Organization Science
Vol. 26, No. 5, September–October 2015, pp. 1447–1465
ISSN 1047-7039 (print) | ISSN 1526-5455 (online)

http://dx.doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2015.0996

Reconnection Choices: Selecting the Most Valuable (vs. Most Preferred) Dormant Ties

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Recent research has shown that reconnecting long-lost, dormant ties can yield tremendous value, often more than active ties. Yet two key research questions remain unanswered: which of a person's many dormant ties provide the most value, and which are advice seekers most inclined to choose as reconnection targets? In the current study, we asked executives to seek advice on an important work project from two dormant ties (their first, most preferred choice plus one selected randomly from their next nine most preferred choices) and to respond to surveys before and after their reconnections. This two-stage design allowed us to make causal inferences about the executives' advice-seeking preferences and the value of reconnecting certain types of dormant ties. Our results show that the most valuable reconnections are to people who provide novelty (by not having spent much time together in the past and having higher status) as well as engagement (by being trustworthy and willing to help). Our executive participants, however, preferred neither novelty nor engagement. Rather, the prospect of reconnecting can make people feel anxious. To avoid this discomfort, executives preferred contacts with whom they had spent a lot of time together in the past, thereby actually reducing novelty. Thus, our findings identify critical biases in executives' reconnection preferences as well as insights into how to make more effective reconnections. Our discussion presents broader implications of these findings for advice seeking and social networks.

Keywords: dormant ties; social networks; knowledge transfer; advice seeking; interpersonal ties; anxiety; tie strength
History: Published online in *Articles in Advance* August 12, 2015.

Introduction

People almost never have all of the skills and knowledge that they need to succeed at work. As a result, work life commonly involves seeking and obtaining information and knowledge from other people. Interpersonal ties among colleagues are particularly effective at providing the kinds of knowledge and advice that people need, and evidence indicates that they are critical for getting work done (Gardner et al. 2012). Identifying who can provide the best advice from a wealth of potential contacts, however, presents a real challenge, one that is not well informed by current theory. A recent review of the advice-seeking literature, for instance, concluded that "the concept of help-seeking in the workplace has been largely neglected by organizational scholars," and "relatively little is known about the antecedents and consequences of help-seeking in the workplace" (Bamberger 2009, pp. 49–51). Hofmann et al. (2009, p. 1261) also laments that "there has been much less attention focused on the interpersonal dynamics of help-seeking, even though the majority of helping exchanges are initiated by a specific request for help."

The challenges associated with seeking useful work-related advice are even more formidable, and even less well understood by scholars, when people go beyond their active contacts and instead seek advice from inactive, dormant ties. The nature of work and professional life, including temporary jobs, career shifts, and work relocations, means that people often lose touch with previous colleagues. Although the Internet and social media help people to maintain their relationships and make reconnecting fairly easy, the vast majority of people's work relationships, even positive relationships, eventually disappear and are never reconnected (Mattioli 2008). This is particularly puzzling because, when it comes to work-related advice, dormant ties are neither dead nor irrelevant, as the literature previously assumed (e.g., Burt 1992, Coleman 1990, Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998). In fact, reconnecting dormant relationships can be as valuable as, if not more valuable than, asking active contacts for advice (Levin et al. 2011a). In spite of these benefits, however, many people seem to avoid reconnecting (Levin et al. 2011b, Mattioli 2008). In sum, although dormant contacts may not be at the top of

people's minds when they need advice, research has shown that potential reconnections are both abundant (Killworth et al. 1990) and remarkably valuable (Maoret 2013, Mariotti and Delbridge 2012, Vissa 2011), particularly with respect to providing specific answers or input, referrals, problem-solving assistance, idea validation, and legitimation, thereby contributing to advice seekers' job performance (Levin et al. 2011a). Thus, in spite of advances in understanding the untapped value of dormant relationships, two central questions remain unanswered.

First, we ask: which dormant ties are the most valuable reconnection candidates? Choosing from among hundreds, possibly even thousands, of long-lost relationships (Killworth et al. 1990)—especially with limited recent information (Levin et al. 2011b)—represents a formidable challenge for people who are seeking the best advice they can find. By examining this question, we contribute to the literature in several ways. We address the theoretical (and practical) problem of identifying the most valuable sources for work advice, an understudied topic in the organizational and psychological literatures (Bamberger 2009, Hofmann et al. 2009). More specifically, we synthesize the literature on active ties to propose that the two main drivers of value in general are novelty and engagement. This theoretical insight, which we believe is a contribution in its own right, further allows us to decompose tie strength into its constituent, and sometimes diverging, elements. Thus, we are able to identify more precisely the specific elements of a relationship—the underlying mechanisms—that contribute to (or detract from) the value received from seeking advice. This in turn allows us to extend preliminary research on dormant ties that has either not differentiated among dormant ties at all or has done so based solely on a tie's prior strength (Levin et al. 2011a, Mariotti and Delbridge 2012, Vissa 2011). The resulting framework offers a more complete understanding of the sources of reconnection value. It also allows us to contribute to the broader debate in the social capital and social networks literature on the features of dyadic relationships that can increase performance (Kilduff and Brass 2010) and, particularly, to the burgeoning literature on "hybrid" relationships (Baum et al. 2007; Levin et al. 2015; Reagans and McEvily 2003, 2008). Such relationships allow actors to simultaneously reap bridging benefits, i.e., access to nonredundant and diverse information (Burt 1992), as well as bonding benefits, i.e., a willingness to cooperate and share information (Coleman 1990), from the same relationship.

Second, we ask: which dormant ties do people actually prefer to reconnect? To our knowledge, this important question has never been studied before. Prior research on active ties suggests that people often fall back on heuristics or biases when they seek advice (e.g., Amabile et al. 2014, Casciaro and Lobo 2008, Nebus 2006). Here, we examine whether people make the most of their pool of dormant ties or if their choices turn out to be suboptimal. By comparing people's advice-seeking preferences with the actual value they obtain, we gain insights into any biases that might be associated with their preferences. In addition, we extend prior advice-seeking frameworks, which propose that advice seekers engage in cost/benefit trade-offs when choosing among their ties (e.g., Bouty 2000, Hofmann et al. 2009, Lee 2002, Nebus 2006). In contrast to these earlier frameworks, we take a more behavioral perspective on selection processes, one in which the social and emotional costs associated with a particular dormant tie can overwhelm expectations of potential value, resulting in an overemphasis on potential costs. As a consequence, a markedly different pattern of results emerges for value received versus reconnection preferences: namely, the most valuable relationship features are largely ignored by executives, whereas their most preferred reconnection selections turn out to be among the least valuable. This contrasting pattern provides support for a more behavioral perspective and corroborates the existence of systematic biases in people's advice-seeking and networking behaviors.

To examine these questions, we take a before-and-after approach in our research design. In contrast to many experimental and cross-sectional field studies that "offer—at best—only a very limited 'snapshot'" of advice seeking (Bamberger 2009, p. 89), this is the first study to extensively survey advice seekers in a real-world setting about their dormant ties before—rather than solely after (e.g., Levin et al. 2011a, Vissa 2011)—a reconnection. This approach gives us the opportunity to tease apart the causes and effects of executives' networking efforts, enabling us to address, for example, whether a relationship characteristic, such as trust, actually enhances the value of reconnecting or if this only appears to be the case because the act of reconnecting enhances trust. Thus, our research responds to calls in both the advice-seeking (e.g., Bamberger 2009) and the social networks literatures (e.g., Parkhe et al. 2006) for more study of the actual processes behind interpersonal networking, e.g., how and why ties form, are maintained, decay and, in this case, *re*-form after a period of decay.

Theory and Hypotheses

People establish hundreds, if not thousands, of interpersonal connections during their lives and careers (Killworth et al. 1990). As a person's contacts increase in number, however, it becomes increasingly difficult, and ultimately impossible, to maintain active ties with everyone; due to time and other resource constraints, some connections must necessarily diminish in frequency. Intentional disconnections, however, are relatively rare;[1] rather, circumstances and other contextual

forces (e.g., job and location changes, and the development of new interests or directions in life) provide the impetus for many ties, even close ties, to become dormant.

For some time, theorists and practitioners assumed that relationships "die out if not maintained" (Coleman 1990, p. 321; Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998, p. 258) and that "if you or your partner in a relationship withdraws, the connection, with whatever social capital it contained, dissolves" (Burt 1992, p. 9). In this view, even a previously rewarding relationship will "quickly die of natural causes unless an effort is made to sustain it" (Burt 2002, p. 347). Recent evidence, however, indicates that past relationships can retain considerable value, without the need for active maintenance. For instance, Mariotti and Delbridge's (2012) study of the British and Italian motor sport industries suggests that amicably severed ties may retain their potential for substantial benefits. Similarly, Maoret (2013) finds that, early in their careers, professional basketball players perform better after switching to a team with a former teammate than to teams without a dormant tie, suggesting that reconnecting can help learning. Vissa (2011) also suggests that people can benefit professionally from reconnecting dormant ties. In terms of advice seeking, the study by Levin et al. (2011a) of the comparative value of active versus dormant ties finds that people derived as much, if not more, value from reconnecting than they did from their active connections. They further find that the value of reconnecting is due to useful and unexpected insights (novelty) that can be obtained with minimal time expenditures (efficiency), two benefits typically associated with weak ties. In addition, dormant ties that had previously been strong retained almost as much trust and shared perspective, two benefits typically associated with strong ties, as active strong ties. Similarly, an online social network experiment (Lim et al. 2013) has shown that the quality of engagement following a reconnection typically returns to predormancy levels.

In sum, the natural cycle of people's lives and careers gives them the opportunity to create large networks that contain extensive and valuable work-related knowledge. Activating these networks, however, is a necessary precondition for realizing that value. Ironically, even with the ease of reconnection that Internet search engines and social networking sites provide (Lim et al. 2013, Quinn 2013), people rarely take full advantage of these valuable sources (Mattioli 2008). Moreover, as noted, identifying the most promising reconnections can be a considerable challenge for which little theoretical insights exist. Thus, the current research takes a first step in addressing these issues by investigating which types of dormant ties, if reconnected, provide the *most* value, and whether people actually choose those ties as their targets for reconnection.

Some might argue that *nothing* can predict reconnection value, because every reconnection is unique, and it is simply too difficult to know in advance what might happen after years of dormancy. In this view, it would be surprising if anything measured before an actual reconnection, after years of no contact whatsoever, could predict differences in value received during the reconnection (Burt 1992, Coleman 1990, Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998). However, dormant ties are not dead and do have some features in common with active ties (Levin et al. 2011a). Thus, in the next section, for each hypothesis, we first synthesize and extend theories of active social network ties, and then extend these insights by developing a theory of reconnecting.

Value Received

We define *value received* as the extent to which information and/or knowledge received from a knowledge source helps knowledge recipients to perform better in their work. The social networks literature has long suggested that networks are valuable for two reasons: bridging and bonding. At the network level, bridging focuses on opportunities to connect or bridge between socially distant contacts, thereby providing access to nonredundant and diverse information (Burt 1992). This is particularly helpful in providing the foundation for fresh, creative thinking and unexpected insights (Cross and Sproull 2004). Thus, one fundamental network driver of value is what we call *novelty*. In contrast, network bonding focuses on the benefits of interacting with others in a dense, close-knit network in which social norms and reputation encourage people to cooperate and share information (Coleman 1990). With bonding, actors tend to be more easily available, to treat each other well, and to be willing usually to assist each other and to cooperate, allowing them to engage in particularly productive exchanges. Thus, another fundamental network driver of value is what we call *engagement*.

We apply these two underlying drivers of value, novelty and engagement, to the tie level. Prior research at this level has commonly focused on tie strength. Granovetter (1973, p. 1361) originally defined tie strength as "a (probably linear) combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie," with weak ties typically providing novelty, and strong ties providing engagement (see Krackhardt 1992), thereby suggesting a theoretical tension between these two drivers. Since then, scholars have conceptualized tie strength as emotional closeness, interaction frequency (McFadyen et al. 2009, Reagans and McEvily 2008, Tortoriello et al. 2012), trust or trustworthiness (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998), or a combination of these elements (Cross and Sproull 2004, Lechner et al. 2010, Levin and Cross 2004, Reagans

and McEvily 2003). For some relationships, these elements are highly correlated and work in parallel (e.g., Reagans and McEvily 2003). Several studies, however, indicate that these elements are not necessarily unitary (Lechner et al. 2010) and actually operate independently (Marsden and Campbell 1984, Sosa 2011), potentially pushing in opposite directions. For example, it is easy to imagine a strong tie that is characterized both by frequent interactions as well as feelings of trust. Although the strong tie's feelings of trust and the resulting engagement enhance the value of advice seeking (Levin and Cross 2004), interaction frequency can ultimately undermine value, since spending more time together can mean that a contact has less and less new knowledge to share (Perry-Smith 2006). Thus, different features of a relationship, such as those providing novelty versus engagement, can force people to make trade-offs when it comes to obtaining valuable work-related advice.

Prior research has further shown that, for dormant ties, reconnections provide novel insights as well as retaining the trust that characterized the tie before dormancy (Levin et al. 2011a), i.e., dormant ties can have features of both strong *and* weak ties (Levin et al. 2011a). Due to this "hybrid" character, strong-tie theory (Krackhardt 1992) and weak-tie theory (Granovetter 1973) provide only limited insights in identifying the most valuable dormant ties. Thus, instead of simply applying these theories to the context of dormant ties, we decompose tie strength into its constituent elements and assess the impact of multiple features of people's relationships. Identifying the underlying mechanisms that contribute to (or detract from) the value associated with reconnections, with a particular focus on distinguishing novelty and engagement as the two main drivers of value, helps us to identify potentially valuable features—including those not necessarily associated with tie strength, such as status differences—and develop a model for understanding the sometimes confusing and conflicting effects of ties on reconnections in particular and on advice seeking more generally.

Novelty. New and unexpected insights are one of the main drivers of value when seeking advice from active ties (Cross and Sproull 2004).[2] Novelty can result from at least two characteristics of an active relationship: having spent less time together in the past and a contact's higher status. First, the less time that people have spent together, the more likely they will be to have new insights and information, because repeated interactions lead to more similar stocks of knowledge (Perry-Smith 2006, Reagans et al. 2005). People who have spent less time together are also less likely to be part of similar social networks, giving them access to other, nonredundant sources of information (Granovetter 1973, Levin and Cross 2004). Although spending more time together may help people to develop relationship-specific routines that allow them to communicate and coordinate more efficiently (Reagans et al. 2005), this is mainly the case for tasks involving complex coordination or teamwork (Huckman et al. 2009, Staats 2012) rather than advice seeking.

Thus, we suggest that, similar to active ties, seeking advice from dormant ties will exhibit a positive association between having spent less time together and novelty. At the same time, reconnected dormant ties are more likely than active ties to provide novel ideas, since unique insights and experiences accumulate during a tie's dormancy (Levin et al. 2011a). Over and above this effect, however, we suggest that having known someone for only a short time and having interacted infrequently before the relationship became dormant should lead to fewer redundancies than will reconnections with more-familiar contacts, primarily because people who have had only infrequent interactions before dormancy are likely to have missed some of a tie's previously available novel insights. People who have spent a lot of time together are also likely to still have similar network ties, thereby limiting the novelty of their experiences during dormancy. Thus, we hypothesize as follows.

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *People will receive less value by reconnecting with dormant contacts whom they* (a) *have known for a long time and* (b) *used to interact with frequently.*

An advice seeker and an advice provider can also vary in their relative status. On the one hand, higher-status active contacts may not provide all that much value, because their higher hierarchical position may make them so distant that they are out of touch with a lower-level advice seeker's problems (Pfeffer 2007). Similarly, they may not be able to divulge as many insights if they are privy to proprietary, confidential, or strategic information.

These disadvantages may be even more pronounced for higher-status dormant contacts, because the lack of interaction during dormancy exacerbates the relevance problems associated with a contact's knowledge; it may also make them more wary of sharing confidential information with someone who has been "off their radar" for so long.

On the other hand, and perhaps more importantly, higher-status active contacts can offer substantial benefits with respect to providing novelty. For example, Sosa (2014) found that active-tie contacts of superior rank are more likely to help people to identify the need for corrective action as part of new product development. Moreover, status lets people control valuable resources, including information and knowledge (Lin 1999). It also lets them interact in broader, more diverse networks with more potential for novel ideas and referrals (Cross and Sproull 2004). Greater status and influence should

also allow advice providers to more easily extract novel knowledge from their own contacts.

Extending these arguments from active to dormant ties, we predict that, as the relative status of a reconnected contact increases, so will the likelihood of obtaining novel information and knowledge, including referrals, thereby increasing the value of reconnecting. On balance, we expect that higher-status dormant contacts will be more valuable reconnections than lower-status dormant contacts. Formally, we hypothesize as follows.

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *People will receive more value by reconnecting with higher-status dormant contacts.*

Engagement. The value of active ties depends not only on novelty but also on individuals' engagement in meaningful, fruitful interactions (Bouty 2000, Cross and Sproull 2004). A relationship's engagement stems from feelings of trust and a willingness to help (Levin and Cross 2004, Marsden and Campbell 2012). Engagement is conceptually distinct from the time people have spent together (Marsden and Campbell 1984, Sosa 2011).[3] Contrary to the popular myth that trust inevitably builds over time, a meta-analysis has shown that trust is actually uncorrelated with the amount of time spent together (Dirks and Ferrin 2002), as time sometimes also lets people learn that someone is not very trustworthy or helpful (Levin et al. 2006). Conversely, trust can develop swiftly, even between strangers (Meyerson et al. 1996). Thus, engagement is valuable, independent of time spent together.

Engagement is important in many knowledge exchanges both in terms of transmitting information as well as in generating new insights. Research has shown, for instance, that trust is a stronger platform than interaction frequency for receiving value (Levin and Cross 2004). This suggests that effective knowledge exchange, including the generation of new and creative ideas (Sosa 2011), depends more on whether people share, listen, and fully engage than it does on how much time they have spent together. If advice seekers believe that their counterparts care about them and their interests, i.e., if they have relational trust (Levin 2008), then they are more likely to fully engage and absorb the other person's advice (Levin and Cross 2004). Similarly, help providers are particularly valuable when they are open and willing to discuss problems and experiences constructively (**?**). Thus, expecting that someone is willing to freely and openly share knowledge should be a particularly strong predictor of a reconnection's value. These positive effects can result from accurate predictions of a contact's subsequent engagement or because positive expectations create a self-fulfilling prophecy; i.e., when advice seekers expect another person to be engaged and they treat that person accordingly, then this can initiate a spiral of positive, productive reciprocity (Ferrin et al. 2008). Extending this rationale to the context of dormant ties, we propose the following.

Hypothesis 3 (H3). *People will receive more value by reconnecting with dormant contacts whom they expect to be* (a) *willing to help and* (b) *trustworthy.*

Reconnection Preferences

Having identified the relationship features driving value in reconnections, we turn next to the question of whether people actually target these kinds of ties and make the most of their pool of dormant ties or, if they do not, what factors drive their reconnection preferences. Among the handful of studies that have developed frameworks to explain the advice-seeking process among active ties (e.g., Bouty 2000, Hofmann et al. 2009, Nebus 2006), a common theme is the theoretical tension between the expected value and expected costs of the process. Expected costs can include the time and effort required to identify suitable sources of advice and secure their help and, "perhaps most significantly, the emotional and social costs [arising from] the threat that help-seeking may pose to one's sense of self-efficacy and mastery" (Bamberger 2009, pp. 52–53). Asking for help from their active ties can make advice seekers feel inferior, dependent, and less competent (Amabile et al. 2014). They also face the risk of an advice giver rejecting, humiliating, or otherwise damaging their self-esteem or reputation (Flynn and Lake 2008). Thus, advice seekers often face a vexing dilemma: how to ask for help without incurring considerable emotional and social costs (Lee 2002).

Although these frameworks suggest that advice seekers, relatively rationally, trade off expected value versus expected costs, other research suggests that people pay more attention to and thus overweight negative, rather than positive, information (Fiske 1980). Indeed, one of the key insights of prospect theory is that people tend to focus more on avoiding losses than on achieving gains (Kahneman and Tversky 1979). Similarly, a recent study on advice seeking among active ties (Casciaro and Lobo 2008) has found that emotional and social costs can dominate value considerations altogether. Instead of trading off expected value versus costs, disliking someone—a social and emotional cost—can render that person's task competence (or expected value) virtually irrelevant: "[f]aced with a choice between a 'competent jerk' and a 'lovable fool' as a work partner, people usually opt for likeability over ability" (Casciaro and Lobo 2005, OnPoint supplement). Amabile et al. (2014) echo this point: although they expected expertise to strongly predict a person's popularity as a source of work advice in a product-design firm, they found that factors like trust and accessibility mattered most.

The social and emotional costs of seeking advice may be even more salient for people contemplating a reconnection, because they have had no interaction for years. Thus, besides the usual anxieties associated with advice seeking from active ties (Lee 2002), the thought of

reconnecting can create additional feelings of embarrassment for not having stayed in touch (Quinn 2013), fear that an unexpected request for advice may be seen as opportunistic, and worries about creating a new set of obligations (Levin et al. 2011b). Thus, advice seekers are likely to think that reconnecting will be awkward and uncomfortable (Levin et al. 2011b, Mattioli 2008, Quinn 2013). An executive in our current study summarized these fears as follows:

> When I thought about reconnecting . . . I found myself feeling very nervous. Some thoughts that ran through my head were: What would be the best way to make first contact with little chance of being rejected? What if they do not return my call? Will they be uncomfortable reconnecting after so long? How do I begin the conversations? What if there are awkward moments during the conversations? What if they do not want to help me with this project? What if they cannot give me the information I require?

Thus, for reconnecting, we expect that people will focus first and foremost on reducing the expected emotional costs associated with each of the relationship features identified above, and only then consider the expected value if the emotional costs are not deemed overwhelming. Also, as we discuss below, some features of a dormant tie, such as time spent together, have inherent trade-offs between their associated costs and benefits, whereas others, such as higher status and engagement, do not.

Inherent Cost/Benefit Trade-Offs (Costs Predominant). Ironically, time spent together, the very feature of dormant ties that turns out to make them less valuable by reducing the likelihood of novel insights, is also likely to minimize the social and emotional costs associated with reconnecting. The traditional view of connection preferences based on cost/benefit analysis might therefore suggest minimal preference for time spent together, because the high emotional costs of reconnecting a tie after having spent little time together before dormancy would be counterbalanced by the higher value likely to be received from such ties. In contrast, based on the more recent view that emotional costs predominate advice seeking among active ties (Amabile et al. 2014, Casciaro and Lobo 2008), we expect that the emotional costs of reconnecting will be uppermost in people's minds. As a result, we predict that people will prefer to reconnect with people with whom they have had more time together, before dormancy, even though this may reduce their reconnection benefits. This is also consistent with research suggesting that mere exposure increases attraction (Zajonc 1968), particularly for interpersonal interactions (Reis et al. 2011), and that people are inclined to seek out safe and familiar, rather than valuable, interactions because these feel more comfortable (Reis et al. 2011). We propose that this desire for comfort will also apply to dormant ties since, even with no recent interactions, the memories of positive feelings of comfort from having spent time together are likely to survive (Soda et al. 2004), reducing people's reconnection anxiety. Hence, such dormant ties should appear less costly when people contemplate reconnecting. Dormant ties with less interaction history, in contrast, are likely to increase feelings of anxiety and make these ties less preferred. In sum, we explicitly acknowledge the theoretical tension between reconnection value and preferences: although H1 predicts that people will get more value by reconnecting dormant ties that spent *less* time together, we predict that a desire to minimize the emotional and social costs of reconnecting will lead people to opt for reconnections associated with having spent *more* time together. Thus, we propose the following.

Hypothesis 4 (H4). *People will prefer to seek advice from dormant contacts whom they* (a) *have known for a long time and* (b) *interacted with frequently.*

No Inherent Cost/Benefit Trade-Offs. For the remaining relationship features, we propose that lowered emotional costs and increased potential value should push advice seekers in the same direction; i.e., there is less of a trade-off. For status, the impact of obtaining advice on costs is mixed, at least among active ties. On the one hand, social comparison theory suggests that it may be less threatening to seek advice from, and thereby implicitly admit a personal inadequacy to, higher-status active contacts, who are less socially similar and therefore less likely to induce a negative comparison (Nadler and Fisher 1986). On the other hand, people may be more reluctant to seek advice from higher-status active contacts who "typically control access to professional rewards and resources, and as such, appearing incompetent in the presence of a higher status helper can undermine one's future access to these resources" (Lee 2002, p. 20; see also Amabile et al. 2014, Hofmann et al. 2009).

These status-related concerns are likely diminished, however, when people seek higher-status dormant contacts, for two reasons. First, dormant contacts tend to be socially and organizationally distant (Levin et al. 2011a), allowing advice seekers to maintain their self-image at their home organization, thereby reducing their emotional and social costs. Asking a former boss for advice after a period of dormancy, for example, may be less stressful than it once was, because the advice seeker is no longer dependent on the former boss for performance reviews, raises, or promotions. Second, it is commonly accepted, often even expected, that people will lose touch with someone of higher status, as a result of the higher-status person's mobility, limited time, and dissimilar attributes (Lin et al. 1981). Thus, there should be less concern, and hence lower social costs, for not having stayed in touch with a higher-status person. As a

result, people should find it easier to focus on the potential benefits of reconnecting with a higher-status dormant contact (see Casciaro and Lobo 2008). Formally, we propose the following.

HYPOTHESIS 5 (H5). *People will prefer to seek advice from higher-status dormant contacts.*

As noted in H3, the engagement benefits of a dormant contact's expected trustworthiness and willingness to help can make the tie particularly valuable. In addition, from a cost perspective, choosing contacts who are apt to be trustworthy and helpful should also be appealing, because these factors can reassure advice seekers in the face of the often uncomfortable task of asking for help (Amabile et al. 2014, Hofmann et al. 2009, Lee 2002, Nebus 2006, Van Dyne et al. 2008). This reassurance should be particularly true for active ties, where information about the other person's potential reactions is recent and relatively reliable. For dormant ties, much time has passed, so people may see their expectations of what a dormant contact will do as more of a guess. However, we would still expect people to rely on their expectations, at least to some extent, given the potential for reassurance. In sum, we expect a contact's trustworthiness and willingness to help to be preferred from both a cost and benefit perspective. Thus, we propose the following.

HYPOTHESIS 6 (H6). *People will prefer to seek advice from dormant contacts whom they expect to be* (a) *willing to help and* (b) *trustworthy.*

Methods

As part of a leadership course in an Executive MBA (EMBA) program, we asked 156 executives from four classes (two in the United States, two in Canada) to seek useful advice on an important work project by reconnecting two dormant ties. The instructions defined dormancy as no communication for at least three years (Levin et al. 2011a). The course material did not include any discussion of networks or dormant ties. Participants listed and rank-ordered 10 possible reconnections and were then instructed to reconnect, by phone or in person rather than via email, with two: their top choice and another contact whom we randomly selected for them from the other nine. We took this approach, rather than completely randomizing our sample, to satisfy the course instructor's concern that executives might object to not being able to connect with their top choice. Before reconnecting, the executives completed a survey that included the independent variables (except whether they reconnected in person) for each of their two reconnections. Approximately one month later, we sent everyone a second web-based survey that included items measuring the value obtained from each reconnection. Executives also submitted a short essay describing their reconnection experiences, often including their thoughts and feelings before reconnecting. Two coders, one of whom was blind to our hypotheses, independently rated 25 randomly selected essays (with names masked); inter-rater reliability was excellent (Cohen's kappa = 1.00). Of these, 60% explicitly mentioned, unprompted, that they felt nervous before reconnecting. This finding further corroborates prior research (e.g., Levin et al. 2011b) and provides empirical support for our assumption that anxiety about social and emotional costs is common, even among executives. Finally, we sent respondents a short survey one year after their reconnections to assess the longevity and continued effectiveness of their reconnections. All surveys were voluntary, and respondents were assured that the course instructor would never see any of the surveys and would not know who completed them.

Repeated emails sent to the executives to encourage them to complete the surveys resulted in 117 executives completing both pre- and post-reconnection surveys, a 75% response rate. The gender breakdown of our respondents (25.0% female), the only available demographic variable for nonrespondents, was nearly identical to that of the contacted sample (25.6% female, $t = 0.19$, $p = 0.847$). On average, respondents were 37.8 years old (SD = 6.1), worked in an organization of 27,870 employees (SD = 70,536), previously worked in 3.5 other organizations in the same industry (SD = 3.7), and had worked in their current job for 4.3 years (SD = 4.5).

Measures

Dependent Variables. Because third parties are rarely in a position to know the details of transferred knowledge, let alone its usefulness, we relied on self-reports and not on third parties such as supervisors. Moreover, although recipients and sources might differ in their perception of the value of an exchange, "a knowledge seeker is the best, perhaps the only, judge of the usefulness of knowledge received" (Levin and Cross 2004, p. 1482). We therefore operationalized *value received* as executives' average responses to six receipt-of-useful-knowledge items, previously used by Levin et al. (2011a) and based on Cross and Sproull's (2004) typology of actionable knowledge. Respondents rated how much each type of useful knowledge (i.e., specific answers/inputs, referrals, problem-solving assistance, validating the respondent's ideas, and legitimacy) contributed to their project performance, as well as their contact's overall contribution (see appendix for details on all measures). Unweighted least-squares factor analysis of these items identified a single factor (eigenvalues of 3.8, 0.8, 0.5, 0.4, 0.4, and 0.2) with high reliability ($\alpha = 0.86$).

Our second dependent variable, *reconnection preference*, was based on executives' rank-ordering of their dormant contacts from most to least preferred. We

reverse-coded this variable so that higher numbers indicated a stronger reconnection preference. Nisbett and Wilson (1977) have found that people are often unaware of their own decision processes and that, when asked, they tend to provide plausible explanations, accurate or not, to explain their choices. To avoid this potential bias, we did not ask respondents directly why they preferred to reconnect some ties more than others. Instead, we used their rank-ordering and their characterizations of the two selected dormant contacts, as captured in our pre-reconnection survey, to infer their preferences.

Independent Variables. Relationship length was the logarithm of the number of months (plus 1) that people had known each other (Levin et al. 2006). *Prior communication frequency* was a single item (with a 7-point Likert scale) for the average communication frequency during the time when the dormant tie had been active (adapted from Hansen 1999 and Levin and Cross 2004). Two items measured *higher-status contact:* "How much status/prestige does this person have?" and "What is this person's organizational rank/level?" (1 = much lower than me to 7 = much higher than me; $\alpha = 0.89$). Two items, adapted from Szulanski (1996), assessed respondents' views of the other person's *willingness to help* ($\alpha = 0.70$): "I expect that this person will answer completely and openly any question I ask" and "I expect that this person will be very willing to share any of his or her knowledge with me, even if I do not specifically ask for something" (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). Last, *relational trust* was measured with two items adapted from scales testing benevolence-based trustworthiness (Levin and Cross 2004, Levin et al. 2006): "This person will always look out for my interests" and "This person will go out of his or her way to make sure I am not damaged or harmed" (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree; $\alpha = 0.80$).

Control Variables. We controlled for several respondent-level variables (Levin et al. 2011a), including which section of the four EMBA classes a respondent attended (*cohort* 1, *cohort* 2, *cohort* 3), *organizational size*, breadth of experience (*prior organizations*, *job tenure*, and *prior project experience*), and demographic characteristics (*gender, age*), as well as how much a respondent's work project demanded new skills, knowledge, or expertise (*project novelty*). We also created or adapted (e.g., from Burt 1992, Levin et al. 2011a) a number of tie-level control variables, all measured with 7-point Likert scales: belonging to the same groups (*shared identity,* 2 items), a tendency to think alike (*shared perspective*, 1 item), *prior intensity/closeness* (2 items), sharing mutual third-party contacts (*people in common*, 1 item), relative geographic location (*physical proximity*, 1 item), knowing about the other person's activities during dormancy (*up to date on contact*, 2 items) or about his or her skills (*knowledge of contact's expertise areas*, 2 items), competence-based trust (*perceived ability*, 1 item), and whether the reconnection was primarily face to face or not (*communication in person*, 1 item).

For the 7 independent and control variables with 2 items each, we conducted an unweighted least-squares factor analysis with direct oblimin rotation. A scree plot of eigenvalues confirmed the presence of 7 factors, each with expected factor loadings above 0.43 (mean = 0.78) and no cross loadings above 0.31. Reliabilities were also good ($\alpha = 0.70$–0.89). Several other measures relied on single items; although not ideal, they are fairly typical in this type of research (e.g., Hofmann et al. 2009, Sosa 2011) and tend to be reliable when procedures make it easier for respondents to provide accurate reports (Marsden 1990). In particular, "measuring self-reported facts, e.g., number of previous jobs . . . with single items is commonly accepted practice. [In addition, if] the construct being measured is sufficiently narrow or is unambiguous to the respondent, a single item may suffice" (Wanous and Reichers 1996, p. 631). Most of our single-item measures are objective, e.g., age, job tenure. Only three subjective measures—all control variables—used single items: project novelty, shared perspective, and perceived ability. Given a sample of busy executives and the associated need to keep the survey length manageable, we complied with the course instructor's request to reduce some control variables to single-item measures.

Analyses

In this study, knowledge-seeking ties ("level 1") were nested within respondents ("level 2"), so we used hierarchical linear modeling (HLM), which is ideally suited for nested data, because HLM does not require independent observations (Bryk and Raudenbush 1992). HLM represents each level of analysis with its own submodel, delineating the variance explained by variables at each level. For each tie, the predicted intercept and slopes were estimated at both levels, followed by an optimally weighted, empirical Bayes estimation strategy (Hofmann 1997). We tested our hypotheses using random coefficient regression in Mplus Version 7.2 (Muthén and Muthén 1998–2010). In line with our stratified sampling strategy (i.e., half our sample was executives' #1 choices and the other half was their #2–#10 choices), we followed the standard, recommended specification of "sampling weights" to account for unequal probabilities of sample selection. This allowed us to reconfigure our sample as if it were a random draw from the overall population and, hence, obtain reliable and unbiased estimates (Asparouhov 2006, Pfeffermann et al. 1998, Solon et al. 2015). Sampling weights are calculated as the inverse of the probability of selection. In our sample a contact ranked #1 had a 100% chance of being selected, so its sampling weight was set at 1; a contact ranked #2–#10 had a 1 in 9 chance of being

Table 1 Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. *Value received*	5.57	0.81											
2. *Reconnection preference*	7.66	3.00	0.13										
3. *Cohort 1*	0.30	0.46	0.00	−0.01									
4. *Cohort 2*	0.29	0.46	0.01	0.07	−0.42**								
5. *Cohort 3*	0.25	0.43	−0.03	−0.08	−0.38**	−0.37**							
6. *Organizational size*	2.96	1.43	−0.07	0.03	0.07	−0.06	0.01						
7. *Prior organizations*	0.52	0.34	0.02	0.00	−0.32**	−0.28**	0.36**	−0.04					
8. *Job tenure*	4.42	4.55	0.00	0.00	0.29**	0.16	−0.30**	−0.05	−0.31**				
9. *Prior project experience*	0.49	0.50	0.04	0.00	0.06	−0.04	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.14			
10. *Respondent's gender*	0.25	0.43	0.12	0.03	0.03	−0.01	−0.04	−0.02	0.15	0.02	0.26**		
11. *Respondent's age*	38.02	6.03	0.17*	−0.02	0.10	0.15	−0.11	−0.22*	−0.14	0.28**	0.07	0.16	
12. *Project novelty*	5.07	1.33	0.05	−0.02	−0.06	−0.02	0.02	−0.18	0.11	0.00	−0.09	0.06	0.04
13. *Shared identity*	4.62	1.23	−0.02	0.12	0.03	0.09	−0.12	−0.04	−0.14*	0.11	−0.19**	−0.04	0.02
14. *Shared perspective*	4.63	1.31	0.19**	0.11	0.04	0.02	−0.04	−0.01	−0.01	0.03	0.01	0.02	0.04
15. *Prior intensity/ closeness*	3.78	1.37	0.06	0.15*	−0.08	0.14*	−0.06	−0.01	−0.09	−0.03	0.01	0.02	0.22**
16. *People in common*	1.77	0.58	−0.06	−0.07	−0.02	−0.01	0.00	0.17*	0.01	0.01	−0.05	−0.01	−0.10
17. *Physical proximity*	1.96	0.73	0.00	−0.09	0.27**	−0.05	−0.30**	−0.02	−0.23**	0.05	−0.07	0.04	0.15*
18. *Up to date on contact*	3.53	1.52	0.13	−0.03	−0.06	0.05	−0.01	−0.02	−0.09	0.06	−0.05	−0.06	0.06
19. *Knowl. of contact's expertise areas*	5.45	1.06	0.20**	0.14*	−0.08	0.12	−0.09	−0.13	0.05	0.02	−0.06	0.02	0.14*
20. *Perceived ability*	6.12	1.06	0.26**	0.21**	−0.09	0.14*	−0.15*	0.02	0.01	−0.18**	−0.01	0.09	−0.03
21. *Communication in person*	0.14	0.35	0.14*	0.14*	0.07	0.07	−0.15*	0.00	−0.11	0.08	−0.02	0.10	0.15*
22. *Relationship length*	2.05	0.23	−0.03	0.18*	0.03	0.08	−0.08	−0.02	−0.05	0.23**	0.14*	0.12	0.36**
23. *Prior comm. freq.*	5.13	2.00	−0.12	0.19**	0.01	0.10	−0.03	0.01	−0.13	0.10	0.16*	0.08	0.16*
24. *Higher-status contact*	4.50	1.36	0.34**	0.21**	−0.01	0.14*	−0.13	0.03	0.00	−0.01	0.11	0.14*	−0.02
25. *Willingness to help*	5.67	0.97	0.34**	0.19**	0.09	−0.12	0.05	0.05	−0.02	0.02	−0.20**	0.17*	0.11
26. *Relational trust*	5.20	1.16	0.28**	0.17*	0.04	0.04	−0.12	0.00	−0.08	−0.06	−0.11	0.16*	0.14

Table 1 (cont'd)

Variable	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
13. *Shared identity*	0.01													
14. *Shared perspective*	−0.03	0.39**												
15. *Prior intensity/ closeness*	0.14	0.17*	0.12											
16. *People in common*	0.14*	0.08	−0.04	0.04										
17. *Physical proximity*	−0.02	0.09	0.00	−0.06	−0.06									
18. *Up to date on contact*	0.01	0.26**	0.14*	0.12	0.27**	0.02								
19. *Knowl. of contact's expertise areas*	0.02	0.26**	0.28**	0.26**	−0.06	0.01	0.40**							
20. *Perceived ability*	0.10	0.20**	0.21**	0.17*	0.04	−0.06	0.18**	0.31**						
21. *Communication in person*	−0.11	0.13	0.15*	0.00	0.00	0.31**	0.03	0.12	0.00					
22. *Relationship length*	0.04	0.04	−0.03	0.26**	0.04	−0.04	−0.07	−0.08	−0.02	0.16*				
23. *Prior comm. freq.*	−0.14*	0.07	0.00	0.38**	0.00	−0.05	0.00	−0.03	0.02	−0.09	0.22**			
24. *Higher-status contact*	0.00	0.09	0.12	0.02	−0.06	0.00	0.02	0.22**	0.35**	0.04	0.00	−0.06		
25. *Willingness to help*	0.10	0.13	0.22**	0.36**	−0.03	0.02	0.09	0.20**	0.22**	0.10	0.12	0.11	0.12	
26. *Relational trust*	0.11	0.17*	0.26**	0.53**	0.03	−0.08	0.07	0.21**	0.41**	0.05	0.23**	0.22**	0.13	0.57**

Notes. $N = 207$ for variables 1, 2, and 13–26 ("level 1" variables); $N = 113$ for variables 3–12 ("level 2" variables). Two-tailed tests.
*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

selected, so its weight was set at 9. Because we have a multilevel model, we used the recommended AI scaling method for the sampling weights (Asparouhov 2006). The above approach is deemed appropriate if the "informative index" comparing weighted versus unweighted results is above the recommended cutoff value of 0.02 (Asparouhov 2006); this was the case for both value received (0.13) and reconnection preference (0.61).

For value received (a continuous variable), we used a standard HLM regression; for reconnection preference (consisting of discrete, ordered categories), we used an ordered logit HLM regression. To address the possibility

Table 2 HLM Regression Results

Outcome variable =	*Value received*				*Reconnection preference*			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	B	S.E.	*B*	S.E.	*B*	S.E.	*B*	S.E.
Level 2 (respondent level)								
Cohort 1	−0.08	(0.24)	−0.12	(0.21)	−0.65	(0.80)	−0.35	(0.85)
Cohort 2	−0.22	(0.25)	−0.13	(0.21)	0.54	(0.76)	1.01	(0.87)
Cohort 3	−0.11	(0.21)	−0.10	(0.19)	−0.87	(0.72)	−0.75	(0.77)
Organizational size	0.03	(0.04)	0.00	(0.04)	0.13	(0.15)	0.12	(0.17)
Prior organizations	−0.14	(0.25)	−0.11	(0.21)	0.23	(0.97)	0.43	(1.00)
Job tenure	0.00	(0.02)	0.00	(0.02)	−0.01	(0.05)	−0.05	(0.05)
Prior project experience	−0.05	(0.16)	0.07	(0.17)	0.08	(0.44)	0.07	(0.53)
Respondent's gender	0.27	(0.16)	0.11	(0.15)	0.18	(0.49)	−0.04	(0.52)
Respondent's age	0.02	(0.01)	0.02*	(0.01)	−0.01	(0.05)	−0.05	(0.06)
Project novelty	0.01	(0.06)	−0.02	(0.05)	0.15	(0.18)	0.18	(0.20)
Level 1 (tie level)								
Shared identity	−0.08	(0.07)	−0.06	(0.06)	0.39	(0.21)	0.28	(0.22)
Shared perspective	0.05	(0.06)	−0.02	(0.05)	0.08	(0.22)	0.03	(0.24)
Prior intensity/closeness	−0.03	(0.05)	−0.03	(0.05)	0.15	(0.19)	−0.19	(0.20)
People in common	−0.03	(0.14)	0.01	(0.12)	−0.52	(0.46)	−0.60	(0.50)
Physical proximity	−0.14	(0.11)	−0.14	(0.09)	−0.52	(0.36)	−0.31	(0.38)
Up to date on contact	0.00	(0.05)	0.02	(0.05)	−0.33	(0.18)	−0.22	(0.17)
Knowl. of contact's expertise areas	0.09	(0.07)	0.02	(0.06)	0.03	(0.21)	0.12	(0.26)
Perceived ability	0.17*	(0.07)	0.02	(0.07)	0.39*	(0.18)	0.27	(0.20)
Communication in person	0.36*	(0.18)	0.34*	(0.17)				
Reconnection preference	0.02	(0.02)	0.01	(0.02)				
Relationship length (H1(a), H4(a))			−0.36	(0.29)			3.12*	(1.32)
Prior comm. freq. (H1(b), H4(b))			−0.06*	(0.03)			0.33*	(0.14)
Higher-status contact (H2, H5)			0.18***	(0.04)			0.40	(0.22)
Willingness to help (H3(a), H6(a))			0.18**	(0.07)			0.20	(0.37)
Relational trust (H3(b), H6(b))			0.13*	(0.07)			0.16	(0.34)
$\Delta\chi^2$ (Δdf)	23.873** (10)		44.426*** (5)		18.140** (8)		21.613*** (5)	
Level 1 pseudo R^2 =	0.354		0.612		0.218		0.428	
Level 1, N =	207		207		223		223	

Notes. Unstandardized (*B*) coefficients shown, with robust standard errors (S.E.) in parentheses, based on random coefficient regression models using hierarchical linear modeling (HLM). All variables are grand-mean centered. $\Delta\chi^2$ refers to the Satorra–Bentler scaled χ^2 difference test (Satorra 2000); Δdf is change in degrees of freedom. Variance explained is calculated as pseudo R^2 = 1 − (level 1 restricted error + level 2 restricted error)/(level 1 unrestricted error + level 2 unrestricted error) (Snijders and Bosker 2012).

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

that the error terms of the two regression equations might be correlated, we replicated our analyses using seemingly unrelated regression (SUR; Zellner 1962); the results did not change.

Tables 1 and 2 present the correlation matrix and the regression results. In Models 1 and 3, we entered the control variables as predictors of value received and reconnection preference, respectively. In Models 2 and 4, we entered our hypothesized independent variables. In line with recommendations in the literature (Hofmann and Gavin 1998, Kreft et al. 1995), we used grand-mean centering for all variables. We examined the significance of coefficients and also conducted χ^2 difference tests comparing Models 1 and 3 with their respective nested models (i.e., without any predictors), Model 2 with 1, and Model 4 with 3. Because χ^2 tests in Mplus cannot be used directly for difference testing, we calculated the Satorra–Bentler scaled χ^2 difference tests using log likelihoods (Muthén and Muthén 1998–2010).

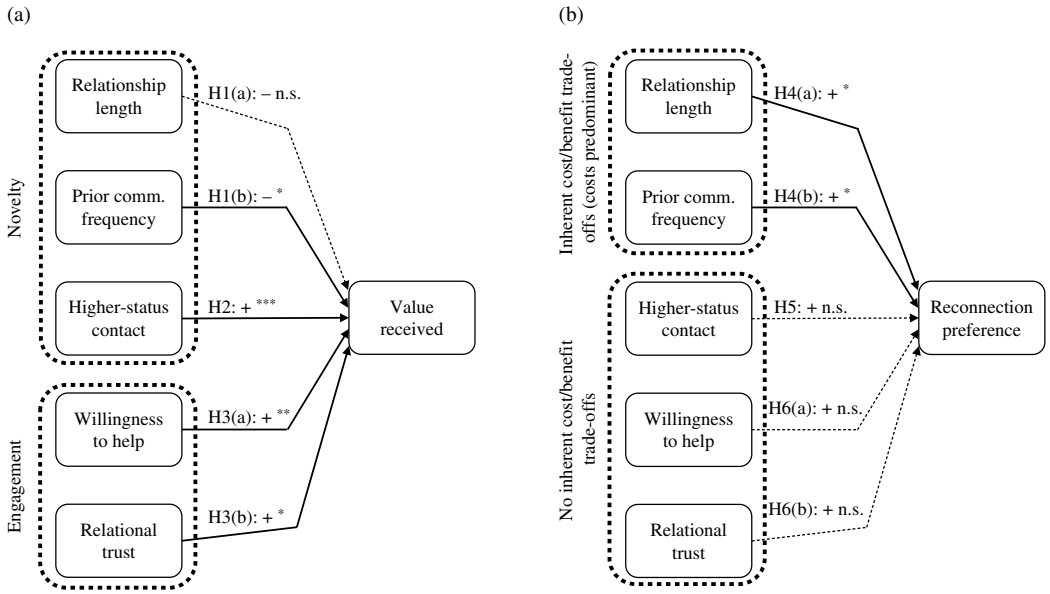
Results

Older executives reported receiving more value than younger executives did (Table 2's Model 2; $p = 0.049$); this makes sense, because people accumulate dormant contacts and have more reconnection options over time (Levin et al. 2011b). In addition, consistent with previous research (e.g., Kirkman et al. 2004), executives rated face-to-face interactions as more valuable than phone-based interactions ($p = 0.043$).

Hypotheses Testing

Figure 1 summarizes our hypotheses and results. In line with our overall theory, our results corroborate our argument that relationship elements associated with either novelty or engagement had a positive influence on reconnection value, but executives either ignored these or did the opposite when it came to reconnection preferences, thereby undermining reconnection value. In particular, for *value received*, Table 2's Model 2 indicates

Figure 1 Causal Models for (a) Value Received and (b) Reconnection Preference

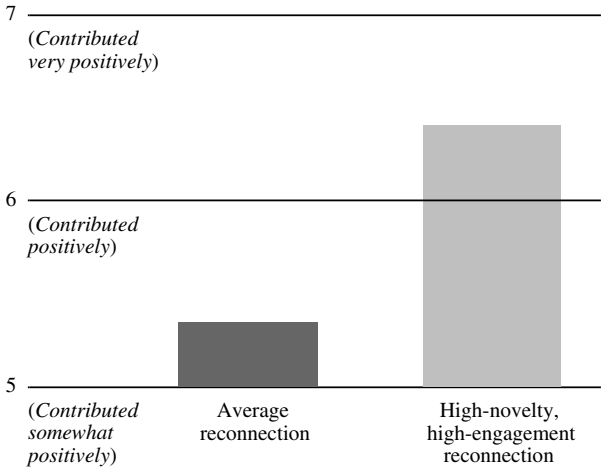


*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$; n.s., not statistically significant.

that H1(a), for relationship length, was not supported ($p = 0.225$), although the results were in the hypothesized direction. The other four hypotheses for value received were fully supported: the more frequent the prior communication, the less valuable the reconnection (H1(b), $p = 0.048$); higher-status dormant contacts led to more valuable advice (H2, $p < 0.001$), as did expected willingness to help (H3(a), $p = 0.007$) and relational trust (H3(b), $p = 0.048$). To illustrate the combined magnitude of these results, the average value received was 5.34 on a 7-point scale; for ties with high novelty and engagement (computed at the 90th percentile), it was 6.40 (see Figure 2). For *reconnection preference*, Table 2's Model 4 shows full support for both relationship length (H4(a), $p = 0.018$) and prior communication frequency (H4(b), $p = 0.019$). H5 was not supported, because respondents had only a marginal preference for higher status ($p = 0.071$). H6 was also not supported, because neither willingness to help (H6(a), $p = 0.585$) nor relational trust (H6(b), $p = 0.647$) was significant.

With respect to long-term value, we assessed *value received one year later* with a single item asking respondents how much their contact had contributed positively to their performance at work in the year after their initial reconnection. Although we would have preferred multiple items, we sought a high response rate from busy executives, which dictated the use of a simple, single-item measure. Most of our executives responded ($n = 89$; a 76% response rate), with respondents and nonrespondents not differing significantly on our independent or dependent variables. Value received a year later was significantly correlated with initial value received from reconnecting ($r = 0.40$, $p < 0.001$). In HLM, prior communication frequency remained significantly negative ($p < 0.001$), higher-status contact remained significantly positive ($p = 0.012$), and relational trust remained significantly positive ($p = 0.002$). Thus, high-novelty, high-engagement dormant ties provided the most value, not just immediately but also during the following year.

Figure 2 Value Received



Notes. Value received for average reconnection versus a reconnection at the 90th percentile for the five hypothesized predictor variables, based on Table 2's Model 2. Specifically, we calculated the value received at an average level for all control variables and at the 90th percentile for less relationship length (1.74, which corresponds to 4.5 years), less prior communication frequency (which, after the reverse coding, corresponded to once every three months or less [or only met once]), more status (6 = higher than me), more willingness to help (7 = strongly agree), and more relational trust (6.5, halfway between agree and strongly agree). We then subtracted each variable's mean from these five values and used them in Table 2's Model 2 regression equation, with 4.68 as the overall intercept.

Additional Analyses

To address common-method concerns, we followed the recommended procedures for both ex ante survey design as well as ex post statistical checks (Podsakoff et al. 2012). For survey design, we collected the value-received data in a separate survey a month or more after collecting data on the independent variables. Such a time lag is widely acknowledged as a "procedure that should help to diminish method bias" (Podsakoff et al. 2012, p. 563), because it reduces the salience of retrieval cues, the use of previous answers to fill in retrieval gaps, consistency motifs, and demand characteristics. Similarly, our web-based pre-reconnection survey did not allow respondents to return to their rankings once they began completing the perceptual items, nor were they ever reminded of their rankings, further reducing any tendency toward artificial consistency. For ex post statistical checks, we confirmed that higher- and lower-ranked preferences were not significantly different for value received, as they might have been if respondents had been trying to justify their rankings. Also, all of the correlations with *reconnection preference* (see Table 1) were relatively low (every $r < 0.22$), suggesting that a common method did not inflate the predictors' effects. Most importantly, we ran a confirmatory factor analysis, per Podsakoff et al. (2012), with all items allowed to load onto both their associated (trait) factor and also an uncorrelated "common-method factor"; this allowed us to estimate the portion of variance due to trait, method, and random error (Williams et al. 1989). In our sample, 61% of the variance was accounted for by the trait factors, 33% by random error, and only 6% by the common-method factor. This 6% is considered low, much less than the 25% typically found in other studies (Podsakoff et al. 2012, Williams et al. 1989), indicating that common method is unlikely to be a problem for our sample.

Another potential concern is that respondents' preferences and expectations of engagement may have influenced their perceptions of the value they received from reconnecting. Although it is difficult to rule out this explanation completely, at least two reasons suggest that it is not a major problem. First, expectations about engagement are not the same as expectations of receiving value; if they were, or if they were conflated in the minds of respondents, then reconnection preferences should have been closely related to trust ($r = 0.17$) and willingness to help ($r = 0.19$), but they were not. Second, we added reconnection preference as a control when predicting value received. However, reconnection preference was not a significant predictor over and above our other predictors of value received ($p = 0.472$). This suggests that these alternative explanations are not serious concerns.

Finally, we conducted an additional analysis to examine whether, in line with our theorizing, anxiety about reconnecting explains people's preferences for reconnecting ties that they spent more time with in the past. We utilized 344 U.S. participants from Amazon Mechanical Turk (Mason and Suri 2012), an online labor market commonly used for research (Buhrmester et al. 2011). Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2 (high or low time spent interacting in the past) × 2 (high or low engagement) between-participants design. We asked participants to think of a current, major project (or problem, task, or issue). We then asked them to identify two people (and we randomly selected one of them) with whom they had not communicated for three years or more, whom they might contact "for information, knowledge, and/or advice on the project," and who fit that condition's criteria, which corresponded roughly to the 10th or 90th percentiles in our primary study. Manipulation checks confirmed that the dormant contacts matched our four experimental conditions. When asked to imagine that they were about to reconnect with this person for their project, participants reported less anxiety (6 items; $\alpha = 0.92$) when time spent together in the past was high ($p = 0.025$), but there was no difference for engagement ($p = 0.366$) and no two-way interaction ($p = 0.241$). (More details are available from the authors.) These results indicate that, consistent with our primary study, anxiety varied as a function of people having spent time together in the past, but this anxiety-reducing effect did not surface as a function of engagement (i.e., trust and willingness to help).

Discussion

We posed two key questions in this paper: which types of dormant ties provide the most value, and which types do advice seekers actually prefer? After disentangling tie strength into its constituent elements, we find that the most valuable reconnections are to people who can provide novelty (e.g., not having spent much time together in the past, and reconnecting with an advice giver who has higher status) and people who can provide engagement (e.g., being trustworthy and willing to help). These results are consistent with our hypotheses and stand in contrast to the view that dormant ties are either dead (Burt 1992, Coleman 1990, Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998) or too idiosyncratic to predict. Although we focused primarily on the immediate value of reconnecting, data collected a year later indicates that initially valuable reconnections continued to be valuable, too. This suggests that reconnecting has enduring value and that this value can be predicted in advance; it also accentuates the importance of choosing effective reconnection partners.

In contrast, however, our executives did not seem particularly interested in choosing people who would provide either novelty or engagement. Instead, as our additional analyses show, the prospect of reconnecting often makes people anxious. It appears that people, to avoid

this discomfort, prefer contacts with whom they had spent a lot of time together, although this turns out to be counterproductive in terms of value. Typical reconnections are still useful but are not optimal in terms of novelty, engagement, and, as a result, value (see Figure 1). Thus, our findings suggest that people have suboptimal preferences: a greater emphasis on seeking relationship features associated with novelty and engagement, rather than having spent time together and initial comfort, would yield more valuable reconnections.

Ironically, it would seem that our executives need not have worried so much before reconnecting, because many of them told us afterwards that their reconnections were extremely positive experiences. For example, looking back on her reconnections, the same anxious executive we quoted earlier concluded:

> From a personal standpoint, I believe that I completely underestimated their reactions to assisting me with my project and hence was worried for no reason .... Though nervous at first, I am now looking forward to maintaining both these connections, since I believe it will be beneficial for all of us—on a business and personal level.[4]

This was a typical reaction: many executives indicated that their main anxiety in reconnecting was the initial act of making contact rather than subsequent interactions or exchanges. This makes sense in that the most salient feature of dormant ties is probably that they have been dormant. As a result, questions of why the tie is no longer active are likely to be prominent in people's minds (e.g., "if the relationship was so great, then why didn't it continue?"). Higher engagement, such as trust and willingness to help, does not fully address this underlying anxiety. Thus, although engagement is attractive, it might also accentuate anxieties and uncertainty about where the relationship currently stands, creating conflicting pressures.

Thus, in contrast to prior research on active ties (e.g., Hofmann et al. 2009, Nebus 2006, Van Dyne et al. 2008) and to our own expectations, our respondents' preferences for reconnecting were not significantly related to either engagement (i.e., trustworthiness or willingness to help) or to higher status, despite the lack of an inherent cost/benefit trade-off. For engagement, people may have wondered, and worried, that this had diminished during dormancy (Burt 1992, 2002; Coleman 1990). For example, respondents may have lacked confidence that a dormant contact was really going to be trustworthy and willing to help. Moreover, given that these relationships had been inactive, people might have had minimal (if any) confidence in their ability to predict a dormant contact's reactions, reducing the likelihood that they would rely heavily on potential engagement when considering a reconnection. In addition, conflicted feelings, such as wondering why a tie went dormant in the first place, could further confuse the issue for people. With respect to status, the social costs of reaching out to a higher-status dormant contact seem to be greater than we anticipated. As a result, the potential benefit of getting more novelty and value from a higher-status contact may have been outweighed in people's minds, at least to some extent, by a reluctance to bother the higher-status person or to look bad in some way, as noted in our development of H5.

Finally, novelty was a significant driver of reconnection value only in the form of less prior-interaction frequency, not a shorter relationship length, as we had predicted. This makes sense in that what ultimately reduces novelty in a relationship is interacting over and over again, which may be better captured by the frequency of those interactions rather than by how spread out over the years they were.

A central contribution of this research is the identification of aspects of dormant ties that are ultimately beneficial. Specifically, we find that novelty and engagement are key drivers of value. This is consistent with our view of the drivers of value in ties generally, as well as in dormant ties. However, the distinctions among these different relationship elements can be difficult to detect and are often conflated. Not surprisingly, then, research on the strength of active ties has produced inconsistent results: some studies have reported an overall advantage for stronger ties (Krackhardt 1992; Reagans and McEvily 2003, 2008; Sosa 2011); others, for weaker ties (Granovetter 1973); and still others, contingent effects (Cross and Sproull 2004, Hansen 1999, Lechner et al. 2010, Levin and Cross 2004, McFadyen et al. 2009). The current findings suggest that tie strength can be an "umbrella construct" (Hirsch and Levin 1999) in which the components of tie strength are not only conceptually distinct but potentially in opposition to one another, because some are beneficial for receiving value whereas others are detrimental. Thus, the current findings help to identify *which* aspects of a tie are most helpful. Although these different relationship factors are often correlated, distinguishing them remains important and can lead to hidden sources of value. Interaction frequency, for example, is (by definition) time consuming, but engagement, in the form of trust or a willingness to help, need not be. In fact, trust can occur swiftly even within newly formed groups (Meyerson et al. 1996), from third-party referrals, a common background, similar demographics (Levin et al. 2006), a superordinate identity (Kane 2010), trustworthy behaviors (Whitener et al. 1998), subliminal cues (Huang and Murnighan 2010), or any number of other factors that do not consume much time (Levin 2008). Thus, the current findings complement and extend research on active ties that has found that trust, rather than closeness or frequency, is particularly beneficial for obtaining useful knowledge (Levin and Cross 2004). This helps to clarify which aspects of a relationship make it most valuable.

The positive effects of novelty and engagement also contribute to a growing body of research on hybrid ties that combine these two relational elements. Examples include trusted weak ties (Levin and Cross 2004), strong bridges (McFadyen et al. 2009), trusted bridges (Levin et al. 2015), and, interestingly enough, reconnected dormant ties in general (Levin et al. 2011a). Although dormant ties in general can provide both types of benefits, we show that not all reconnections are equally valuable, because high-novelty, high-engagement dormant ties provide the most value (see Figure 2). Moreover, in the current sample of reconnected ties, novelty and engagement were not necessarily incompatible opposites; indeed, the correlations between time spent together in the past and engagement were fairly small (every $r < 0.24$; see Table 1). Future research, then, may find it fruitful to examine other examples of hybrid ties that can combine novelty and engagement, to see if they also prove to be hidden sources of value in people's networks.

Our study also contributes to the field's theoretical understanding of people's preferences for help seeking. Anecdotal evidence from our primary study, as well as evidence from our additional analysis, suggests that executives' desires to reduce anxiety may have biased their reconnection choices. Thus, rather than seeking reconnections that would provide the best available advice for their work projects, executives seem to have sought less anxiety-provoking ties, thereby sacrificing value for peace of mind. They appear to have acted much like the story of the man searching for his keys at night. When a friend finds him under a streetlight and asks why he is searching there, instead of where he likely lost his keys, he explains, "The light is better here." Similarly, our executives seem to have followed a comfortable, rather than an effective, route to seeking valuable work advice, whereas focusing on engagement and novelty would have been more productive.

This research represents a first step in the development of "richer psychological theory to supplement the overreliance on rational choice models of individual behavior in social network research" (Kilduff and Brass 2010, p. 336). We took a behavioral approach to inform advice-seeking preference models in a work setting, a topic about which the field knows surprisingly little (Bamberger 2009, Hofmann et al. 2009). What is known on this topic, however, has tended to emphasize rational cost/benefit trade-offs (Hofmann et al. 2009, Lee 2002, Nebus 2006), with little or no role for emotions like anxiety. Casciaro and Lobo (2005, 2008), however, found that emotions are so important that they can overwhelm cost/benefit trade-offs. The current findings echo this view, showing that increasing the comfort of seeking out contacts with an extensive history of prior interactions was a critical driver of people's reconnection preferences. We suspect that reconnection anxiety may also be responsible for the reluctance that so many people have for reconnecting in general (Levin et al. 2011b, Mattioli 2008). Future research might examine whether these kinds of effects extend beyond dormant ties, as we suspect they do, to more general phenomena in relationships and interpersonal interactions where anxiety and other strong negative emotions are salient. The prospect of "cold calling," for example, also provokes anxiety (Nebus 2006). Indeed, this emotional factor may be more important than previously thought: the literature on strong negative emotions finds that these affective states can inhibit people's willingness to consider new alternatives (Levin et al. 2010), narrowing attention to what comes to mind most easily (Fredrickson and Branigan 2005). The implications for advice seeking are that people who feel strong negative emotions may not be able to carefully consider all of the pros and cons of their potential reconnections; instead, it seems that they seek contacts who make them most comfortable.

In drawing these inferences, we were able to capitalize on a "before and after" research design and its ability to simultaneously examine causal antecedents and outcomes of executives' networking efforts. In contrast to the laboratory experiments, retrospective, or cross-sectional designs that prior research has used (Bamberger 2009), our research design allowed us to examine the *process* of advice seeking, from its inception (before seeking advice) to its conclusion, in a real, work-related context. Given the associated advantages of generalizability, external validity, and causal conclusions, we believe that future research might benefit from copying this approach, to illuminate the processes behind interpersonal networking efforts, not just with reconnections but with many other types of ties as well.

Like any research, our study also has limitations. First, we asked executives to rank-order a list of their 10 most preferred reconnections rather than their top 50, 100, or 1,000, which would have been impractical but potentially more revealing of the nature and depth of their pools of dormant ties. Second, we pushed executives to reconnect, rather than waiting for them to do so on their own. Thus, we cannot say whether or how these reconnections might differ from naturally occurring reconnections. Third, we did not measure our respondents' views of engagement before dormancy in terms of trust or willingness to help. Moreover, although anecdotal evidence indicates that most of our respondents' dormant ties simply faded and were not severed on bad terms, we did not systematically study how their relationships became dormant. Thus, future research might examine ties while they are still active and then, years later, identify which went dormant, which remained active, and why, as well as whether some were reconnected. Relatedly, more information on the dormant contacts' activities during dormancy—such as whether they ascended the corporate hierarchy; switched jobs, fields, and/or industries;

took leaves of absence; or even retired—might provide additional insights into the drivers of reconnection value. Fourth, our study focused on executives; it is possible that lower-level employees might experience the prospect of reconnecting differently, perhaps with less anxiety. However, if anything, we would expect reconnection anxiety to be even more widespread among nonexecutives, because people higher in a hierarchy tend to be more comfortable contacting other people than are people lower in a hierarchy (Smith et al. 2012). Fifth, most of our study's respondents reported after the fact that they had been anxious about reconnecting, and our additional analysis found support for our assumption that anxiety is a primary driver of reconnection preferences. However, to preserve the independence of emotion and behavior—and not contaminate our measures—we did not test a fully mediated model that would have measured the influence of pre-reconnection anxiety on people's reconnection preferences. Thus, future research might directly assess people's advice-seeking emotions to determine their direct influence on networking preferences. Finally, our study focused exclusively on the advice seeker; future research might examine the motivations of dormant contacts to see what makes them more versus less interested in helping.

Conclusion

Prior research has shown how useful reconnections can be as a source of knowledge and help. The current research extends this work by addressing two important questions: which reconnection choices are most valuable, and which do people actually prefer? Our findings suggest that, unfortunately, reconnection anxiety appears to lead executives to make poor selections, focusing on what is most comfortable, even though, ironically, these turn out to be among the least valuable. Our research identifies more optimal selection criteria: dormant ties that provide high novelty and high engagement. Thus, this study contributes to a better theoretical understanding of how network ties form and re-form, in terms of both connection preferences and outcomes. In doing so, we are able to better understand how networking and advice-seeking efforts potentially can, as well as actually do, take place.

Acknowledgments

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Academy of Management annual meeting in San Antonio, Texas. The authors thank Prasad Balkundi, Dan Brass, Terri Kurtzberg, Rodney Lacey, Neha Shah, and Sameer Srivastava for their helpful advice and assistance.

Appendix

Survey Items: Pre-reconnection Survey

Reconnection preference. Please *rank order* these 10 names in terms of your reconnection preferences. The first name should be the one with whom you would most like to reconnect. Your second-most-preferred choice should be listed as #2, and so on. (#1 Reconnection Preference (*most preferred* choice); [etc.]; #10 Reconnection Preference) [reverse-coded]

Organizational size. Approx. number of people employed by your organization (i.e., size) [recoded as logarithm]

Respondent's age. Year born [recoded as years until survey date]

Project novelty. To what extent does the work project you selected demand new skills, new knowledge, and/or new expertise from you? (1 = not at all; 7 = to a very large extent)

Shared identity. (1) This person and I both identify with the same groups or categories of people, demographically, professionally, personally, etc. (2) I see myself and this person as belonging to the same groups or categories of people. (1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = somewhat disagree; 4 = neutral; 5 = somewhat agree; 6 = agree; 7 = strongly agree) [Cronbach's alpha = 0.70]

Shared perspective. I assume that this person and I will share the same perspective, e.g., think a lot alike. (1 = strongly disagree; [etc.]; 7 = strongly agree)

Prior intensity/closeness. (1) How close was the relationship between you and this person? (1 = especially close; 4 = somewhat close; 7 = distant) [reverse-coded] (2) This person and I once had a very intense, strong relationship (1 = strongly disagree; [etc.]; 7 = strongly agree) [Cronbach's alpha = 0.74]

People in common. How much do you and this person *currently* share mutual contacts with each other (i.e., people you both know and are both currently in touch with)? (1 = no mutual contacts; 2 = few mutual contacts; 3 = many mutual contacts)

Physical proximity. Where do you expect this person to be located, in terms of physical proximity to you? (1 = same city; 2 = different city, but in same country; 3 = different country) [reverse-coded]

Up to date on contact. (1) I know a lot about what this person has been up to at work during the years since we lost touch. (2) I am very familiar with what has been happening with this person's *career* during the years since we lost touch. (1 = strongly disagree; [etc.]; 7 = strongly agree) [Cronbach's alpha = 0.81]

Knowledge of contact's expertise areas. (1) *Overall*, I have an extremely good understanding of what specific skills this person has. (2) *Overall*, I have a very clear sense as to what areas this person has experience in. (1=strongly disagree; [etc.]; 7 = strongly agree) [Cronbach's alpha = 0.85]

Perceived ability. This person is extremely capable at the work he or she performs. (1 = strongly disagree; [etc.]; 7 = strongly agree)

Relationship length. How long ago did you meet this person for the *very first time*? (in years and months) [recoded as logarithm of: the total number of months (plus one)]

Prior communication frequency. During the time you were in contact with this person, what was the average communication frequency you two had? (1 = daily; 2 = twice a week; 3 = once a week; 4 = twice a month; 5 = once a month; 6 = once every second month; 7 = once every three months or less (or only met once)) [reverse-coded]

Higher-status contact. Even if you are in different organizations, please do your best to compare the relative status or rank

of each person. (1) How much status/prestige does this person have? (2) What is this person's organizational rank/level? (1 = much lower than me; 2 = lower than me; 3 = somewhat lower than me; 4 = same as me; 5 = somewhat higher than me; 6 = higher than me; 7 = much higher than me) [Cronbach's alpha = 0.89]

Willingness to help. (1) I expect that this person will answer completely and openly any question I ask. (2) I expect that this person will be very willing to share any of his or her knowledge with me, even if I do not specifically ask for something. (1 = strongly disagree; [etc.]; 7 = strongly agree) [Cronbach's alpha = 0.70]

Relational trust. (1) This person will always look out for my interests. (2) This person will go out of his or her way to make sure I am not damaged or harmed. (1 = strongly disagree; [etc.]; 7 = strongly agree) [Cronbach's alpha = 0.80]

Survey Items: Post-reconnection Survey

Value received. To what extent did each type of advice from this person contribute to your performance on your work project? (1 = contributed very negatively; 2 = contributed negatively; 3 = contributed somewhat negatively; 4 = contributed neither positively nor negatively; 5 = contributed somewhat positively; 6 = contributed positively; 7 = contributed very positively; [and for all but overall contribution:] NA = did not receive anything like this [recoded as missing value]) Note: If the project that you identified is on-going, then estimate what your answers would be once the project is completed. [variable calculated as average of six items, Cronbach's alpha = 0.86]

Definitions: Sometimes when you consult with people, you benefit from their ability to provide . . .

Specific answers or input: Providing specific answers to your question or solutions to your problems.

Referrals: Pointing you to relevant sources of information such as other people, paper archives or databases.

Problem-solving assistance: Helping you think through a problem (even when they may not have specific information that solves your original problem). These interactions may help you to consider important dimensions of a problem and/or anticipate issues likely to appear in the future.

Validating your ideas: Validating your plans or solutions. These interactions bolster confidence in a plan or solution and improve your willingness and ability to express ideas persuasively to others.

Legitimacy: Being able to say you have spoken with that person about your plans or solutions. Indicating that you have consulted with such a person lends credibility to your plans or solutions.

Overall contribution to your performance on your work project

Prior organizations. Number of *prior* organizations worked for in the same industry (do *not* count your current organization) [recoded as logarithm of raw number (plus one)]

Job tenure. Number of years in current job

Prior project experience. Have you ever worked on any prior projects in the same technical area as the work project you selected for the dormant ties assignment? (0 = no; 1 = yes)

Respondent's gender. (0 = male; 1 = female)

Communication in person. Did you talk mostly by phone or in person? (phone; in person; other) [recoded as 0 = phone or other; 1 = in person]

Endnotes

[1]Prior work has shown that negative ties amount to only approximately 2% of people's active ties (Labianca et al. 1998) and approximately 3% of their dormant ties (McCarthy and Levin 2015). Thus, most dormant ties, especially those that people would consider reconnecting, will have a very high probability of a positive history.

[2]Whereas novelty per se is not necessarily beneficial, we follow the innovation literature and define novelty as both new and having the potential to be useful (Amabile 1996, Fleming et al. 2007), but with the newness being new to the knowledge recipient, regardless of how proven or established it may be in its original context (Damanpour 1991).

[3]Engagement also differs from emotional closeness. Whereas closeness may be a perfectly reasonable overall indicator of tie strength (Burt 1992, Marsden and Campbell 1984, Sosa 2011), it is not, in our view, a good proxy for engagement in a productive knowledge exchange. In particular, research has shown that people often have ambivalent feelings toward someone with whom they feel close (Pratt and Doucet 2000); e.g., they might have mostly positive feelings, but they can also feel trapped, resentful, or annoyed. In fact, the closer people feel, the likelier they are to raise annoying issues and generate conflict (Anderson and Jap 2005). Similarly, closeness can lead to competition and rivalry, and hence ambivalence or mixed feelings (Ingram and Zou 2008). This ambivalence may be especially potent for someone contemplating a reconnection (e.g., "It might be fun to get in touch with someone I used to feel so close with, but I also feel especially bad about having lost touch with them."). As a result, closeness may not fully capture how likely people are to engage, i.e., to be willing to listen to and share knowledge with each other. Thus, given our efforts to disentangle the dueling forces within tie strength, we focus on relatively pure forms of engagement like relational trust and a willingness to help, and we control for any effects of closeness in our analyses.

[4]And, indeed, one year later, this executive reported still being in touch with—and receiving value from—both contacts on multiple occasions, e.g., "to exchange information/knowledge on projects we were working on [or] regarding new technologies being used at our [work]sites."

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