

# **ALL IN THE FAMILY: NETWORK TIES AS DETERMINANTS OF REPUTATION AND IDENTITY IN NCAA BASKETBALL**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Social networks serve as conduits of novel information, power, assets, and identity. These diverse types of resources are all important determinants of career opportunity. Scholars have investigated the importance of networks in multiple labor markets ranging from professionals in a high-tech firm in California (Podolny & Baron, 1997), to employees at a phone center (Fernandez, Castilla, & Moore, 2000), to unemployed citizens in a Russian city (Yakubovich, 2005). Frequently, network ties are identified as conduits of instrumental resources made available through connections. For example, scholars have indicated that structural network concepts such as brokerage, strength of ties, and composition (Burt, 1992; Granovetter, 1974; Lin, Ensel & Vaughn, 1981; Montgomery, 1992; Wegener, 1991) can create and maintain an individual's access to instrumental resources such as novel information, social support, and financial support, which in turn influence opportunity (Granovetter, 1982). Researchers utilizing a different approach have indicated that network structure and ties also serve as signals of perceptual resources such as status, image, and market identity. For example, scholars have indicated that affiliations with prominent individuals or organizations confer status (Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman & Sloan, 1976), and that the composition of an actor's network sends signals about quality (Benjamin & Podolny, 1999) and market identity (Podolny & Baron, 1997; Zuckerman, Kim, Ukanwa, & Rittman, 2003) that can affect opportunity.

I aim to extend research linking social network analysis with identity theory by suggesting that network ties represent much more than resources derived from structure. Through an analysis of career trajectories, I plan to show that reputation and social identity influence the effects of social network structure, and that individuals with similarly structured social networks realize different benefits when the social identities derived from network ties are perceived differently. I aim to address the following questions: To what extent does reputation influence the effects of network structure on career issues (i.e., prestige of position obtained, and exhibited career resilience)? And to what extent does membership in a socially constructed network group influence an individual's career advancement and resiliency? For example, I focus on groups of individuals affiliated either through a common institution, or via a common co-worker, who identify themselves as members of a collective "family group." Family group identification, which is based on network ties, persists through an individual's subsequent career positions at different institutions with different colleagues; this identification differs from identification with a formal institution. Examples include: (1) individuals who worked at Fairchild Semiconductor who identified themselves as "Fairchildren" long after leaving Fairchild for positions at other organizations (Pollack, 1988); and (2) former employees of Bain Consulting who refer to themselves as lifelong Bainies, as evident in former Bain employee

Grenville Byford's quote, "Once a Bainie, always a Bainie, and I'm married to one too" (Hanna, 2005).

### **Network Structure: More than Information**

Network scholars have long suggested that individuals receive resources (e.g., information, goods, innovations, etc.) from friends, family, coworkers and connected others. The more connected an individual is relative to others in his or her network, the more central he or she is (Freeman, 1979); further, the more disconnected an individual's alters are to each other the more likely that the focal individual will be in a position of influence (Burt, 1982). In a review of research on network centrality and structure, Borgatti and Everett (2006) indicate that central players in social networks have greater influence (Galaskiewicz, 1979; Laumann & Pappi, 1973; Marsden & Laumann, 1977), power (Burt, 1982), advantage in exchange networks (Marsden, 1982), and competence in formal organizations (Blau, 1963). In career settings, network ties have been shown to be strong predictors of job search success. For example, Gravovetter (1974, 1982) suggests that an individual looking for a job is most likely to receive helpful and novel information from acquaintances and friends of friends; this fact provides evidence of the importance of all types of network connectivity and structure. However, in addition to providing an individual with novel information and resources, I propose that an individual's network connectivity sends signals to the market regarding the quality of the individual, by triggering sensemaking processes of external evaluators.

Reputation is fundamentally a socially constructed concept, which is based on performance-based evidence of actual or perceived quality that generates rewards for an actor (Rao, 1994; Washington & Zajac, 2005). As discussed by Rao (1994), models of reputation are predicated on the decision-theory vision of a world of imperfect information in which actors rely on proxies or signals to make rational assumptions about the intentions, future behaviors, and quality of other actors (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). These models assume a tight coupling between past actions and future expectations (Rao, 1994; Wilson, 1985). For example, in his analysis of the automotive industry, Rao (1994) suggests that prior victories in certification contests legitimate organizations and enrich the reputation of winning organizations. Models of reputation also assume a tight coupling between certain attributes and the evaluation of an organization.

The concept of reputation is also applied at the individual level, and researchers have indicated that an individual's reputation is achieved through signals of quality determined by past actions (Washington & Zajac, 2005). Researchers of career mobility have found support linking prior performance and actions with advancement. For example, the concept of human capital suggests that education, experience, and general intelligence are valuable signals of quality which elevate an individual's opportunity for advancement (Dreher, & Bretz, 1991; Wayne, Liden, Kraimer, & Graf, 1998). In addition, scholars have also suggested that actors rely on additional proxies to determine the perceived quality of an individual (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). One discussed and supported proxy of reputation is an individual's social network ties.

In their seminal work on affiliation and perception Cialdini and colleagues introduced the "basking-in-reflected-glory" effect (Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman & Sloan, 1976). This phenomenon proposes that observers evaluate connected objects similarly; therefore, individuals with visible links to prominent actors showcase these ties to enjoy the benefits of public perception of similarity. Because an individual's performance can be difficult to assess, people look for signals of quality (Spence, 1973), such as affiliation. Extending this work, Kilduff and Krackhardt (1994) demonstrated that individuals who are perceived to have

prominent friends are credited with the ability to influence higher-status persons and therefore gain important advantages in the market for power and influence in an organization. These findings indicate that the performance evaluation is partly a function of the perception that the individual has friends in prominent positions.

During a hiring process when an individual's perceived value is evaluated by a hiring committee, his or her ties with other visible leaders signal that the individual is similar to active leaders, and therefore has similar access to industry resources, and is capable of being a leader. For example, an individual with multiple ties throughout an industry will likely be viewed by a hiring committee of a prestigious organization as attractive and therefore will more likely be hired to fill a prestigious position. In addition, individuals with multiple ties throughout an industry who are ousted will be deemed by hiring institutions as being embedded within the industry and therefore more likely to exhibit career resiliency and obtain a position after being ousted. Thus, the following hypotheses are offered:

***Hypothesis 1A:** Ceteris paribus, the greater the network connectivity of an individual with active industry leaders, the greater the likelihood that this individual will be hired by a prestigious hiring institution.*

***Hypothesis 1B:** Ceteris paribus, the greater the network connectivity of an ousted individual with active industry leaders, the greater his or her likelihood of exhibiting resiliency and obtaining employment in a leadership position.*

### **Network Composition and Identity**

In addition to perspectives of reputation and external market identity based on affiliation ties, social identity based on network ties is also a likely determinant of career issues. For example, alliances with others also entail fundamental differences in the way that focal individuals identify themselves (Brewer & Gardner, 1996), and can provide a partial answer to the question "Who am I?" (Stryker & Serpe, 1982; Turner, 1982). Termed social identity, this concept is the knowledge of an individual that he or she belongs to certain groups, together with the emotional and value significance of that group membership (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory suggests that individuals classify themselves and others into various social categories; these social categorizations cognitively segment and order the social environment, providing the individual with a systematic means of defining others and him/herself in the social environment (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Whereas social identity usually refers to social categories such as organizational membership, gender, race, and religious affiliation, social identity can also be applied to groups based on network ties. For example, as previously discussed, individuals affiliated with Fairchild chose to identify themselves as "Fairchildren" and continue to do so long after leaving Fairchild, and individuals with prior affiliations to Bain refer to themselves as "Bainies for life" (Hanna, 2005). In addition to providing a sense of categorical belonging and connection, the social identity of these informal groups promotes uniqueness and a signaling of core values.

### **The Importance of Language**

Researchers have investigated how metaphors such as family, sports team, military, community, and associates have been utilized by organization members to describe their culture and working environment (Brotheridge & Lee, 2006; Casey, 1999; Gibson & Zellmer-Bruhn, 2001). The family metaphor and language, as used by the "Fairchildren" and "Bainies," have

been shown to invoke elements of nurturing and support in the workplace among individuals who view teams as families (Gibson & Zeller-Bruhn, 2001). For example, even though the majority of former employees of Fairchild did not share direct ties, the creation of the “Fairchildren” moniker, and the promotion of a network family, encouraged members to help and support each other much like one would help and support a biological family member.

I propose that individuals who claim membership in a family group receive benefits from fellow members due to the linkage of the network group with the family institution. As discussed by Weber and Glynn (2006), institutions tend to prime meaning-making by serving as the building blocks for sensemaking. Friedland and Alford (1991, pg. 247-250) suggest that family is a central institution of contemporary Western society, which signals community, unconditional loyalty to its members and their reproductive needs, and routines and rituals which define the order of the world and one’s position in it. By adopting language from the family institution, individuals enact roles and scripts to establish identity continuity (e.g., Who I am? Who are my referents? What do I stand for?) and form expectations for the conduct of others (Weber & Glynn, 2006). This process effects how individuals think of themselves as organizational actors, shape what they enact and how they interpret (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005).

Family language also triggers the enactment of sense making among external audiences (i.e., hiring committees, analysts, evaluation committees) who endorse family categorizations to simplify the complexity and better predict future performance. In addition, Glynn and Wrobel (2007) theorize that the use of a family metaphor can be utilized by group members to highlight attributes to external audiences which engender credibility and trustworthiness that advantage the group.

In career settings, an individual with membership in a group that promotes a legitimate and familial identity will be considered by hiring committees to have less risk due to the promoted family values. Such an individual is therefore more likely to be hired than one who lacks membership in a group with a legitimate identity. Membership will also provide the individual with a sense of belonging and social support which will improve his or her career resiliency. Thus,

***Hypothesis 2A:*** *Ceteris paribus, individuals who are members of a recognized network group with a family identity will obtain more prestigious positions than individuals who are not members.*

***Hypothesis 2B:*** *Ceteris paribus, individuals who are members of a recognized network group with a family identity will exhibit more career resiliency than individuals who are not members.*

## DATA

### Empirical Setting

Men’s Basketball Coaches in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) provide an excellent empirical setting to investigate how network ties affect labor market opportunity and career resiliency of members. This setting, which provides the ability to control for performance and compliance, and the ability to identify network affiliations and socially constructed groups, is ideal for analyzing the phenomenon of interest. Using sport as an empirical setting has a long history in management research as recently addressed by Wolfe and colleagues (Wolfe, Weick, Usher, Terborg, Poppo, Murrell, Dukerich, Core, Dickson, & Simmons Jourdan, 2005).

This empirical setting is also similar to highly competitive industries, because year-to-year performance is unpredictable and uncertain. For example, the two teams that faced off for

the National Championship game in 2006 failed to even qualify for the 2007 NCAA tournament. In addition, there is extremely high turnover among coaches. For example, following the 2006-2007 season, there were 62 head coaching position changes sparked by veteran head coaches retiring and unsuccessful head coaches being fired. Of the 341 current Division I men's basketball teams, 156 institutions fired their head coaches at some point between the 2001 and 2007 seasons, forcing these coaches to re-enter the carousel in hopes of finding another coaching position. Due to frequent position changes and short tenures, there are many active head coaches who have worked together as colleagues at a point in time. For example, 308 of the 341 head coaches who started the 2007 season worked on the same staff with at least one other active coach at some point in their careers.

Similar to the "Fairchildren" group, there are collections of coaches working at different institutions who are categorized into "Coaching Families". For example, analysts recognize and endorse groups such as the "Tar Heel" family, the "Rick Pitino" coaching family, and the "Spartan Family" (For example, journalist Joe Perry (2004) explains that the Tar Heel coaching family headed by legendary Coach Dean Smith "is a living, breathing entity, linking the past to the present" that "continues to grow"). Certain coaches also make identity claims regarding membership in these groups (For example, Coach John Calipari when describing his annual retreat for friends and former coaching colleagues stated "All of this is about all of us looking out for each other. Our jobs are to promote each other. This is a family" (Rhoden, 2005).

These coaching groups are primarily based on network ties (e.g., most family members worked together at some point in time), but also have distinct behaviors (e.g., members of the Pitino family are known for a similar style of play (Tramel, 2008)), distinct affect (e.g., the "Coach K" members present a very professional image (Duke Basketball Media guide 2007)) and distinct cognitions (e.g., members of the Spartan family include statements of group meaning such as "Spartan Family is a group of individuals bonded together as a cohesive group" (Michigan State Media Guide, 2007)). These family groups also have implications for the careers of coaches (as evidenced in hiring announcements in which hiring committees highlight family memberships of their selected candidate and in introductory statements in which coaches highlight their family membership). It should be noted that not all coaches in NCAA basketball claim membership in a family group.

## METHODS

### Dependent Variables

To determine career implications (Hypotheses 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B), I investigated all job changes between the beginning of 2001 season and the beginning of the 2007 season. This seven-year period captures the rise of public interest in NCAA basketball and also the rise of family coaching groups. In Analysis 1, I analyzed determinants of *position prestige* of the 285 coaches who obtained head coaching positions during the study period (as measured by average home basketball attendance at the hiring institution in the year prior to hiring a new coach). In Analysis 2, I analyzed the subsequent career moves of the 155 coaches who were fired between the beginning of the 2001 season and the end of the 2006 season; this analysis serves to investigate the roles of network factors and family group membership as determinants of *career resiliency* (as measured by an index with outcomes which range from dropping out of the profession to obtaining another head coaching position).

*Network Connectivity.* To calculate this measure I first created a complete historical affiliation network for each coach in my dataset. I defined affiliations as historical overlaps with alters at

the same institution at the same point in time. To calculate each individual's connectivity with the 341 other active coaches at the time of interest I utilized the two-step reach statistic. This measure captures the percentage of actors in the entire network that are within two network steps of the focal coach (termed ego) and is commonly used statistic in ego network analysis (Hanneman & Riddle, 2005).

*Family Membership.* Through qualitative text analysis of industry articles and media guides of NCAA basketball programs, I identified eight coaching families and the respective members. I identified these family groups using the following criteria: (1) sports journalists and industry experts referred to the coaching family group with "family" terminology such as "family," "tree," and "genealogy." (2) Group members used family language when referring to their relationships. I excluded coaching groups mentioned by outsiders in media articles for which I could find no claims of group existence by endorsed members, such as the "Lute Olson Coaching Tree" (Doyel, 2004). To identify members of these recognized coaching families, I analyzed job history data, network overlap data, and qualitative data such as press conference quotes, hiring announcements, and public press articles involving coaches in the study sample.

In both analyses I controlled for several performance variables to eliminate alternative explanations and better estimate the socio-cognitive effects of network ties. I utilized ordinary least squared regression to test hypothesis 1 and ordered logistic regression to test hypothesis 2 using Stata 10. I analyzed all network data using UCINET VI (Borgatti, Everett, & Freeman, 2002).

## **RESULTS**

Findings from my analyses indicate that network connectivity positively predicts the likelihood that an ousted leader exhibits career resiliency and obtains employment (even when controlling for performance). Findings also indicate that individuals who are recognized and who identify themselves as members of a coaching family obtain more prestigious positions and exhibit more career resiliency than nonmembers (even when controlling for performance and network structure). This indicates the socio-cognitive importance of network ties by suggesting that connections are not evaluated equally, and that ties which signal membership in a coaching family effect how an individual is perceived by audiences and how that individual self identifies in a very competitive industry.

## **DISCUSSION**

Through an analysis of the career moves of coaches in NCAA basketball, this investigation identifies the importance of cognitive resources derived from network ties. In an extension of research linking social network measures with performance reputation, this analysis suggests that social network measures influence career mobility through mechanisms of reputation and identity. Findings also indicate that individuals who are recognized and identify themselves as members of a family group obtain more prestigious positions and exhibit more career resiliency than nonmembers. By controlling for prior performance, I am also able to negate a possible alternative explanation that family membership is actually a proxy for quality and not a source of reputation and identity. Overall, this project indicates that reputation and identity moderate the effects of social network structure, and that individuals with similarly structured social networks realize different benefits when the social identities derived from network ties are perceived differently.