

Brief Note

This is a long abstract of a paper at very early stage of development. The overall idea and method section is there, but there is no final discussion yet. Actually there is where we are welcoming all help possible. As I will illustrate during the seminar we are still working on few methodological issues, but most important we need to strengthen the theoretical anchoring of the paper's result. Currently, our idea is to develop an Attention-based view of network advantage within organizations (is not in here, but I'll talk about it during the seminar), but maybe you have other suggestions ...

Thanks,

Francesco Ciabuschi

NETWORK STARS AND THE ATTENTION PARADOX**ABSTRACT**

The first contention of this paper is that the advantage derived from three classic network structures, in terms of promotion rates, are dependent on whether ego's advantage originates from ties that vertically cross formal organizational boundaries. The argument is that the more an actor is geared towards other actors at higher levels of the organization, the faster the time to promotion. The second contention is that promotion for actors with advantageous network positions—that is, network stars—is influenced by the degree of visibility to decision makers at higher levels of the organization. To test these contentions the paper draws upon the full social network of all managers of a large American organization. It is found that managers at lower organizational levels (subsidiary managers) that have strong network opportunities with higher levels of the organization (HQ managers) enjoy faster promotion rates. However, when these subsidiary managers are also highly visible to the HQ, they are, in fact, less likely to be promoted as it is in the HQ's best interest to maintain them in their current positions. This finding highlights a potential attention paradox where actors may benefit more from their networks if they are located in a unit that does not receive high degrees of attention from the parent unit. As a result, we suggest a contingent view of the value generated by intra-organizational network structures.

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THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

In organizational contexts, access to ideas that are conducive to positive outcomes such as higher compensation, or faster promotions is not the result of isolated actions. Access to strategic information can be influenced by the position of the focal actors, and by the structural properties of the network of relationships in which they are embedded. Specifically, network research has pointed to different social structures that may trigger such positive outcomes. Among these, a great deal of attention has been devoted to the ideas of tie strength (Granovetter 1973, Krackhardt 1992), brokerage (Burt 1992, 2004), and density (Coleman 1988). Each of these network structures provide the focal actor (ego) with resources that, although different in nature, may be conducive to advantage.

First, Granovetter (1973) proposes that strong ties tend to bond similar people to each other, and for this reason are unlikely to be the sources of novel information. Specifically, people that are linked by strong ties have a higher chance of having a large pool of common alters. This configuration should be conducive to higher redundancy of information in the network. On the other hand, weak ties are considered as proxies of “bridges”—ties that link otherwise disconnected alters. Weak ties should thus be conducive to non-redundant information, which is a key driver of superior performance (Granovetter 1973). This perspective, however, has been questioned on two fundamental aspects. First, Burt (1992, 2004) sees tie strength as a suboptimal proxy for the non-redundancy principle, and proposes a direct measure of brokerage as one that “captures the causal agent directly and thus provides a stronger foundation for theory” (Burt 1992: 28). Second, Krackhardt (1992) highlights that, while weak ties may offer access to higher amounts of non-redundant information, strong ties are conducive to different, but equally important advantages. In particular, due to their affective component, strong ties should facilitate trust, and in turn the exchange of important information (Krackhardt 1992). Thus, once access to a sufficient level of useful knowledge is granted—for example, via the focal employee’s prior work experience (Fleming et al. 2007), or via ties to different knowledge pools (Reagans and McEvily 2003)—strong ties should also be conducive to superior performance via increased trust, improved mutual understanding, and facilitated knowledge flows (Krackhardt 1992).

Second, early research on social networks highlighted that dense social structures give to individuals a broader, easier, and more immediate access to one another’s ideas and knowledge, which facilitates the effective resolution of complex and non-routine problems, particularly when information is ambiguous and unevenly distributed among actors (Leavitt 1951, Shaw 1954, 1964). Moreover, building on Coleman’s (1988) model of social capital, a rich vein of research shows that the consolidation over time of tightly coupled social structures leads to the creation of strong norms, mutual monitoring, and trust. This, in turn, should strengthen interpersonal collaboration, promote knowledge transfer, and foster superior performance (Obstfeld 2005, Reagans and McEvily 2003, Uzzi and Spiro, 2005).

Last, related to Granovetter’s logic, structural holes theory assumes disconnected actors to belong to distant social circles and, in turn, possess distinct knowledge and information, which is an important driver of superior

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performance (Burt 1992, 2004). In addition to knowledge access, brokerage offers to the focal actor also a control advantage determined by the dependency that the broker's others experience, due to the (lack of) availability of alternatives. Thus, individual brokers connected to otherwise disconnected alters are expected to benefit from increased power, and first access to non-redundant knowledge (Burt 1992, 2004).

Recent research has called for an analysis of the fact that informal social networks can cross formal organizational boundaries, and that this interplay may have a strong effect on informal network outcomes (McEvily, Soda and Tortoriello 2014). Actors have limited amounts of time and energy to dedicate to the formation and management of interpersonal relationships. If the organization is conceptualized as a hierarchy comprising both a higher (parent unit) and a lower (sister units) level, each actor will experience a tradeoff between the number of work relationships that she can entertain with each level. Thus, the more horizontal links one has, the fewer vertical links one can foster (and *vice versa*). For actors at the lower level of the organization, this implies that they will experience a tradeoff in terms of where (parent vs. sister units) they will develop their network advantage.

In particular, the presence of strong ties should favor the development of isomorphic positions and homophilous relations in social systems (McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook 2001). Thus, having a network of strong ties to actors at higher levels of the organization (*vis-à-vis* with actors in lower levels) should facilitate the development of codes of behaviors and shared values that resonate well with those that are in place where the promotion decision is taken, increasing the odds of faster promotion rates. Also, actors at higher levels of the organization possess key financial and managerial resources (Dellestrand and Kappen 2012, Stein 1997), and dense social structures have been shown to facilitate the formation of trust, collaboration and knowledge flows (Coleman 1988). Thus, having a dense network with actors at the higher level of the organization should also facilitate the access to those resources, which in turn should be promotive of career advancements. Similarly, the opportunity to bridge (vertical) relationships should confer ego the opportunity to both control the flow of information between key actors, and access non-redundant knowledge located at the higher levels of the organization – which should be particularly conducive to promotion. Formally,

H1: Actors that have a) strong ties, b) dense networks, c) brokering ties at higher (vis-à-vis lower) levels of the organization will have a faster rate of promotion.

Actors are constrained by rational limitations that make their decision-making contingent on attentional factors (Ocasio 1997, 2011). The attention-based view of the firm highlights the role of decision-makers' attention for firm behavior (Simon 1947, Ocasio 1997). It posits that decision-makers' actions depend on what issues and answers they focus their attention on, and that this focus depends on the particular context they are placed in. In turn, the decision

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context is shaped by the system of rules, resources, and social relationships that emerge in the organizational setting (Ocasio 1997). Visible attention (Bouquet and Birkinshaw 2008) captures the explicit recognition from a corporate parent of a subsidiary's existence and achievements. For actors in the higher levels of the organization, this implies that their knowledge of activities carried out in units at the lower levels of the organization is contingent on the visibility of those units. As a consequence, the decision to promote a given actor in lower levels of the organization should be influenced by the extent to which this actor's performance is known to the decision maker that is responsible for the promotion decision.

Improved knowledge of an actor's structural network advantage should be conducive to faster promotion rates (as posited in H1). In a similar vein, the increased visibility of an actor to the corporate parent may open up new opportunities for strengthening existing relationships and establishing new ones, thus positively contribute to the recognition of the network stars' value. Increased recognition of the value of such actor will lead to new opportunities for promotion. Formally,

H2: The positive effect on promotion of having a) strong ties, b) dense networks, c) brokering ties at higher levels of the organization is positively moderated by the unit's visible attention.

And yet, actors occupying key positions in the social structure – that is, network stars – tend to be repositories of knowledge and resources that are of key importance also for their alters. Thus, there can be an interest from the higher level of the organization to immobilize networks stars (lowering their rate of promotion) so as to limit the structural volatility of these stars. This might result in an attention paradox, where higher levels of visibility might not necessarily translate in higher promotion rates. Thus, we postulate also the following competing hypothesis:

H3: The positive effect on promotion of having a) strong ties, b) dense networks, c) brokering ties at higher levels of the organization is negatively moderated by the unit's visible attention.

METHODS

Data collection and research site

We drew the empirical data to test our theory from B-Com (a fictitious name), an American vertically integrated multinational company engaged in the production and marketing of products used as a means to improve performance efficiency and contain pollution. B-Com's is stock listed at the NYSE and its products are used by a variety of industry sectors, such as commercial/industrial, aerospace, chemical, energy and pharmaceuticals. We use three distinct data sources: Demographic information and relational data originate from a questionnaire that was *Work in progress. Please do not cite.*

submitted to all managers in the company in 2007. Promotions for all managers (from 2007 to 2014) were extracted from LinkedIn or, where needed, from other similar sources (e.g., individual profiles on Businessweek). The content of the company's annual report was used to compute the visible attention measure (Bouquet and Birkinshaw 2008).

The network questions were based on Burt's design (1992) and used the standard method of name-generator and name-interpreter items (Marsden 1990, 2005). In this method, respondents (egos) are first asked to select from the complete list of company managers (roster of alters) who they have one or more criterion relationships with (name-generators). Then, they are asked to further characterize their relationship with each listed person (name-interpreters). Specifically we asked each respondent to identify those colleagues in B-Com (by selecting their name and department from the roster provided online) with whom he or she had "communicated the most regarding work-related topics" in the last year (average number of relationships listed by egos = ###), and to further specify the strength of that relationship. The item was modified from the work of Brass (1985) and Burkhardt and Brass (1990), and was chosen in line with the idea that general work-related conversations expose individuals to ideas and resources that may lead to job performance and promotions.

Network data collection, through an online survey, was conducted during Spring 2007. First, our questionnaire was pretested with management scholars and managers to ensure that it was easily understood. We also tested it with representatives of B-Com to ensure that our items and the wording made sense within the firm. In parallel, during April and May 2007 the roster of all B-Com employees holding a managerial position was created with the help of headquarters staff and HR Director. Out of the targeted sample of 205 managers, 196 persons (49 HQ managers and 147 subsidiary managers) completed the questionnaire (final response rate of 96 percent). The final number of cases used in this study is 147, as the focus of our theorizing involves the career implications for subsidiary managers of having different visibility, and networks opportunities. Based on employees' responses, we created a matrix on the network relations (relation or not = 1/0) among the employees that have both responded themselves, and have been listed by others—that is, we only count as existing ties those ties that are confirmed by both actors involved in the relationships.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The correlation matrix includes descriptive statistics for all variables, and is shown in Table 1. As expected, the correlations between the network structures are high, indicating that they need to be estimated separately to test the formal hypotheses. As the managers in our study are at risk of being promoted at any time during our window of observation, and since not all managers attained promotion (meaning that observations are generally right censored), techniques for analyzing promotion patterns need to rely upon event history analysis (cf. Allison, 1995). To visually illustrate the rates of promotion and the effects of the network structures and visible attention, we ran a series of

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Kaplan-Meier Life-Tables (see Figure 1). To formally test our hypotheses we employed a Cox proportional hazard model. We ran seven different models in order to sequentially test the proposed hypotheses (all variables are specified in Table 1). Model 1 includes only the control variables. Models 2a and 2b present the results using strength to create our first index of network advantage. Models 3a and 3b substitute strength with density, testing our model with a second index of network advantage. Lastly, models 4a and 4b substitute density with brokerage, and test a third index of network advantage. Models 2a, 3a, and 4a test the main effects of visible attention and each of our network indexes (strength, density and brokerage, respectively). Models 2b, 3b, and 4b test the interactive effect of visible attention with each of our indexes separately. Taken together, these models test the career implications of having a network advantage that is mainly geared towards the parent unit (Hypotheses 1abc), and what happens when the employee having this advantage occupies a managerial position in a subsidiary that is particularly visible (Hypotheses 2abc).

We find support for hypotheses 1a, 1b, and 1c indicating that the advantage derived from the three classic network structures of strength, density and brokerage are indeed dependent on whether those structures are mainly formed of ties that vertically cross formal organizational boundaries. We also find support for one of the competing hypothesis (H2 and H3), namely hypotheses 3a and 3b (but not for hypothesis 3c) suggesting that actors that benefit from network advantages originating from strong ties or highly cohesive networks (but not brokerage) suffer from being highly visible. That is, these stars are more likely to be held back from promotion by decision makers at higher levels of the organization in order to preserve the status quo.

We conclude that a classic perspective to network advantage can be greatly enriched by integrating it with a more complete account of the implications of having informal ties that cross formal organizational boundaries (McEvily et al. 2014). Lastly, we provide preliminary evidence of an interesting and yet potentially problematic paradox that applies to network stars whose network advantage is known to HQ.

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TABLE 1
Correlation matrix (N=147)*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1) Visible attention	1.00																
2) Strength index	0.22	1.00															
3) Density index	0.16	0.61	1.00														
4) Brokerage index	0.16	0.93	0.59	1.00													
5) Male	-0.13	0.11	0.18	0.07	1.00												
6) Tenure of current position	-0.03	0.09	0.07	0.09	-0.19	1.00											
7) Industry experience	0.10	0.21	0.17	0.23	0.03	0.25	1.00										
8) Tenure at Donaldson	0.22	0.19	0.21	0.18	0.02	0.44	0.33	1.00									
9) Employee initiative	0.10	0.04	0.01	0.08	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.00	1.00								
10) Nr of relationships to HQ	0.20	0.49	0.68	0.32	0.16	0.07	0.08	0.14	0.00	1.00							
11) Distance to headquarters	-0.35	-0.18	0.05	-0.13	0.18	-0.14	-0.10	-0.17	0.13	-0.04	1.00						
12) European HQ employed	0.78	0.10	-0.01	0.07	-0.20	0.17	0.18	0.22	0.10	-0.01	-0.48	1.00					
13) Division dummy 1	-0.28	-0.23	-0.16	-0.16	0.09	-0.14	-0.07	0.01	-0.13	-0.21	-0.06	-0.17	1.00				
14) Division dummy 2	0.01	0.06	-0.08	0.09	-0.03	0.10	0.01	0.11	-0.12	-0.10	0.03	-0.03	-0.16	1.00			
15) Division dummy 3	0.25	-0.19	-0.09	-0.18	0.10	-0.16	-0.10	-0.05	0.01	-0.14	0.01	0.17	-0.21	-0.10	1.00		
16) Division dummy 4	0.01	0.15	0.08	0.10	0.11	0.12	0.05	0.13	0.25	0.03	-0.13	0.11	-0.22	-0.10	-0.14	1.00	
17) Division dummy 5	0.05	0.10	0.07	0.11	-0.07	0.07	0.14	0.08	0.06	-0.01	0.01	0.09	-0.08	-0.04	-0.05	-0.05	1.00
Mean	0.48	-0.43	-0.36	0.07	0.84	4.73	15.13	4.53	4.95	3.21	8592	0.36	0.25	0.07	0.12	0.12	0.02
Std. dev.	0.50	0.42	0.74	0.76	0.37	1.24	9.70	0.90	1.65	5.26	2823	0.48	0.44	0.25	0.32	0.33	0.14
Min. values	0	-1	-1	-1	0	1	0	1	1	0	2341	0	0	0	0	0	0
Max. values	1	0.35	0.88	0.85	1	6	41	5	7	28	15283	1	1	1	1	1	1

Promotion. We obtained our promotion data from the publicly available profiles from LinkedIn and similar sources (B-Com’s website, Bloomberg, Businessweek, or Forbes) where we identified as instances of promotion an increased job grade. **Visible attention.** We counted the total number of times a subsidiary country location was mentioned in the annual report (excluding references to currency and accounting standards) over one (2007) or two years (2006–07). **Strength index.** Our strength index captures the dominance of strong ties with HQ managers over subsidiary managers. Relationship strength is assessed for each relationship by asking the respondent “How strong is your relation with this colleague?”. The item was measured on a three-point scale (1 = weak and 3 = strong) for each relationship. If the respondent listed more than one tie, the average was calculated across the listed relationships to create an overall measure of relationship strength of all ties for each respondent. Based on this measure of strength, we then calculated the strength index as follows: Average strength HQ – Average strength SUB / Average Strength HQ + Average Strength SUB. **Density index.** Density captures the cohesiveness of an actor’s network and was computed in UCINET as the number of ties between those in the focal employee’s network that did not include the focal actor divided by the number of all possible ties in the network. Specifically, we calculated the density score of each ego first with all relationships with HQ managers—i.e., setting to 0 all ties to other subsidiary managers, and then for all relationships with subsidiary managers—i.e., setting to 0 all ties to HQ managers. In this way, we obtained two density scores for each ego, capturing their constraint with HQ managers and with subsidiary managers. We then computed the density index as follows: Density HQ – Density SUB / Density HQ + Density SUB. **Brokerage index.** Lastly, we developed a brokerage index based on Burt’s measure of constraint. We calculated the value of constraint of each ego for all relationships first with HQ managers, and then with subsidiary managers. We then multiplied the values of constraint by –1 in order to capture structural holes (the “opposite” of constraint). We computed the brokerage index as follows: Brokerage HQ – Brokerage SUB / Brokerage HQ + Brokerage SUB.

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FIGURE 1
How the strength, density, and brokerage indexes predict promotions

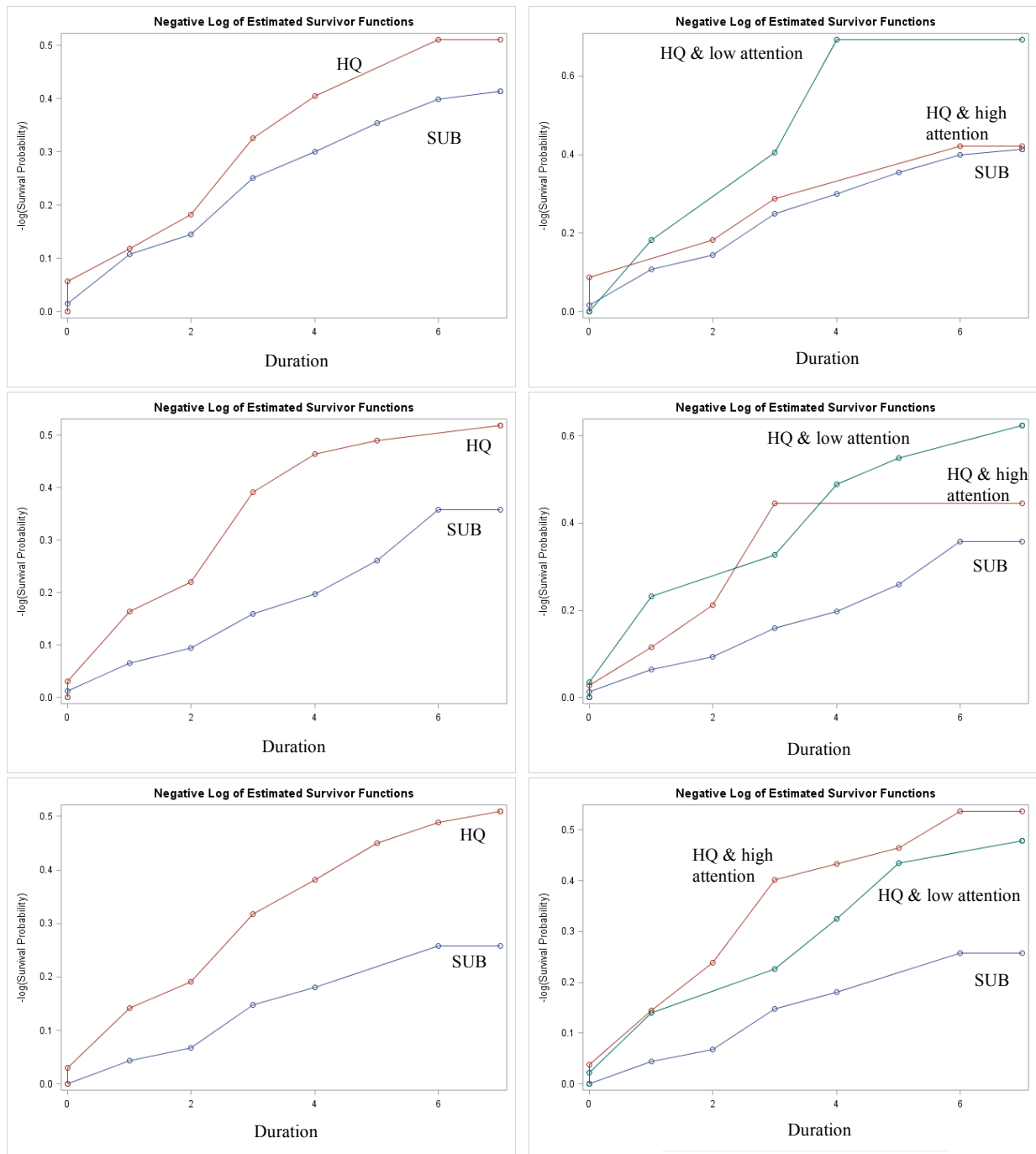


TABLE 2
Models with strength, density, and brokerage indexes as independent variables (N=147)

	Model 1		Model 2a			Model 2b			Model 3a			Model 3b			Model 4a			Model 4b			
	Controls		Strength			Strength			Density			Density			Brokerage			Brokerage			
	Estimate	S.E	Estimate	S.E		Estimate	S.E		Estimate	S.E		Estimate	S.E		Estimate	S.E		Estimate	S.E		
<i>Main variables</i>																					
Visible attention			-0.55	0.63		-0.96	0.64		-0.41	0.63		-0.21	0.63		-0.49	0.61		-0.19	0.65		
Strength index			0.97	0.48	**	2.01	0.79	**													
Density index									0.64	0.27	**	1.24	0.38	**							
Brokerage index															0.62	0.25	**	1.04	0.42	**	
Strength index * Visible attention						-1.7	0.89	*													
Density index * Visible attention												-1.15	0.47	**							
Brokerage index * Visible attention																		-0.73	0.53		
<i>Controls</i>																					
Male	0.58	0.48	0.48	0.48		0.52	0.49		0.51	0.48		0.59	0.48		0.51	0.48		0.53	0.48		
Tenure of current position	0.05	0.21	0.11	0.23		0.07	0.23		0.07	0.24		0.07	0.25		0.12	0.23		0.1	0.23		
Industry experience	-0.03	0.02	*	-0.04	0.02	**	-0.04	0.02	**	-0.04	0.02	**	-0.04	0.02	**	-0.05	0.02	**	-0.04	0.02	**
Tenure at Donaldson	0.09	0.14		-0.09	0.16		0.04	0.17		-0.01	0.17		0.03	0.18		-0.02	0.16		0.02	0.17	
Employee initiative	0.03	0.09		-0.01	0.09		-0.02	0.1		0.03	0.1		0.03	0.1		-0.02	0.1		-0.03	0.1	
Nr of relationships (size) to HQ	0.03	0.03		0.01	0.03		0.02	0.03		-0.01	0.04		-0.01	0.04		0.03	0.03		0.03	0.03	
Distance to headquarters	-0.01	0.01	*	-0.01	0.01		-0.01	0.01		-0.01	0.01	*	-0.01	0.01	*	-0.01	0.01		-0.01	0.01	
European HQ employed	0.41	0.37		0.83	0.61		0.75	0.59		0.71	0.6		0.34	0.61		0.77	0.58		0.79	0.58	
Division dummies included	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		

* and ** indicates significance on 10% and 5%, respectively.

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