

DISSERTATION DEFENSE

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“ESSAYS ON INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCE AND ORGANIZATIONAL NETWORKS”

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12:00 pm

Via Zoom: <https://cmu.zoom.us/j/638763771> (Meeting ID: 638 763 771)

A key question in the study of organizations is why some individuals perform better than others. Understanding the drivers of individual performance is important because organizations rely heavily on their human resources to build value. Among the different perspectives that have been proposed to explain variance in individual performance, the social network approach has emerged as a widely accepted one. Informal relationships among individuals are seen as a source of both opportunities and constraints. As such, employees' outcomes depend in part on their position in the social network structure. Understanding how informal relationships affect performance requires a theory that explains not only how individuals attain valuable network positions, but also how they take advantage of those positions.

In this dissertation, I propose to answer these questions and further our understanding of the link between individual performance and social networks by analyzing both the evolution of intraorganizational informal ties (Chapter 1) and the mechanisms underpinning the ability of individuals to extract rents from their structural positions (Chapter 2 and Chapter 3).

In the first chapter—co-authored with Giuseppe Soda and Brandy Aven—adopting an organizational design perspective on the evolution of social networks, we design a quasi-experiment to investigate the evolution of informal ties following a managerial intervention that encourages some employees to become key social network players. This study advances our understanding of how individuals move into valuable network positions by illustrating the role that organization design may play in shaping the evolution of social ties.

In the second and third chapter, which focus on the concept of brokerage, I explore two mechanisms that affect individuals' ability to derive advantages from bridging across different groups. Specifically, in the second chapter—co-authored with Giuseppe Soda and Marco Tortoriello and published in the *Academy of Management Journal*—distinguishing brokerage (structural property of individuals in a network) from brokering (behavioral strategic orientation toward interacting with others), we theorize and find suggestive evidence for the fact that brokers' strategic orientations play an important role in explaining individual performance over and above their structural position. In the third chapter, which is a solo-authored manuscript, disentangling actual and cognitive social structures with respect to brokerage positions, I propose that alters' perceptions of a focal actor's brokerage opportunities play a moderating role in the relationship between individual performance and network positions with higher returns accruing to actual brokers who are misperceived by their alters to occupy dense social networks. Furthermore, I also investigate the role of trust as a mechanism explaining why people who are perceived to have cohesive networks perform better than people perceived to bridge across different groups.

Moving beyond a pure structuralist approach, which assumes that the major determinant of employees' performance rests in the social structure surrounding them, this dissertation sheds light on why some people perform better than others by focusing on processes and socio-cognitive mechanisms associated with attaining and taking advantage of specific network positions.