

Internal Social Network Ties & Entrepreneurial Team Performance: Role of Teamwork in Technology-Based Ventures in India

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This paper examines how internal network ties of nascent entrepreneurial teams of technology-based ventures (TBV) impact their team performance. We argue that several dimensions reflecting teamwork quality within strong and weak network ties are essential determinants of entrepreneurial team performance. Hierarchical regression technique was applied to the sample of 98 nascent entrepreneurial teams comprising 230 co-founders of TBV in India. Results indicate that strong and weak ties in entrepreneurial teams do not directly impact team performance. Instead, the practice of strong and weak ties to openly communicate within the team, coordinate, mutually support each other, willingness to stay in the team and putting efforts into their respective work helps in their positive team performance.

Introduction

As per the NASSCOM Indian Tech Start-up Survey (2020), there has been an exponential growth in India's technology ventures. Around 4300 TBV started in 2015, which rose to 5000-5300 in 2016, 6500 in 2018, 9200 in 2019, and about 11000 new TBV in 2020. Interestingly, around 89 percent of funded TBV were team-based ventures in 2019 (Innoven Capital Report, 2019). There is an increased need for entrepreneurial teams in TBV in India due to its emerging demand in different sectors. Still, surprisingly, these entrepreneurial collaborations are rarely tested in India (Meil & Salzman, 2017).

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Entrepreneurs utilize micro (entrepreneur's characteristics and personality) as well as macro factors (funding sources, economic indicators, infrastruc-

ture availability, industrial environment and government policies) to explore emerging technological opportunities (Joshi & Satyanarayana, 2014). During this process, if the complexities of business need a collection of technical and other business expertise, challenges to own by a solo entrepreneur, the entrepreneurial team becomes apparent in TBV (Chowdhury, 2005). Moreover, in the entrepreneurial team formation of TBV, the addition and deduction of the team members occur at both nascent stages and later growth phases (Lazar et al., 2020). So, the networks within entrepreneurial team members also grow, develop and change. (Arenius & Laitinen, 2011). Nascent entrepreneurial teams usually form through network ties as they assist in recognizing business opportunities and gaining both social and human capital.

However, the recent systematic literature review studies on entrepreneurial teams have observed that the relationship between network ties and entrepreneurial teams' outcomes has not been adequately addressed in the extant literature (Das et al., 2021; Bolzani et al., 2019). Prior studies have limited themselves to examining internal network ties' strength, i.e., strong and weak ties to form entrepreneurial teams in different settings (Aldrich & Kim, 2007; Ruef et al., 2003). Moreover, Vissa & Chacar (2009) investigated how internal dynamics within an entrepreneurial team impacts external networks of the entrepreneurial team. Bhagavatula et al. (2010) examined the role of networks on venture performance and suggested that

network ties alone might not impact team outcomes. Some intervening variables could also contribute to entrepreneurial team performance. When an entrepreneurial team is formed via internal network ties, the information and resource exchange become dominant for team outcomes. Scholars suggest that the multiple dimensions of teamwork, i.e., communication, coordination, mutual support, cohesion, efforts, and balance of contribution, broadly cover the team members' interactions (Hoegl & Gemuenden, 2001; Lechler, 2001). These social interactions between entrepreneurs are contingent upon strong and weak ties in the entrepreneurial team, which subsidize their team outcomes.

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Due to the limited studies, the scholars have shown considerable interest in exploring internal network ties' impact on entrepreneurial team outcomes of TBV (Zhou & Rosini, 2015; Klotz et al., 2014). Thus, the present study explores how internal network ties impact entrepreneurial team outcomes of technology-based ventures. In this process, the present research theorizes about the mediating effects of multiple dimensions of teamwork on internal network ties impacting entrepreneurial team performance. Consequently, various significant theoretical and practical implications for improving the team performance of TBV are presented in this study.

Review of Literature

Internal Network Ties: The recent and varied research on social networks has rationalized the present concepts of social network theory in entrepreneurial team's context (Nanda & Sorensen, 2010). These studies observed that nascent entrepreneurial team members of TBV are active networkers. The social capital assesses meaningful information, knowledge, funding and other crucial resources through networks rich in structural holes. The entrepreneurial team either considers the individuals' complementary skills required for managing the complexity of TBV or the set of individuals providing social and emotional support to the team members (Soetanto, 2017). Scholars suggest that entrepreneurial teams in TBV are more likely to have strong ties (Ruef et al., 2003) as they result in the diffusion of social information and increase social influence within the team (Granovetter, 1983). These ties make the team's internal environment more expressive, trustworthy, and willing to work for the venture. However, there is also a burden of maintaining the relationship in strong ties, which distracts team members' attention in the venture and affects their performance (Balkundi & Harrison, 2006).

Alternatively, if technical expertise is the venture's primary requirement that existing team members do not fulfil, collaboration through weak ties is generally considered in technology ventures (Aldrich & Kim, 2007). The weak ties provide instrumental/task-oriented strength in the network that better

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reaches the outside source of information through bridging ties between different network clusters (Granovetter, 1983). Entrepreneurial team members in such a network work independently to achieve the common goals of venture success (Schjoedt & Kraus, 2009). But then again, the strength of weak ties lies in their ability to develop bridging ties with others instead of the number of connections they have. The contradictory observations and limited literature on the strength of strong and weak ties on the entrepreneurial team of TBV make it necessary to investigate it more precisely. Hence, we hypothesize that:

H1a: High strong ties' strength in the entrepreneurial teams of TBV significantly impacts their team performance.

H1b: High weak ties' strength in the entrepreneurial teams of TBV significantly impacts their team performance.

Strength of Internal Network Ties and Teamwork Quality: Prior studies observed teamwork quality as an inclusive concept of the level of interactions in teams (Brinckmann & Hoegl, 2011). The multiple essential dimensions of social interactions in entrepreneurial teams include (1) Communication- which includes frequency, intensity, sharing of ideas, information and opinions among

entrepreneurial team members; (2) Co-ordination- which comprises specificity, well-coordination, adjustments in the entrepreneurial team; (3) Cohesion- that encompasses the desire of entrepreneurial team members to remain in the team; (4) Efforts- represents the effort of the entrepreneurial team member which are crucial for team success and (5) Mutual support for each other, broadly covered by teamwork quality (Lechler, 2001). High teamwork quality in a team creates openness in sharing relevant and valuable information. They coordinate their activities together; mutually support each other; put their efforts to develop a balance of contribution and cohesive environment in the team.

Social networks' viewpoint on team interactions focuses on the strength of social relations among team members, i.e. strong and weak ties (Sauer & Kauffeld, 2013) that lead to change in their interactions. These collaborations and interactions are essential for strategy formulation, decision-making processes and team effectiveness (Neelam et al., 2016). Thus, nascent entrepreneurial teams with strong network ties are expected to show resilient teamwork. To widen networks, gain diversity in social capital, and balance skills in the team, entrepreneurs often include individuals with more technical/business proficiency with whom they might not have permanent contact (Greve & Salaff, 2003). However, limited interpersonal relationships among team members with weak ties might take some time to adjust and mingle in the team and reduce teamwork quality. Hence, we hypothesize that:

H2a: High strong network ties strength within the entrepreneurial team of TBV develop high teamwork quality.

H2b: High weak network ties strength within the entrepreneurial team of TBV develop low teamwork quality.

Teamwork Quality: The social interactions among team members change over time with increased experience of the technology used in the venture, change in group composition and task structure (McGrath et al., 1993). The group interactions often connect with the information exchange within team members, which is essential in a TBV that can lead to task productivity or performance (Sparrowe et al., 2001). It is primarily necessary for the entrepreneurial teams to work together and run innovative ventures. Prior literature supported the association of teamwork as social interaction and team performance in small groups and corporate/organizational teams (Gupta & Karve, 2020; Bansal, 2002). Hoegl & Gemunden (2001) observed teamwork in managers, team leaders, and team members working on innovative projects and their performance. Meta-analysis results also indicated that teamwork practices are positively related to team performance (LePine et al., 2008). While many studies demonstrate the link between team-based organizations and innovative performance, they fail to specify and measure the collaborative work of entrepreneurial teams for their success and performance. Hence, we hypothesize that:

H3: The positive team interactions, i.e., multiple dimensions of teamwork

quality in the entrepreneurial team of TBV, positively impact their team performance.

There is a positive and significant relationship between strong internal ties and team performance when there is a higher degree of team interactions.

Teamwork is primarily perceived in closer team collaborations. The entrepreneurial team members preferably select strong ties for venture formation because of enhanced team attraction, synergy, empathy, and social affiliation (Chen & Wang, 2008). The team member with no prior contact or weak ties might take some time to tune and mix themselves in the team to work effectively and show low teamwork quality initially (Brinckmann & Hoegl, 2011). Lin et al. (2006) studied internal networks as a moderator between entrepreneurial strategies, capabilities, and venture performance, positively affecting a venture's innovative capacity. The network ties among group members lead to change in their social interactions, which is critical for the smooth functioning of the TBV. Thus, teamwork quality acts as an intervening variable that can bridge the relationship between network ties or the composition of the entrepreneurial team and their team outcomes. So, the contention is that there is a positive and significant relationship between strong internal ties and team performance when there is a higher degree of team interactions, i.e. teamwork quality within an entrepreneurial team. So, this study hypothesizes that:

H4: The strength of internal network ties (both strong and weak ties) within entrepreneurial team members of TBV show positive team performance through a mediating effect of the multiple dimensions of teamwork quality.

Methodology

The survey was conducted in technology incubators in India. The respondents were the current incubatees and the alumni of the incubators. The primary research questionnaire was collected by personally visiting the incubators or administering an online google form in 6 months' time period. Around 300 teams were contacted for the survey, but single-member response teams were discarded from the survey because the study investigates the interactions between the team members, and the minimum response was required from at least two team members (Khan et al., 2015). After data screening the final sample comprised 98 entrepreneurial teams representing 230 co-founders with a team size of 2 or 3 co-founders. The response rate of the survey was 33 percent.

Descriptive

62 percent of the respondents were within 21-30 years of age. 31 percent of respondents were women, while 69 percent were males. 42 percent of respondents had post-graduation as their highest qualification. More than half of the respondents were from an engineering background (58 percent). The Intra-class Correlation Coefficient (ICC) was cal-

culated to determine within-group similarity for all the measuring scales used in the study. The mean values of all the scales were more than 0.71, which showed significant within-group agreement (Burke et al., 2017). The average mean of all team members' responses was calculated to aggregate at the team level for analysis. Hence, further calculations were reported on 98 entrepreneurial teams' aggregated data (Khan et al., 2015).

Common Method Variance

Podsakoff et al. (2003) stated procedural and statistical remedies to make data free from common bias. The procedural remedies for collecting data were adopted by reverse coding the items and adding only close-ended items. Harman's one-factor test was conducted as a statistical remedy to estimate the magnitude of common method variance. The exploratory factor analysis of all factors reported that the eigen-values of 11 factors were more than 1.0. One of the factors had the largest variance of 29 percent, which assured that common bias is not significant in the present data.

Measures

The eight items scale used by Khan et al. (2015) in the entrepreneurial team's context was adopted to measure team performance ($\alpha=0.87$). The 29 items scale of teamwork quality developed by Hoegl and Gemunden (2001) was used to analyze interactions in the entrepreneurial teams ($\alpha=0.91$). This scale includes the multiple dimensions of team-

work quality, i.e., communication, coordination, cohesion, efforts, mutual support and balance of contribution. The strength of internal network ties, i.e., strong ties, are more expressive, whereas weak ties are more instrumental or task-oriented (Wu et al., 2020). The six-item scale for strong and weak tie strength reported by Manev and Stevenson (2001) was adopted to analyze the data.

Validity & Multi-collinearity

All dimensions of the teamwork quality scale were analyzed separately in which reliability coefficient for the balance of contribution dimension with three items was less than 0.7. Hence, this dimension was dropped, and the internal reliability of teamwork scale was again calculated. Furthermore, the multi-collinearity of the variables was checked by calculating Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values which were reported less than 3 for all variables (Hair et al., 2006). The mean, standard deviation of all the variables, Cronbach's alpha values of their respective scales, and the approximate VIF values are provided in Table 1. Also, the first order correlations of all the focal variables are calculated and given in Table 2. The results provided the initial support for the hypothesis.

Hypothesis Testing & Results

Hierarchical multiple regressions through SPSS 22 software are used to analyze hypotheses H1a, H1b, H2a, H2b, and H3. While hypothesis H4, including mediation of teamwork quality, is analyzed using the PROCESS macro plugin

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics & Internal Consistency Coefficient

S no.	Variables	Mean	S.D	Cronbach's α	VIF(app values)
1.	Team performance	3.99	.527	0.849	1.50
2(a)	Strong ties	4.42	.646	0.793	1.26
2(b)	Weak ties	4.14	.853	0.736	1.08
3.	Teamwork quality total	4.20	.431	0.718	1.59
3(a)	Communication	4.42	.646	0.835	2.09
3(b)	Coordination	4.01	.644	0.762	2.23
3(c)	Cohesion	4.34	.548	0.830	2.07
3(d)	Efforts	4.28	.552	0.742	1.75
3(e)	Mutual support	4.31	.566	0.882	2.53

Table 2 Correlation Matrix of Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1.Team performance	1								
2.Strong ties	.068	1							
3.Weak ties	.066	.256*	1						
4.Teamwork total	.571**	.410**	.256*	1					
5.Communication	.427**	.348**	.233*	.818**	1				
6.Corrination	.606**	.341**	.214*	.763**	.534**	1			
7.Cohesion	.473**	.218*	.177	.814**	.546*	.530**	1		
8.Efforts	.291**	.328**	.236*	.719**	.493**	.433**	.584**	1	
9.Mutual support	.504**	.294**	.175	.872**	.667**	.621**	.621**	.548**	1

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Note: N= 98, the variables are measured at the team level of analysis.

for SPSS and Sobel's test. Based on Hayes (2013), the analysis was conducted in steps by developing models as per the hypotheses. In step one, model one was created by regressing team performance on internal network ties, i.e., strong ties and weak ties. The result was insignificant and did not support the hypotheses, H1a and H1b. It implies that internal network ties, i.e., strong and weak ties, do not directly impact the en-

Internal network ties, i.e., strong and weak ties, do not directly impact the entrepreneurial team performance of TBV.

trepreneurial team performance of TBV. Moreover, when all the dimensions of teamwork quality were regressed on strong tie strength, the result was significant at $p < .001$ and supported H2a. Also, when all the dimensions were aggregated together (total Twq), the relationship between weak tie strength and teamwork quality was positively significant at $p < .05$. Hence, high weak tie strength shows high teamwork quality and does not support H2b. In step two, model two was created by regressing team performance on all the dimensions of teamwork quality (taking one at a time). The results were significant at $p < .001$, and H3 was supported, implying that all dimensions of

teamwork quality positively impact entrepreneurial team performance. Finally, in step three, model three was created by regressing team performance on teamwork quality and strong and weak ties. The results were significant, and hence,

H4 was supported. The adjusted R^2 values (Model 2: Adj. $R^2 = 0.326$; Model 3: Adj. $R^2 = 0.355$) and F values (Model 2: $F = 46.475$, $p < .001$; Model 3: $F = 52.361$, $p < .001$) also improved which are reported in Table 3.

Table 3 Hierarchical Linear Regression Model for Prediction of Entrepreneurial Team Performance

	Team Performance			
	Twq Total	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Intercept	2.779***	3.66***	1.05**	1.40**
Strong ties	0.246***	0.044		0.155**
Weak ties	0.082*	0.032		0.034
TWQ total			0.698***	0.811***
Communication			0.422***	0.468***
Coordination			0.497***	0.545***
Cohesion			0.455***	0.464***
Efforts			0.278**	0.287**
Mutual Support			0.469***	0.494***
R^2	0.193	0.007	0.326	0.362
“ R^2 ”	0.193	0.007	0.326	0.355
F value	11.342***	0.340	46.475***	52.361***

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Note: Twq total denotes all the dimensions of Teamwork quality analyzed together.

Process macro (Hayes, 2013) used for mediation analysis with the bootstrap sample of 10,000 showed that all the dimensions of teamwork quality mediated the relationship of internal network ties and team performance. The indirect ef-

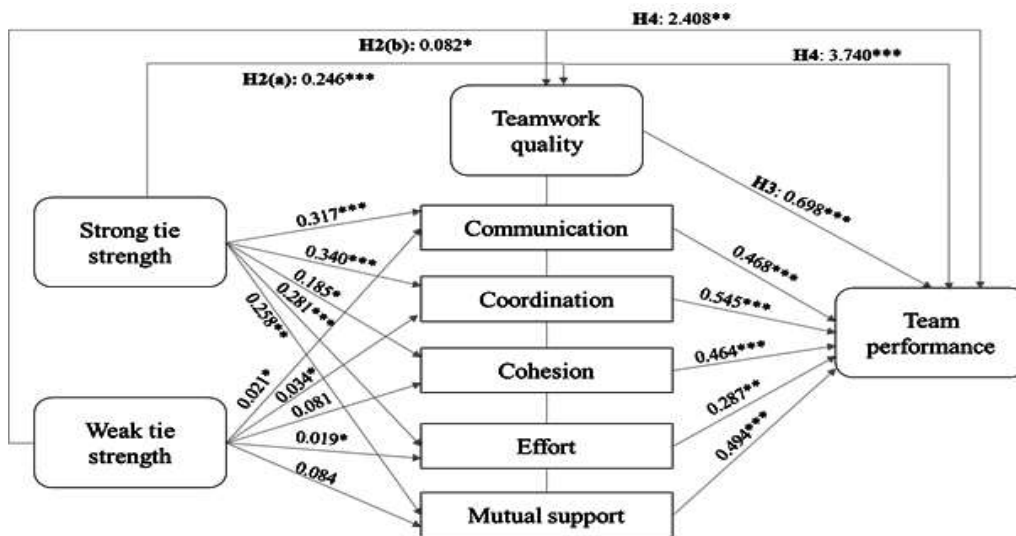
fect of strong ties ($z = 3.740$, $p < 0.001$) and weak ties ($z = 2.408$, $p < 0.01$) on team performance through all the dimensions of teamwork quality was also verified through Sobel's test which are reported in Table 4.

Table 4 Test Results of Mediation Effect

Indirect path	Effect	Standard error	Lower limit index	Upper limit index	Sobel's test
Strong ties → Teamwork → Team performance	0.219	0.058	0.062	0.113	3.740***
Weak ties → Teamwork → Team performance	0.094	0.044	0.018	0.193	2.408**

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Fig.1 The Model



Note: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$ (significance level)

Discussion

This study aimed to unravel the impact of the internal network ties on the entrepreneurial team performance of TBV by investigating the mediating effects of multiple dimensions of teamwork quality. Our analysis did not support the hypotheses H1a and H1b, high internal tie strength (strong and weak ties) in nascent entrepreneurial teams directly impact team performance. It is interpreted as nascent entrepreneurial teams are usually formed through network ties to gain their resources. However, developing ties alone is insufficient for their performance. The strength of ties lies in their ability to develop bridging ties with others instead of the number of connections they have, which does not impact performance much. The entrepreneurs also need to make other efforts to gain high performance that is analyzed in our

other hypotheses. Our hypothesis H2a was supported, and H2b was not supported, confirming that high strong and weak ties lead to high teamwork in TVB. To develop the technology venture, the entrepreneurial team members need to contribute their expertise and process information and tasks in the team. The viewpoint of social networks on team interactions focuses on the strength of social relations among team members, i.e., strong and weak ties that lead to change in their interactions. The strong ties build a trustworthy environment, and the weak ties provide the most useful skill and knowledge in the technology venture. Hence, the team members must work collectively throughout the venture life

The team members must work collectively throughout the venture life cycle.

Nascent entrepreneurs in TBV must balance strong and weak ties to ensure access to resources through social interactions.

cycle. Moreover, hypothesis H3 was supported and showed that positive teamwork among entrepreneurial team members is essential for team outcomes. If there is no exchange or sharing of ideas and information, the team members might not feel enough cohesiveness to stay in the team and put less effort into the team's success. There could be chances of reduced mutual support for each other, resulting in reduced involvement of team members in team processes and thus, affect performance. Furthermore, hypothesis H4 was significant and conferred that both strong and weak ties are preferred to enhance team performance of TBV through their teamwork. Strong ties are more expressive, providing social and emotional support within the team. In contrast, weak ties take more time to show results but provide instrumental support to the team. Nascent entrepreneurs in TBV must balance strong and weak ties to ensure access to resources through social interactions. Hence, along with technical and business administration expertise, the entrepreneur's internal network ties must maintain internal interactions for team outcomes and venture growth.

Implications

This research complements the newer aspects of the entrepreneurial team performance of TBV. Rather than

studying network ties in isolation, it could be studied with the team members' social interactions. Though prior studies investigated strong ties' social interactions, our study tested the social interactions in weak ties and their surprising impact on performance. Additionally, the introduction of social network approaches also contributed to further developing the scope of theory to the entrepreneurial team's literature. Moreover, by capturing the results from technology ventures in India, the present study contributes a more nuanced understanding of network ties and interactions in entrepreneurial teams in emerging economies, which is rarely tested. The findings of the study act as a means to broaden the entrepreneurship in teams' literature by exposing itself as a base for more analysis and future research in emerging economies.

This study also puts forward its practical implications. Most nascent entrepreneurial team members of TBV are well versed in technical proficiency but low on managerial or business knowledge for maintaining social relationships. These ventures require a balance of skills in the team to work on all possibilities for their performance and success. Thus, our study assists in advancing the skills of entrepreneurs for improving their capacities to collaborate, effectively interact and generate performance. Moreover, for developing technology-based ventures, funding from investors is required. Investors bet their capital on jockey rather than a horse. This project offers insights into how the entrepreneurial team's social interactions and composition could pro-

vide essential clues on venture funding decisions. They may also reconsider their parameters and emphasize the team interaction factor for evaluating ventures. Also, most technology ventures in India are associated with educational institutes and universities that are the nascent entrepreneurs' first mentors. Thus, this study can be helpful to the academicians to understand and further assist the internal dynamics of the team for their team outcomes. The incubator managers can also get new insights from this study and help entrepreneurs of technology ventures to develop team performance.

Future Research & Limitations

This study could be used as a base for more analysis and future research to explore the phenomenon further. Firstly, future studies need to be conducted that could contribute more to entrepreneurial team's literature, especially in India, as there is an exponential growth of TBV and hence, the need for entrepreneurial collaborations for their performance. The authors also find that the studies on networks in teams are not recent in developed countries. But it needs to be broadened to capture and highlight new insights regarding entrepreneurial teams' performance and innovative capability in emerging economy countries. Future studies could also consider external network ties to investigate their effect on entrepreneurial team outcomes as both internal and external relations are essential for TBV. The role of incubators, accelerators and co-working spaces could be investigated to analyze how they as-

sist or act as a moderator in developing interactions within co-founders to enhance their performance. Likewise, scholars could also explore the role of academicians, mentors, and e-cells in future studies. Also, more intervening and interacting variables could be considered to explore this study further as we do not claim that teamwork quality can be the only mediating variable for such a relationship. The sample size of this study was limited to analyze different groups within teams. Considering large sample size in future studies could cover different groups within entrepreneurial teams like teams based on gender (all men team, men-women team, or all-women team, 'couplepreneurs'); diverse team size; and other technology sectors to analyze their impact of network ties in the entrepreneurial team.

Conclusion

The present study theorizes how social interactions mediate the relationship between internal network ties and entrepreneurial team performance of TBV. The results of the study recommend nascent entrepreneurs of TBV to focus on strengthening internal network ties and improving their interactions within the team simultaneously to enhance their team performance. The theoretical and practical implications of the study present the new avenues for future research in entrepreneurship in teams' literature.

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