships if the antecedent expectations on which these relationships are based are violated. One way to answer these questions is to assume the organization to be of a particular type - a formal organization with clear hierarchical structure, systems and goals, and based on employee-employer relationships with their mutual expectations. However, this conceptualization of an organization might not provide anchors to understand organizations, which have both formal and informal organizations entwined in each other and which have motivations other than those driven primarily by employee-employer relationships, for instance motivations related to power and politics in organizations or behavioral theories of firm. To understand what fuels motivations in organizations, which are predominantly informal and without employee-employer relationships, we conduct a grounded theory enquiry in a community based organization. We propose the construct of *social obligation* as *a set of reciprocal ties, responsibilities and consequent authorities that are primarily rooted in the uniform states of mind of individuals in the informal organization, which motivates work in those organizations*. These uniform states of mind crystallize into norms, mores or customs that guide the organizing and functioning of informal organizations (Barnard, 1938: 123). We argue that social obligation and psychological contract together have the ability to explain people's motivation to commit to work and continue working in organizations.

Motivations to work are directly linked to the type of organization under consideration. On the broadest level we can conceive of formal and informal organizations. In extant literature, informal organizations are described as interlocking social structures with norms, people and

their communities or networks. There is an amount of opacity in such organizations as it requires insider knowledge to understand the inter-personal dynamics in them. These organizations are typically good at motivation, but, they need to consciously build alignment as goal consciousness is not as strong as they are in formal organizations. In contrast to these characteristics, formal organizations have explicit structures, systems and processes that are organized. Hierarchical controls ensure excellence at alignment to goals. They tend to be enduring unless deliberately altered. Further, in informal organizations, people are seen as individuals as contrasted with formal organizations where they are seen with respect to the roles they are supposed to play. Therefore, we need to find ways to develop an intrinsic motivation in people in formal organizations and thus, theories of organization behavior and human resource management are replete with propositions to build motivation. This need has become even more pronounced as there has been a global convergence to capitalistic market principles with near-absence of trade unions as a device to intervene in the employment relationships (Cullinane & Dundon, 2006). Psychological contract offers a way to look into the question of why people work in contemporary formal organizations. However, it is equally or even more important to study what motivates people to work in informal organizations. In this paper, we argue that the construct of psychological contract is inadequate for such contexts.

Psychological contract is defined as the employee's perception of unwritten promises and obligations implicit in his or her relationship with the employing organization (Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1998: 679). It is a multidimensional construct with economic, socio-emotional and ideological dimensions. It is composed of transactional aspect entailed in economic dimension, relational aspect entailed in socio-emotional dimension and ideological aspect entailed in ideological dimension (Thompson & Bunderson, 2003). Employment relationships are two-way

exchanges with rationality being a core assumption on both sides of the exchange. Therefore, psychological contract is aptly rooted in social exchange theory. The word “contract” sets out the fact that there are distinct entities entering in some kind of contract, overt or covert. One of the critiques of the construct is its explicit reliance on individual’s role in the organization than his personality (Cullinane & Dundon, 2006). The theory of identity fusion (Swann Jr., Jetten, Gomez, Whitehouse & Bastian, 2012), on the other hand, talks about “*visceral feeling of oneness*” of an individual with his or her group, such that the feeling is associated with increased permeability of the boundary between his or her personal and social self. Such group membership is a key feature of informal organizations. The proposed construct of social obligation is rooted in the *theory of identity fusion* (Swann et al, 2012) and works through these permeable boundaries between an individual’s personal self and social self. The constituent elements of social obligation that emerged from this research are as follows: a) **a set of ties** that members feel among themselves like those of ties of connectedness, trust and mutual support and identity, which leads them to b) *feel responsible for other members of the group and for society at large* like feeling responsible for learning and development, social change and emancipation which further begets them the c) *consequent authority of legitimacy to act* and fulfill those responsibilities.

Informal organizations get created by individuals, who self-select themselves on account of certain characteristics like geographical proximity, community feeling and coalitions (Cyert & March, 1963). Once the formal organization is established, informal relationships, hierarchies and an unofficial stratification emerges among the members because of conscious or unconscious social processes (Diefenbach & Sillince, 2011). Such an informal hierarchy has been identified as person-dependent social relationships of dominance and subordination, which emerge from

social interaction and become persistent over time through repeated social processes (Diefenbach and Sillince, 2011: 1517). These characteristic features are present in organizations like community based organizations (CBOs), micro-enterprises, social enterprises and so on; organizations which are on the fringes in the current dominant paradigm of organizational sociology but which are increasingly becoming popular and numerous as an alternative way of organizing production along with poverty eradication in many economies over the world. These organizations are structured around informal relationships and hierarchies. We examine the nature of such relationships that bind people.

In this paper, we propose social obligation an alternative to the construct of psychological contract. We argue that the latter is inadequate in explaining the work motivations in informal organizations. We further investigate the motivations behind work in an organization where there is a predominance of informal organization and an absence of employee-employer relationships. This organization is a CBO in the state of Kerala of India. We conduct a grounded theory enquiry in this CBO under interpretivist paradigm. This succeeding section of this paper is organized as follows – first we describe the research setting followed by methodology adopted for this research. Then we discuss the findings followed by emerging themes that make up the construct of social obligation. We, finally, conclude with the conclusion section.

RESEARCH SETTING

We study Kudumbashree, a community based organization (CBO), which is a running program of poverty eradication, supported directly and indirectly by the state government of Kerala in India for the last 16 years. Kudumbashree meaning ‘prosperity of the family’ in the local language (Malayalam) is built on the central idea of enabling and empowering women as a

means of uplifting their families and consequently, the larger community. Kudumbashree (KS) took an innovative approach to estimating poverty and identifying the poor by a set of nine non-monetary risk indicators rather than just income as criteria. These indicators were designed and developed such that they included various manifestations of poverty and were simple, transparent and easily understood by the community. Today, KS parallels the local self government, and partners with them for various programs, and has matured into a development model worth replicating, wherever there are poor women and impoverished communities in need of help.

KS has two-levels: the voluntary democratic lower level and the upper administrative level. The former level is a voluntary democratic three-tier structure. This level is our research setting. It is a good example of a participatory informal organization (Diefenbach and Sillince, 2011) wherein collective appreciation of the common sense of community supersedes hierarchical structures and processes of the organizational framework. At the lowest level, a neighborhood group (NHG) is a collective of geographically proximate women, who share common core characteristics of being economically underprivileged but might differ in other features like education level, skills, religion and caste and so on. The collective is referred to as neighborhood groups (as against self-help groups) to highlight its idea of bringing together women from a given neighborhood. A typical NHG comprises of 20 to 25 women, each representing a household in the community. Five volunteers are elected for undertaking various functional activities of the NHG and meetings and activities happen according to some laid down procedures. This is the only formal organization at the NHG level. Otherwise, at NHG level the organization is informal in essence and need-based in practice. For a woman from a poor family the position of a volunteer is a stepping-stone towards an identity beyond her home and an

opportunity for learning and leadership. These NHGs are the starting point of gaining access to different kinds of loans for setting up micro enterprises. The NHGs elect representatives to the second tier in the formal structure called the Area Development Societies (ADSs). Multiple ADSs then elect a community development society (CDS) that work closely with their local village self government. Thus, the three-tiers comprise of the NHGs at the bottom, followed by the ADSs in the middle, and a CDS at the top. As one goes up the ladder in KS hierarchy, we notice a distinctive organizational format, with formal and informal elements being intertwined in a unique and interesting fashion where lower levels have higher predominance of informal organizations with overall norms in the group as an agency of social control. Although these norms are unwritten and implicit, they often have a powerful, and consistent, influence on regulating and regularizing group members' behaviors.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs an interpretivist paradigm. Under this paradigm, *the researcher's perspective* is central and important. Prior experiences of the researcher have a crucial role in building researcher's perspective. Therefore, past experiences of the researcher in the field of research, as a participant, has been considered important (Varman, 2002). One of us had some experience with KS while helping them with some of their projects and hence this research has elements of participant observation (Burawoy, 1998).

The research design involved two distinct phases. The first phase consisted of reading all information that was available in the secondary sources about KS. This prepared us for the next phase of primary data collection, wherein, we spent extensive time in the field and in the KS offices to understand the organization, its people and the larger community in which KS was based. Data collected from all sources, both primary and secondary, were analysed through

grounded theory method. There were many similar patterns available in the study, which led to discovery of similar codes and categories. Dissimilar patterns were also studied to bring out idiosyncratic categories. Finally core categories started emerging. Both general and idiosyncratic categories finally resulted in themes of how they were related to core categories. We followed constant comparative and iterative method instead of collecting data and then analyzing it at one time (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Analytical rigour of coding procedures and pattern matching ensured that the conceptual categories that emerged could be conceptually generalized across cases, with approximate validity to a number of research contexts. However, as transferability demands, the onus for such generalizability still rests with the receiver.

This research has been conducted under interpretivist paradigm with the spirits of naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Interpretivists don't believe in objective reality verification and therefore reject the notions of validity issues in the manner positivists do. However, they subscribe to "trustworthiness" requirements of research, which attempts to take care of the "truth value", "applicability", "consistency" and "neutrality", in a manner, which is consistent with their worldview and their axiomatic elements. We have taken care of trustworthiness requirements as laid down in the theory of Naturalistic Inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest prolonged engagement, persistent observation and triangulation to address the issue of increasing the probability of credible findings. We were embedded in the context long enough to note a lot of observations, for our field notes. We maintained a chain of these evidences collected and used them sequentially during report making and analysis. Further, we extensively used peer debriefings. Peer debriefing has been suggested as an activity to keep an external check on the inquiry process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure credibility one is required to check whether initial findings and interpretation are what they were actually intended

to be, with the respondents and the other elements of the context, who may have constructed the multiple realities. We archived some raw data and did not utilize them in developing the theory. At the early stages of developments of codes and comparative memos to development of selective coding, we used these materials for referential adequacy. Further, we used member checks extensively, as we collected data. Also, we kept detailed audit trails.

Grounded theory method was preferred over phenomenology or ethnography, as our intention was not to describe processes or to limit to rich descriptive theory from lived experiences, but to develop a conceptualization of the processes. This research intended to go beyond such descriptions to develop conceptual understanding of the mechanisms by which these processes happen. Conceptualization of interactions and manifestations of emerging elements of the processes under study were important features in the proposed theory. Development of such conceptual categories is the central purpose of grounded theory (Glaser, 1992).

FINDINGS

An informal organization is a group of individuals organized together on the basis of a uniform state of mind. The uniformity in states of mind of the group might be evident in how norms, social beliefs and mores tend to bind the group together and how they start to think similarly with repeated interactions over time. The group members of KS were observed to have strong ties with each other. As they all lived and socialized within their neighborhood, everyone was connected to everyone else. Close connections and ensuing social bonds helped deepen understanding among members, which in turn improved prediction of others' behaviors and responses and prevented interpersonal discomfort as far as possible. Social bonds have a functional significance in that bounded solidarity, stronger reciprocity norms and greater trust

have been found to act as effective deterrents against self-serving behaviors (Oh, Chung, & Labianca, 2004). The findings presented below show how a uniform state of mind gets created among members of KS through a set of ties, responsibilities and authority. The thematic form presented below is based on ongoing analysis of field notes and interviews from our data. Also, the emergence of these themes can be referred to in the Table-1

Insert Table-1 Here

Ties of connectedness

One of the core human needs is the need to connect with other humans. It is difficult for a human being to live in isolation. The need to connect is intrinsic to people. Women are generally isolated and their *need to connect* predominates in rural societies as - a) social mores ensure that women should stay indoors and b) their primary household work and child-rearing activities happen indoors. One of the sub-themes identified was the ‘Kitty party phenomenon’ to get together have some free-flowing conversations and share food. It was observed that KS gatherings offered an opportunity for women to freely discuss their family issues, taboos, troubles, achievements and aspirations. Many women shared with us that joining KS was the first opportunity they ever had to step out of home and make friends, as this narration reveals:

Field notes: We interviewed Pushpa who got married in 1996. Till the time of joining KS in 2003, Pushpa was largely confined to the four walls of her house.

Pushpa:

We: So how did you spend time before joining KS?

“(sigh).... my life until joining KS was similar to that of cavemen. I had absolutely no connection or acquaintance with the outside world... My vessels in the kitchen were my only companions. During the monsoon, many a times, water would flood near my door-step... I would cry alone at nights not knowing what to do.”

We: What do you do when you come here?

“Here we open our hearts, have good laugh and share everything that is happening in our lives. If you ask me, this is what draws all women to come for meetings... not the savings schemes as many people think.”

Working together is seen as a source of happiness and fun for the women! The weekly NHG meetings serve an important need of connectedness and hence their utility often went beyond work. Missing a meeting made the members sad as recorded in the statements of Lizzy, another KS member, below.

Lizzy:

“If for any reason, I have to miss any of the KS meetings today...I feel sad. After becoming a KS member life is so much more meaningful...working here is fun... Initially, my interactions with society were restricted to my community alone. I mostly saw others only at our church and other such family functions. I was more than content with that then. Before joining KS, I had never realized that such an opportunity to make friends existed. Now, I easily mingle within the society. There are many benefits in becoming a KS member. I feel that the KS is a community having representation of several families... all matters are discussed openly... almost like in a family.”

Through these conversations a deep concern for each other develops. This closeness is reflected not only in an increasing willingness to help each other as in the words of a CDS member Vanaja.

Vanaja:

“Before joining KS, I did not take part in any social activities. But now, I am able to actively take part in issues of public good. For instance, we collect fund to help when there is a sudden death in the neighborhood. We are interacting more with outside people also now.”

This need to connect is also evident in the desire to spend important personal days, national holidays and festivals together. In the words of **Vanaja:**

“KS has brought us all closer in many ways...On wedding anniversaries of NHG members and birthdays of their children, every other member of our group team up to visit their houses...We bring everything required for partying through collecting money. We hold celebrations for family members and we take part in it too. We return home our hearts filled with joy... and satisfaction.”

In the words of an ADS secretary **Kumari**:

We arrange a tour each year. We have visited Mysore, Vismaya and Veegaland Water theme Parks so far. We collect a tour fund from all members for the purpose. We arrange a bus by ourselves which starts early morning at 5 am. Usually, we enjoy for two days and come back. Sometimes, we even go to Wayanad for short trips whenever we feel like we should team up and go.

Some meetings have a cathartic quality. This was revealed in this conversation with **Lathika**, another NHG member:

“Our NHG gets together for important national holidays. For Onam, we celebrate with floral carpet (Pookkalam) and Onam Sadhya (feast). We hold games like ‘Sundarikku Pottu Thodal’, lemon-spoon race, sweet picking, putting thread inside needle, walking race, musical chairs etc. We even give small compliments to winners like comb, Dr.Wash, Exo Bar Soap etc. which are very useful in the house. Similarly, on Christmas Eve, We have a cake-cutting party. On 31st Dec, we summarise the year-long activities. Sometimes while recalling an activity in the year some members get very emotional...we understand...we give them opportunity to vent, cry or wail as well...we also celebrate someone’s good recollections of the year as well”

A key feature of these small group gatherings were the openness with which even personal matters were discussed creating a deep sense of shared understanding and appreciation for each other and their problems. A deep connection emanated from sharing these. In the words of a

CDS secretary **Vanitha**:

“KS resembles my family. I feel all are free to discuss family affairs and difficulties during meetings. The meetings serve as a relief to our feelings and emotions. We share our experiences and serve as mutual support to each other under all circumstances. The spirit of KS lies in the unity, happiness and eternal joy for ladies who feel suffocated within the confines of homes. For them, this is a way of unburdening their worries...many of which they cannot confide in any family member!”

Meetings are a source of appreciation and support boosting the morale and confidence of women who are otherwise hardly recognized or appreciated.

Vanaja:

“No, we do not discuss just problems...it is much more than just that. Like if any KS member has achieved something remarkable during the current year, they are applauded for it during the meeting on Dec 31st. We make them to stand up while all others clap. This is more significant than an award for that achievement...it increases their enthusiasm to do better things next time.”

Field notes: We attended a weekly meeting. The gathering took place in the house of one of the members. We understood that every member hosted the meeting in rotation. This offered an opportunity to all of them to get a close look at the situation and requirements of each member and consequently appreciate their genuine needs. This meeting was at the house of Kumari, the secretary of the NHG.

Kumari:

We: So why you all decided to host the meetings in one of your houses?

“We all want to have our friends over to our homes (smiles). Isn't it? See when we do so we also become aware of the conditions in each one's home. So, help can be provided even without asking...it happens so many times. These meetings also helped to develop a strong 'Ayal Bandham' (good relationship between neighbors), to have acquaintance easily, to bring general awareness and understand many things.”

We: How long do you all meet?

“Meetings might start at 1 pm and stretch on till 5pm because it is an enjoyable experience for everyone and everyone loves it. All were celebrating the unity...Whatever discussions are held, those are not revealed to anyone outside the circle including spouses or relatives.”

The significance of such gatherings can be better appreciated when we look into the social context of many of these women. Hailing from patriarchic families, they lead a cocooned life within the four walls of domesticity. They have little opportunity or freedom to venture out of their homes and connect with the larger society. The KS meetings are their first tentative steps to the world outside.

When the word-of-mouth spread, women who had not joined KS were soon keen to be members. But membership was not automatic and was restricted to women in a locality. The advantage of this system is that KS is now managed wholly by women who know the best about the needs of their locality and their genuine demands get voiced out in the NHG meetings.

Suja recollected how much she had wanted to join KS:

“When I saw ladies going for meetings, I requested whether I could also join. The lady said that only women of a locality can join and she didn’t know beyond that; but anyways she promised to recommend my name.

We: Why was it so difficult to attend a meeting?

“No outsider can attend the KS meetings.”

We: How do you feel now, that you are a member?

“All the 20 members in my group are like one family only, sharing jokes and other matters. If KS were not there, I wouldn’t have gone out of the house or mingled with others...ever since we have joined together, strong feelings exist among us. We know each other and our background very well just as we have been living together under one roof.”

Ties of Mutual support

A feeling of mutual support forms the bedrock of an informal organization. It is manifested through a belief that the fellow members would take care of group members whenever needs arise. Expectations of mutual support are built over periods of close interactions. Mutual support during times of financial need or personal crisis enhanced the feeling of oneness among members. We describe a few such instances below:

Field notes: We visited an NHG where they were discussing the distribution of loan among the group members. An old lady, Kunhilakshmi had taken Rs. 10,000 as loan to repair her dilapidated hut. She returned the amount when she found that her neighbour required the amount urgently as her son was hospitalized.

Kunhilakshmi:

We: Why did you give back your sanctioned amount?

“My neighbour needs it more today...I can wait (smiles).”

Swapna:

“Initially, we didn’t get 1 lakh loan from Jilla Mission as number of below poverty line or scheduled tribe members were less than required in our group. But our members supported us in taking a loan for cow-rearing from the village Panchayat (local self government). Unfortunately, when we were ill due to chikungunya, we couldn’t take care of those milch cows and hence, they had to be sold off. We then cultivated plantains, cola cassia, yam etc. Photos of the land and cultivated crop were submitted to Jilla Mission. Our photo had come in the newspaper along with the story of our successful venture (smiles). We could do it only with the support from our members.”

Ranjini:

“My husband had developed a drinking habit due to which I faced many hurdles. I was very troubled and confided to the CDS chair Vanaja many times. She tried to advise him, but it didn’t work out. Then all of my group members intervened to make him seek help at a rehabilitation centre which brought a great change into our lives. I was lucky enough to come out from that situation...”

Togetherness offers moral support during times of a personal crisis. At such times, the boundaries between families tend to blur with friends becoming sources of personal strength.

Daisy had tears fill her eyes when she shared this with us:

Daisy:

“My husband is a daily wage earner. I have two sons. My younger son owned and ran a fancy shop in Kunnakulam. He was the pillar of support of our family. Unfortunately, he died in an accident. I was broken and depressed. I stayed away from KS meetings. Then all members in our 15-member group visited my home and consoled me...took me along...took special care of me and ensured that I was always had someone around me... Because of them I started going back to the meetings and activities...and slowly accept fate.”

Ties of Trust

The trust between the members of KS was palpable, and we felt it throughout our data collection.

It seemed like they seemed to believe that they would do good towards other members of KS and when their turn would come they would be receiving good from other members as well.

Voluntary associations have found the presence of trust as a common feature in sociology

(Anheier and Kendall, 2002). Trust is a belief that an individual has about the other members of the group and is rooted in shared expectations about others' behavior. It allows the individual to take for granted the relevant motivations and behaviors of others in her group. The formal processes of the organization are managed efficiently on account of the informal processes including which is based on trust among members.

Field notes: We asked the women, who had no earlier experience of handling money, how they could confidently transact business involving NHG money, how they decided on priorities for spending and if they were worried about possibilities of any misappropriation? Some of the responses that we got are as below:

Radha:

“Decision-making for fund allocation within our group is done with the knowledge and signatures of all members. If there is a sudden need then on humanitarian basis the President and Secretary may disburse the amount, which is then ratified in a later meeting. We know that all will support the cause so there is no need to worry for approvals. They will happen.”

Lathika:

“Loans are sanctioned on an emergency basis for sickness and college admissions by decision of President and secretary. Later on, it is ratified by the group. We trust our members to do the right thing...”

Girija:

“I have been handling accounts for many years, till now not 5 paise has been misplaced. In between I had stayed away for 3 years grieving the loss of my dear son. But, my group members pleaded and brought me back to the same position”.

Putnam (2000) distinguished between thick and thin trust and describes thick trust as being embedded in highly personal relations that usually form the densest part of an extended network of family and friendship ties. This notion of thick trust can be extended to the entire organization based on the action and behaviours of individual members. Such an extension is possible in KS given the way its activities are perceived by the public at large. Usha, a NHG secretary had this to share about how trust has permeated into the entire organization:

Usha:

“The five ward members from the Panchayat dealing with KS act as the Rakshadikaris’ (guardians). Not even a single rupee is wasted.”

Anheier and Kendall (2002) suggest that trust may be formed by instilling habits of co-operation, solidarity and public-spiritedness. Further, trust among members in turn inculcates skills for social, economic and political activities of all kinds. Informal organizations are thus found to be an important incubator of the values like trust and offer an environment where personal ties are strengthened by trust and vice versa.

Ties of Identity

Throughout our immersion in the context, we felt that being a member of KS formed an essential part of the self evaluation and self worth of each of the group member. A strong sense of self identity fused with the group identity was also observed. Each woman saw her identity as derived from the group that she was a part of. When we asked them to tell us what was KS some of them replied as follows:

Vanaja:

“KS is Vishvasam (Faith). It is us. We are it.”

Lizzy:

“Sometimes I even think what we are other than KS members. It is today no less important to me than myself as a wife of somebody, a daughter of somebody”

Suja:

“KS is Muthhate Bank (bank in my courtyard). We think it is ours. Also, similarly, we think we belong to others as well as members of KS...people who need us”.

KS members took pride that they were members of an organization which was pure and uncorrupted and had a reputation of being an incorruptible among the entire village as well as

stakeholders like government, banks and local self government members. They also took pride in the fact that it is an organization that works on consensus building and every voice was heard.

Kavitha:

“In meetings, all of us equally participate in the discussion. There are generally a number of pros and cons for each idea. A decision is passed only if all the members agree to it. By this process people coming from different backgrounds agree for a common cause ... this is very useful...and wonderful.”

Remya:

“The spirit of KS is enhanced by idea generation initiatives which provide us a new outlook. It is from KS that we derive the inner strength to differentiate between right and the wrong, goodness and sin...”

We: Is this limited to issues within your group?

“Wherever crisis situations arise, we are called forth to intervene and find solutions. The faith that people have on us is increasing day by day...our reputation of no corruption in this organization is something all villagers will tell you... this is evident from the calls we keep on receiving.”

Local government members take cognizance of their recommendations before sanctioning money for many programs. In the words of a CDS member Lakshmi:

We: How do you decide who gets particular benefits?

“A Grama Sabha (village level meeting) happens on the 20th of each month. A beneficiary claimant form for applying for a house, shed, toilet, plantain or coconut saplings, cow etc. is distributed via KS on 10th of the next month. These are filled up by deserving candidates and re-submitted to KS on 15th. These are passed onto the Grama Sabha by the CDS members. The list is read out in front of the Grama Sabha for quorum. There is a 7-member Scrutiny Committee consisting of ADS President, CDS, ward member, two political party representatives. The KS members are well acquainted with all the houses in the ward. So, the final list of beneficiaries is prepared only with our consent. No kind of party influence or governmental pressures is possible there.”

“I strictly follow the criteria used for selection of Asraya (a government program) destitutes. The Asraya destitutes are identified with a set of fixed standards, of which 60% should be satisfied. Only those who have no means to live, no wards, and no property/land come under this criteria. I scrutinize all the houses in the locality to prepare the list of beneficiaries. Since I am familiar with people of my locality, it is rather easy to identify”.

Being familiar with people in the locality/ward, Kudumbashree members are able to ensure that the most deserving villagers only get help from government schemes. This aspect assumes significance in a context where several government projects have not reached the truly deserving and instead get diverted to vested interest due to widespread corruption and nepotism. Integrity in allocation has enhanced the respect KS members enjoy in society and hence are looked upon as a trustworthy implementation engine for government projects.

Responsibility for Social Change and Emancipation

The stories that we heard were of lives full of tears and agony due to consistent poverty and social marginalization of women. During our data collection we observed how a social movement was waiting to happen as women had taken up a firm resolve to fighting against poverty and for social change. When the members realised the strength of being together and belonging to KS, they also felt a responsibility to themselves, their fellow members and society at large to contribute towards emancipation. The recognition of their capabilities, made possible by the opportunities offered by KS, has given them a collective identity, when they had none. They feel like a force capable of changing lives.

Umrah:

“I have become bold enough to react strongly and ask questions when I see anything wrong happening around me. Once, I felt that the fund allocation for road construction and repair purpose by the Panchayat was not proper. The venue of work had been shifted without our knowledge. When I pointed that out, they had to answer. Now, I am in a position to re-direct others towards common good.”

Field notes: We asked some members how the strength of their bond has enabled them to be self-sufficient. These are some of the responses we got:

Shanta:

“After being a part of KS I have become courageous to face problems in life. I have suffered a lot... I also faced huge problems due to my ill-health and due to the alcoholic habits of my husband. Now I am ready to face the world in a bold manner... and take on whatever challenges may come my way.”

Bindu:

“For meetings, the activities are first prayer, then welcome speech, presidential address, report reading, discussion, and minutes. Initially, all of us were afraid to deliver any speech and would be shaking when asked to address an audience. Gradually, we picked up and our speeches have improved...Today, I do not stop when I once get started. (smiles).”

A realization of their inherent strengths that had an opportunity to surface through mutual help had helped break self-imposed gender based limitations on work and movement.

Shijina:

“Usually, only men visit shops for buying groceries. We are not in the habit of going outside. Also, in the morning and evening, men like us to be there in the house for serving food. We had to face many such restrictions... After joining KS, the situation has changed such that we don't wait for permission from husbands to come for meetings. Mostly, we would just inform that we are leaving for KS meetings and get out of the house. As part of our busy schedule, we may return home late in the night. That also is ok with them now”.

One of the distinct features of informal participatory organizations is their inherent capacity to help their members realize and consequently extricate rights which were traditionally denied to them. The Kudumbashree sisterhood has added an enduring quality to women's emancipation by ensuring that as a collective they continue to support each other without needing any external encouragement. Women themselves have realized the importance of such a collective effort to improve their situation in life as shown below:

Field notes: The social context in Kerala is patriarchal and as a consequence women are expected to get the consent of their husbands before they venture out of their homes. We asked the members about their experiences on working late outside home and the way society viewed their being in the forefront of several NHG activities. We present what Usha shared with us:

Usha:

“Earlier, if we were seen outside by our husbands, then we had to explain why we went there. Similarly, there were restrictions on riding on other males' bikes. But now, we don't have to answer questions, we are not doubted. Nowadays we reach our homes after meetings and work at 9 or 10 pm. Even till that time we are out, no one from home calls to enquire about our whereabouts”.

Membership in KS has brought about a change in perspective that has helped members overcome their personal prejudices against different castes and religions.

Says Uma:

All religions are welcome to join in KS. There is no difference based on economic or social status. All are equal here...Earlier, I did not take food from scheduled caste households. But after joining KS, I was made to change that. The meeting would be hosted by each member a week at their house. We were served tea and snacks there. So, I had to eat... Now all festivals, birthdays and weddings are celebrated together.

Responsibilities for learning and growth

Another observation that we consistently had during data collection was the inherent sense of responsibility among KS members for their own learning and growth and ensuring that of others, even of villagers, who were not part of KS. Members also helped each other come out of their shell and express themselves without inhibitions. They invariably felt that they were lucky to have been given a platform from where they should take a plunge for personal development.

Sumitra:

“Almost one and a half years passed after I joined KS. The senior lady looking after accounts was getting old and wanted to quit. She looked for someone to entrust that responsibility. I was chosen and she explained to me everything regarding how to manage accounts in the group. From then till now, I have been managing accounts for years without any mistake.”

Renuka:

“Earlier, women didn’t know how to pay taxes. Now all queues contain ladies. Ladies are patient and will retreat only after the required task is completed. Women are now seen going to Grama Sabhas (village meetings), unlike in the past. We are now called for almost every task requiring interaction with people.”

Pushpa:

“We have been trying out several new initiatives. After all how much of farming and cattle rearing can you do? In the last meeting, we discussed about starting mushroom farming, which requires wet conditions and hay to grow up. We are also considering candle-making as it is economical and easily learnt. Similarly, petticoat tailoring is already being implemented by Keerthi Sangham (another NHG). We watch TV and get inspiration for these projects... as well as information from other groups around...apart from interests in particular skills we are also looking for a regular source of income”.

We discovered that they actively focused on learning new functional skills that have added to their confidence and empowered them to become able administrators of the organization. These responses from women of an NHG underline this:

Radhamani:

“The spirit of KS is the opportunity to learn new things. Now, I know how to drive tractor, how to use weeding machine and spray machine on rubber trees. I was trained and conduct classes at the Vengeri, Kalpetta Agricultural Research Centre.”

Sugatha:

“Familiarity with banking procedures gives me an edge by being a KS member. I am taking loans, depositing thrift, writing cheques, signing and doing all other activities which I never expected that I might be able to.”

Valli:

“KS has helped to improve my confidence. Now, I am included in all the events and meetings happening in the Panchayat and ward. I am a member of Grama Sabha in which I have a definite say in matters.”

Parvathi:

“KS has made me confident to go anywhere. Being a member of KS, I am acquainted with lots of people in my locality/ward now. I am involved in so many roles now. I have learnt to manage activities assigned to me in a better manner than before.”

Pushpa:

“Empowerment through KS produces the ability to lead others for collectively achieving results. KS provides an opportunity for using our potential. We have become courageous enough to set a fine example through our lives”

The NHG meetings became an avenue to share information about job opportunities and women often encouraged each other to give a job interview a try. Parvathi and Sumathi had to share this with us:

Parvathi:

“When ladies started stepping out of their homes, they wanted a regular income. During meetings, after collecting thrift and discussing everyday events, there was nothing much to be done. So, we started sharing employment opportunities in newspapers. We asked our members to apply for jobs of their choice...gradually, everyone started getting jobs. Now, all are salaried except for two in our NHG. One is computer instructor; two in post office and school for daily wages, one is into writing legal documents and other in making clothes and selling through KS”

Sumathi:

“There was a member Molly chichi, who didn’t know how to read or write; now she can sign her name. The group helped her become literate. Due to KS, ladies have come to the forefront; no one has stage-fear now. Visits to banks have become successful and their hidden talents are being revealed... I feel that learning and gaining knowledge is an important result of participation (smiles). It has helped me to talk to others ... as a channel for contact with outsiders, that opportunity is lost if we stay at home. Great changes happened in my life due to this”

The ties of social obligation among members get thicker when they experience and benefit from personal growth gained through working for KS.

Authority from Legitimacy

Legitimacy is earned over time. The recognition within the KS as well as outside it that this is an organization that has strong ties among its members and huge sense of responsibility in each member towards themselves as well as towards society in general has given them the legitimacy that they are agents of social change and should therefore be encouraged and empowered. This is noteworthy as it imparts a sense of value to the members for their contributions. Legitimacy bestows members the authority to carry on their collective efforts of improving their lot as well as that of the larger society. Legitimacy also bestows a sense of pride. These feelings act as glue among members and encourage them to continue in their joint efforts.

Shanta:

“We feel that attitude of society towards KS is changing...Initially society opposed us and even ridiculed our group meetings saying that we were gathering just to gossip. But seeing our progress over the years, they have now admiration for us”.

Renuka:

“We approach problems in the society and solve them. So, admiration and respect naturally comes from the society. Such activities have made me more responsive to injustice...Also, now husbands have high regard for us that we are able to earn and take loans for the family requirements.”

The manifestation of legitimacy is most powerful in the form of recognition from external stakeholders as Swathi shares with us her experience of how banks value their KS membership. We also visited a couple of banks and verified their claims. The bank officers showed us how loan requests of KS members had been judged as good risk profiles. They also supported KS members' claims that any villager, whose credibility was backed by KS, was given a good risk profile by them.

Swathi:

“We now get banks loans without getting into many formalities. So, it is easy for us to access and we have already learnt the procedures too. Just the name of KS offers credibility.”

Members are respected more on account of their being KS members. Teresa recounts her early attempts to get elected to the Panchayat (local self government) and how her chances improved after becoming a KS member.

Teresa:

“I stood for the Panchayat elections before becoming a member of KS...but, unfortunately, I lost the elections. Even though, I was associated with church activities and acquainted with the usual crowd at church; people failed to recognize me. But, the situation is very different now... after I joined NHG...within a short span of three years, I became the CDS member based on my capabilities alone...The society is aware that our activities are benefitting them. The situation has come of such that we are now being considered the right people to go to for help ...Our helping mentality always made us support charity activities. We were able to help to cancer patients with donations. We got reports of such cases from two NHGs Aiswarya and Sauhrida. We also got to know about a God-fearing Muslim youth who fell into a broken well by accident and lost his life. This was brought to our notice by the ward member. Immediately we collected and contributed to help his innocent wife and three kids.”

Legitimacy has encouraged the members to extend their work for non-members as well. The advantage of such mutual help and standing up for each other during times of emergencies is that it further improves the way services are delivered by other organizations. An instance in an NHG is proof of this:

Girija:

“In our ward, the nurse didn’t give medical attention to a pregnant lady who was a KS member. She was admitted at night in labor pain. Despite several people going to the nurse and asking for help, she refused to come. Then, somehow, the lady was taken to a midwife, who helped her with the delivery. Next day itself, the KS members got together and made arrangements for transfer of that nurse along with warning her. The new nurse is discharging her duties quite effectively, also fearful of the situation faced by her predecessor.”

Legitimacy gives the members an authority and agency to act making it an important part of the construct of social obligation.

EMERGING THEMES FOR THE CONSTRUCT OF SOCIAL OBLIGATION

Social obligation is built on ties of connectedness. One of the primary human needs is the need to connect. Family is one of the smallest informal organizations, where an individual finds solace in the fact that he or she shall be able to connect with others in the family. KS members repeatedly stated that *they felt like a family*. They celebrated festivals and good occasions just like families. They also mourned their losses together just as they do in a family. They shared good news, happiness, fun times and important days together. During participation in these group activities, a kind of openness develops in informal organizations, which is similar to the openness that one experiences, when one puts ones guards down with friends. Need to connect, therefore forms one of the basis of the construct of social obligation. *Ties of connectedness are the first identified emerging themes of social obligation construct.*

Social obligation is built on a strong sense of individual identity derived from group identity. “*I am what I am because of my group*” is another theme that dominated the minds of participating individuals of KS. It was important to them how others within the group perceived them. KS members derived their sense of identity from KS. Also, it emerged that there was a sense of fusion of their individual self with their group membership self of KS. It was also important to them how KS was perceived by other stakeholders and outsiders. In fact this was a matter of

utmost importance to them sometimes more than how a family member stands for the reputation of his family. They actively invested their time and energy to create positive perceptions. ***A tie of identity with the group is important for work motivation and therefore is the second emerging theme of social obligation.***

There is implicit sense of trust and mutual support among the participating individuals. ***“They would do the same for me if I were in trouble”*** is a dominant theme in expectation of an individual from his or her group members. This is an important presumption and indicative of how uniformity of minds develops and leads to creation of norms and expectations in informal organizations. Often, other members preserve and propagate the interests of an absentee group member. They would forego individualistic gains for other group members. Sometimes, they might even die for their group members, which they would not do for any other individual. ***This mutual sense of trust and support is an important reason behind continuing to work in informal organizations.***

Gender marginalization was high for women. So a sense of justice was predominant in their discussions. They felt that they had the ***responsibility of giving women an opportunity to be themselves.*** Social marginalization has been seen as an important binding force in a group, which creates uniformity in the minds of the participating individuals. There is strength in unity. Socially marginalized populations generally tend to stick fast together to keep from getting hurt by dominant humans or communities. The sense of injustice meted out to them, keeps them together for self preservation. It is in tune with life’s first aim – survival. However, once the group survives, then the second aim of life to thrive and grow takes over. So, these formations continue to stick together to propagate. ***Thus, the goal of social obligation is to preserve or propagate the group through responsibility for emancipation.***

Groups, who continue to preserve and propagate, give a sense of pleasure to the participants in continued memberships. The sense of pleasure might be due to continued feeling of connectedness. They might be due to pecuniary and non-pecuniary gains. When *members perceive that they have growth and learning opportunities in the group they tend to bond strongly and propagate the group itself*. When they perceive that they are better able to face failures and challenges in their personal lives, they become advocates of their group. *Responsibility for learning and development formed another important theme of the construct of social obligation.*

The group membership also gives a sense of legitimacy to the participating individuals. “*Society views me as important as I am a member of this group*” is another theme that emerges in the construct of social obligation. Equally important is the feeling that “*I am important as I am a member of this group*” that emanates in the minds of the participating individuals. So, continuing to work driven by the sense of social obligation in a group is important to participating individuals as it signals legitimacy viz. legitimacy in the eyes of self as well as in that of others. *The authority to be able to bring about social change was derived from this legitimacy. This formed another important theme in the construct of social obligation*

Finally, a continued sense of membership is seen to be important for both preservation as well as propagation. Social obligation never dies with cessation of group membership though the liabilities of the obligation might decrease and become asymptotic over a period. Also, when the intensity of the unifying agency for social obligation decreases for any reasons, the participation reduces in intensity and the group might even cease to exist over time. *However, “once a part, always a part to a group” is a continued theme in the construct of social obligation.* It is rare to find an erstwhile member not reminiscing the *good old days*.

CONCLUSION

We see the construct of social obligation as an important explanation for motivations to work in an informal organization. It helps realize the antecedents and processes for motivating individuals working in informal organizations. Today, with organizations getting remodelled to suit the requirements of the knowledge economy and globalization, new organizing methods have been growing that are difficult to understand using traditional organizational architectures and principles (Seidel & Stewart, 2011). With these developments, there are more chances of informal organizations perpetrating in organising human activities. Open source software like Linux or Wikipedia or social networking sites are some examples of new age informal organizations. An understanding of the construct of social obligation will be required to control and manipulate informal organizations in important ways. If positively enforced, social obligation has the capacity to generate strong motivations in individuals to keep working towards organizationally and socially desirable ends. If not harnessed well, it might generate sources of resistance or indifference within and beyond organizations. As it can't ever be parted away with, it has the propensity to become a source of constant liability.

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Table 1: Themes and Sub-Themes from Interviews (I) and Focus Group Discussions (F)

Themes	Sub themes	I	F
Ties of connectedness	Openness like family	√	√
	Happiness and fun	√	√
	Kitty Party Phenomenon	√	√
	Spending holidays and festivals together	√	√
	Spending important personal days together		√
	Remembering days of national importance		√
	Mingling with the society		√
	Mutually helping each other	√	√
	Missing a meeting makes me sad	√	√
	Human need to connect	√	√
Ties of Identity	Pride in being an un-corrupted organization	√	√
	Implementation engine for govt. projects	√	√
	Pride in govt. dependence on them	√	√
	I want to contribute to society	√	√
	Due recognition for my capability	√	√
	Charity for non-members	√	√
	Encouraging others to join	√	√
	Spirit of KS		√
	Main aim of KS		√
	Collective Strength	√	√
	Collective Decision-making	√	√
	Loyalty towards KS	√	√
	Familiarity with people of locality/ward	√	√
Ties of Mutual support	Support from each other	√	√
Ties of Trust	Flexible Mechanisms	√	√
	Un-corrupted me and others	√	√
	Sharing difficult information	√	√
Responsibility for Social Change and Emancipation	Ladies grouping to fights/gossip		√
	Belief about health, sanitation and education changing	√	√
	Changing perception of late-night mobility for ladies	√	√
	Only males can earn for the family	√	√
	Females actively participating	√	√
	Belief about liquor consumption change	√	√
	Going on the bike of another male is not bad all the time	√	
	Perception towards KS changed		√
	Earlier social isolation	√	√
I changed for the better	√	√	

	Drinking liquor by men is ok		√
	Answerable to men & society in general is ok	√	
Responsibilities for learning and growth	Learning Opportunities	√	√
	How they are important in building capacity	√	√
	How idea generation happens in growth	√	√
	How they collectively face failures	√	√
	How they debate	√	√
	Equipped to face challenges in personal life	√	√
	How their world views have changed	√	√
	How they became extroverts	√	√
	How they try new things	√	√
	Authority from Legitimacy	Govt./other stakeholders like bank recognize me	√
Society gives more respect to me now		√	√
My family members think that I am important now		√	√
Providing societal good		√	√
Perceived as a valuable person because of being a KS member		√	√

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<i>Abstract:</i> Every organization is composed of nested formal and informal organizations. Bernard (1938) conceptualized that informal groups arise in formal organizations and these informal groups evolve to become functioning informal organizations within formal organizations. Mainstream research in organization theory has focused primarily on formal organizations wherein employee-employer relationships guide employees' work motivations as in the construct of psychological contract. Psychological contract incorporates the mutual beliefs, perceptions, and informal obligations between an employer and an employee and explains why people work in organizations. However, psychological contract fails to explain what happen in organizations, where there is an absence of employee-employer relationships. There is a gap. Also, the construct is inadequate in explaining work motivations in settings that are predominantly informal organizations. We propose a construct of social obligation as an alternative to explain motivations to work in informal organizations. In this paper, we define social obligation as – A set of reciprocal ties, responsibilities and consequent authorities that are primarily rooted in the uniform states of mind of individuals in the informal organization, which motivates work in those organizations. We describe the constituent elements of social obligation as a set of ties that bind members to one another, which leads them to feel responsible for each other and for society at large and which further begets them the consequent authority of legitimacy to act and fulfill those responsibilities.	
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