

Conversations for Kindness

Social capital as a means for making kindness a norm

September 2024

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About the movement

Conversations for Kindness is a monthly virtual meeting that was set up in the summer of 2020 by eight colleagues and friends working in healthcare across Sweden, the UK and the USA: Bob Klaber, Dominique Allwood, Maureen Bisognano, Goran Henriks, Suzie Bailey, Anette Nilsson, Gabby Matthews and James Mountford. The purpose of the meeting was to have some time together to continue some initial conversations around kindness, and its role at the 'business end' of healthcare, and to plan interactive workshops on this topic.

Conversations for Kindness

- Monthly Zoom call on the third Thursday of every month (6-7pm UK time)
- A focus on listening, learning, thinking differently and mobilising for action
- An open culture of sharing of resources, energy and ideas

If you would like to join the conversation for kindness, please complete this **[contact form](#)**

Joining the Conversation from across the world

More than **30** Kindness in Healthcare community members came together from all over the world for this Conversation for Kindness. Once again, we had new faces join us for the first time!

Where were our participants?



New Zealand



Sweden



England

Who did we hear from? Tom Lee

We were lucky to have Dr Tom Lee speak to the group today on **social capital**. Tom is a world-leading voice in the field of social capital in healthcare – what it is, why we need it, and how to get it. Lately, some of us have been discussing how social capital and kindness work together to build a kind and safe organisational culture and team performance.

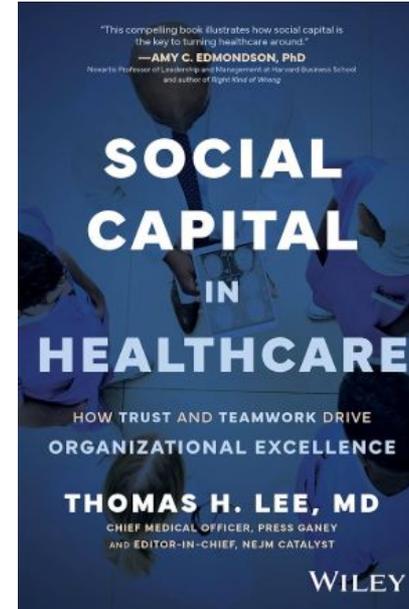


This insights pack summarises the session, but you can also [watch the event on YouTube](#)

What did we hear? What is social capital?

Tom explained the different sorts of capital that a healthcare organisation can utilise to influence organisational culture and performance.

- **Financial capital** – having the money and resources to sustain and grow business operations
- **Human capital** – having the right people, with the right skills, in the right positions to achieve organisational objectives and service delivery
- **Social capital** – how people interact with each other and their infrastructure to achieve what financial and human capital alone cannot. Currencies of social capital include trust, teamwork, and high reliability – how teams connect and work together.



What did we hear? Why is social capital important?

Tom advocated for managers to approach social capital with the same intensity and discipline as financial capital. He highlighted the need for building connections, strengthening them, and transmitting the right values across these connections to improve healthcare outcomes.

Studies have shown:

- There is a correlation between caregivers feeling respected and patients reporting better experiences.
- Organisations with the highest levels of staff engagement also have the strongest cultures of safety
- There is a correlation between diversity, equity and inclusion mean scores for organisations and higher levels of staff retention
- Having a belief that the organisation provides a high quality of care to patients correlates with the likelihood of staff staying with their organisation.

Managerial approach: Managers need to view themselves as CFOs for social capital, emphasizing the need for intensity and discipline in managing social capital akin to financial capital.

Building connections: We heard the importance of building connections within healthcare organizations, strengthening those connections, and ensuring the transmission of appropriate values to enhance healthcare outcomes.

Amplifying signals: there is huge potential of social networks in healthcare and the steps needed to harness their power, including building and strengthening connections and transmitting values.

Enforcement mechanisms: We heard of the necessity of having enforcement mechanisms to ensure adherence to the behavioural norms that contribute to building social capital.

What did we hear? Building social capital

Three functions are essential for building social capital:

1. **Building connections,**
2. **Strengthening connections, and**
3. **Transmitting the right values across these connections.**

These functions are key to unleashing the power of social networks in healthcare.

- **Unleashing social networks:** He suggests that these functions are crucial for unleashing the power of social networks within the healthcare sector.
- **Improving outcomes:** Thomas implies that by focusing on these functions, healthcare organisations can improve outcomes by leveraging the benefits of a strong social network.
- **Values transmission:** Emphasizes the importance of transmitting the right values across connections to ensure that the social capital built aligns with the organization's goals and culture.



These qualities must become routine, expected, and reflected in group norms and values. Tom likened it to asking how we can make norms ritualised the same as hand-washing.

- Respect
- Pride
- Trust
- Inclusion
- Reciprocity
- Transitivity

What did we hear? Social capital is human connection

Importance of bridging and bonding connections: Tom highlighted the significance of both bridging and bonding connections in building social capital. He explained that bridging connections facilitate innovation and learning across groups, while bonding connections strengthen trust and reliability within groups.

- **Bridging connections:** Facilitate innovation and learning *across* different groups within healthcare organizations.
- **Bonding connections:** Connections that strengthen trust and reliability *within* groups, contributing to a cohesive work environment.

Connection types: Managers need to foster both types of connections to build a robust social capital within their organizations, in order to:

- **Facilitate innovation:** Thomas emphasizes that bridging connections are crucial for facilitating innovation by bringing together diverse ideas and perspectives.
- **Strengthen trust:** He asserts that bonding connections are essential for strengthening trust and creating a reliable and supportive team dynamic.



What did we hear? Closing remarks

- All of us can work to strengthen our connections within and across our networks and groups.
- Be explicit in choosing and then modelling and encouraging the 'right' norms.
- Social capital should be treated like financial capital – we should measure what matters, prioritise opportunities to improve social capital resources in our organisation, create plans and pathways, and monitor progress.

Further resources



Group questions

“How can I best enquire about the existence of social capital norms when I’m in conversations with a prospective new employer? What should I look for?”

You can try to assess the relationship to social capital through how the organisation is responding to AI. Organisation’s ability to implement AI and learn and fail quickly, that will be a huge advantage. The data is often there about how do people feel about the culture of respect. We advocate for these data to be shared with boards, and ideally prospective candidates. Do they have a culture where people feel valued and treated with respect?

“I’m building up my social capital in my new role at a paediatric hospital in the USA, but I didn’t know it was called social capital”

We are trying to establish a norm where people are reliable at their best. Front line managers shape the micro culture. Everyone has something to teach others that would improve them.

Acknowledgements

This insights pack has been co-produced by
Nicki Macklin and the team at **Kaleidoscope Health and Care**

For all enquiries please contact us [via the Kindness in Healthcare website](#) or email
bob.klaber@nhs.net

See you next month for another great Conversation.

[Check out resources from our previous sessions on our website](#)

Thank you for joining, thank you for reading.

We'll see you next month!