13 Bringing social structure to both sides of an issue: How proximal and distal ties interact with minority and majority positions to affect influence in workgroups

Federico Aime
Oklahoma State University, USA

Linn Van Dyne
Michigan State University, USA

At a meeting not long ago, we overheard a conversation between two managers in which one asked the other: 'How come we are taking this approach to our project? I thought that we had all agreed on the alternative approach?' The answer: 'Well, you know that Nils and two other group members were certain this was the best option. And of course, you know that he has to be on board for the project to fly.' Interestingly, Nils was neither the manager of the team, nor the expert in that particular area. This raises the question: What made Nils a key determining factor in the decision making? Studies of social influence have often looked at Darwin, Galileo, Churchill, and Picasso as examples of the success of scientific, political, and artistic minorities. Scholars have advanced various explanations for these examples of minority influence success. At the same time, few have stopped to analyse the question: Why these specific people? Why Galileo? Why Darwin? Why Nils?

Social influence can be defined as a process by which an individual's cognitions, attitudes and/or behaviours are affected by the real or imagined presence of one or more others (Allport, 1985). In the prototypic representation of social influence, agent A's influence over target T's cognitions, attitudes and behaviours differs based on A's situation as a minority position (publicly advocating beliefs, attitudes, and ideas that challenge the perspective of the majority) or as a majority position (Moscovici, 1980; Nemeth, 1986). This work has provided increasingly comprehensive models of the mechanisms through which the minority or majority position of an agent (or a target) on a specific issue creates pressures towards non-conformity or conformity, with subsequent effects on intra- and inter-group conflict, decision making, and performance.
To date, however, these efforts have focused almost exclusively on the agent's or the target's situation (i.e., assuming either minority or majority position) and have acknowledged individual personal bases of power for influence (French & Raven, 1959), but prior theorizing has overlooked individual social capital (embedded in an individual's social network) as a source of potential to exercise influence within specific situations. Responding to these gaps, we develop a framework of social capital mechanisms (based on the agent's position in the social network) that enable situated agents to influence others.

The objective of this chapter is to present a theoretical model that explicates ways in which characteristics of employee social networks (i.e., the strength of their proximal and distal ties) interact with their situated perspectives (i.e., being in a minority or majority position on an issue) to influence employee involvement and effectiveness in exercising influence through five specific influence mechanisms: (1) ease of access and frequency of interaction with others in the workgroup; (2) trust, liking, and status; (3) visibility and salience to co-workers; (4) access to non-redundant information; and (5) third-party support. We argue that the characteristics of an employee's social networks provide many of the raw inputs and motivations to exercise influence in more or less effective ways for employees situated in both minority and majority positions. More specifically, we emphasize the effects of social network characteristics (proximal and distal ties) on minority and majority influence.

This is an important gap in the literature because work and employee roles are almost always situated in a specific social context (Burt, 1997; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978; Sparrowe, Liden, Wayne, & Kraimer, 2001; Wrzesniewski, Dutton, & Debebe, 2003). Few, if any, employees function with total independence. Instead, work is increasingly interdependent because organizations increasingly use teams as the building blocks of organizational structure (Ilgen, 1999; Wageman, 1995). As a result of this interdependence, structural characteristics of employee ties are an important (but to date overlooked and under-researched) aspect of work that has potentially profound impact on employee influence.

This structural contribution to minority-influence approaches may also help disentangle the major discrepancy between the very small impact of minorities on group decision making in laboratory results and field evidence regarding much greater success of minorities in imposing their views (Clark, 1994). Those in minority positions are often successful in imposing their views in workgroups and society in general, and developments in minority-influence studies may benefit from cross-mapping social structure with minority and majority positions held by actors to be able to better understand where there is more chance of prevailing and what alternative strategies are available to influence others to adopt their positions. Organizations recognize the value of diversity to projects through an ever-growing reliance on cross-functional and diverse workgroups in core organizational
projects. Each member is situated in a social network that may enable or constrain influence in group decision making. To introduce structure into minority-influence theoretical and empirical work should help guide these applied initiatives.

In sum, we aim to describe how social-network characteristics (strength of proximal and distal ties) provide employees with access to differential causal influence mechanisms that have relevance to majority and minority influence. More specifically, we explicate ways in which these structural resources interact with employee perspectives (i.e., minority or majority positions) to provide them with particular mechanisms for exercising minority or majority influence (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Moscovici, 1980; Nemeth, 1986). Access to these causal-influence mechanisms (which we theorize is a function of employee distal and proximal ties) leads to differences in involvement (amount of influence attempts) and effectiveness (changes in target attitudes, behaviours, and cognitions).

Our chapter is organized as follows. First, we describe characteristics of employee social networks: diversity of ties (proximal and distal ties) and strength of ties (weak vs. strong). Based on these ties, we then delineate the mechanisms (ease and frequency of interaction with others in the workgroup; trust, liking, and status; visibility and salience to co-workers; access to non-redundant information; and third-party support) that employees can use to induce changes in the attitudes, cognitions, and behaviours of their targets. Second, we combine the effects of distal and proximal ties to propose a workgroup social influence network typology. Third, we apply this typology and propose that specific influence mechanisms have differential effects on employee influence involvement (number of influence attempts) and employee influence effectiveness (success in changing targets).

Traditional work on majority/minority influence has typically addressed personal characteristics (e.g., consistency and certainty) and situational characteristics (e.g., sitting at the head of the table). Moving beyond past research and theorizing, we consider the interaction between social-network mechanisms and situational (i.e., minority, majority) characteristics as having critical (but to date under-researched) effects on influence outcomes.

**Minority and majority influence**

Numerous phenomena have shaped research on social influence. In this chapter we draw primarily on two of these (i.e., conformity or majority influence and minority influence) in predicting employee motivation and effectiveness in persuading others to adopt their perspective on issues important to work functioning. The conformity or majority-influence literature advocates the idea that numbers convey social influence. Several mechanisms have been advanced and received support in explaining majority support. First, classical work focused on the need to develop uniformity to accomplish group goals (Festinger, 1954; Festinger, Schachter, & Back,
1950) and on comparison as a means to validate personal views with the purpose of being correct (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Festinger et al., 1950). Second, normative processes that create tension between advocating (or accepting) a unique point of view and conforming to the prevailing majority perspective are important in explaining conforming behaviours (i.e., public alignment with majority positions regardless of private beliefs; Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Nord, 1969).

Two additional theoretical perspectives are relevant to these issues. Self-categorization and social-identity processes view alignment with majorities as efforts to establish or maintain self-views or social identity (Cialdini & Trost, 1998; Clark & Maass, 1988; David & Turner, 1992; Turner, 1991). This argument has also been used to explain the development of reference or membership groups for social minorities. Finally, social impact theory (Latané, 1981; Latané & Nida, 1980; Latané & Wolf, 1981; Tanford & Penrod, 1984) emphasizes number of group members, strength (e.g., power, knowledge), and immediacy (proximity in space and time) as antecedents to social influence. In this approach, relative size is critically important, such that majorities have more impact than minorities due to their greater number (Maass & Clark, 1984).

Majority influence produces either conversion or compliance. Conversion (Berger & Luckman, 1967; Nail, 1986; Nail, MacDonald, & Levy, 2000) is a change in position at both the private and the public levels similar to Kelman’s (1958) idea of internalization. In contrast, compliance represents public agreement and private disagreement (Kelman, 1958; Moscovici, 1980; Nail, 1986).

The minority-influence approach emphasizes different influence processes. Compared to majorities, minorities, by definition, have limited power (Latané & Wolf, 1981). Therefore, their influence is based on something other than their situational position. Prevalent explanations of minority influence can be viewed as extensions of Kelley’s (1967, 1973) attribution theory (e.g., Moscovici, 1980, 1985; Moscovici & Nemeth, 1974; Nemeth, Mayselle, Sherman, & Brown, 1990). This research considers behavioural style of minorities as an antecedent of minority-influence effectiveness.

Consensus (i.e., agreement across minority actors), consistency (i.e., stability of agent response or position over time), and distinctiveness (i.e., clearly articulated social reality or perspective that differs from that of the majority group) were originally identified as key to positive attributions about the minority, and therefore key sources of potential minority influence (Moscovici & Faucheux, 1972; Moscovici & Nemeth, 1974). Of these, consistency has received the most attention in the literature. Consistency over time: (a) accentuates conflict and triggers a review of positions in order to progress toward group goals (i.e., similar to Festinger’s, 1950, locomotion concept); (b) increases exposure to minority arguments (i.e., repetition) and expands information about minority positions and salience of information that is available to majority targets (Maass & Clark, 1984;
Wood, Lundgren, Ouellette, Busceme, & Blackstone, 1994); and, finally, (c) is viewed as more objective (Moscovici, 1985).

Social-impact approaches (Latané, 1981; Latané & Nida, 1980; Latané & Wolf, 1981; Tanford & Penrod, 1984) have also been applied to minority influence. For example, the larger the minority membership (with respect to a majority), the larger the potential influence of that minority. In a meta-analysis of minority influence, Wood and colleagues (1994) demonstrated consistent support for a positive relationship between size of the minority (relative to the majority target) and both public and private direct influence (i.e., specific to the issue). This study also demonstrated a negative relationship between the relative size of the minority and private indirect influence (i.e., similar in content but not identical to the specific issue under discussion). Minority influence is also affected by prestige and status of the influence agent within the group (Ridgeway & Berger, 1986). For example, high-status minority-influence agents have more credibility and influence potential than lower status agents (lower discounts; Kelley, 1971). Likewise, minority-influence agents can increase their influence by being seen as flexible and/or sincere (Maass & Clark, 1984; Wood et al., 1994).

In the next section, we develop the constructs and typology for our workgroup social influence network and then describe specific mechanisms that enhance or limit the potential of agents to exercise majority and minority influence. Later, we build on this to develop our propositions.

**The workgroup social influence network**

We define a workgroup social influence network (WSIN) as the relational structure (or pattern of relationships) in an individual’s formal and informal work-related social interactions. In WSINs, individuals exchange information, advice, and support (Higgins & Kram, 2001; Krackhardt, 1990; Lincoln & Miller, 1979) that have relevance to their involvement and effectiveness in influencing others. WSINs include relationships that are within the organization and relationships that go beyond organizational boundaries. Given the hierarchical nature of most organizational structures and organizational relationships, WSINs include multi-level and cross-level relationships. In sum, a WSIN is the work-related subset of an individual’s entire social network (Wasserman & Faust, 1994).

Our chapter starts with the core premise that an employee’s influence potential is affected by the mutual coordination that occurs between organizational members at different levels in the hierarchy and at different degrees of proximity. For example, an employee may interact with superiors, subordinates, and peers who are internal to the organization as well as with clients, suppliers, and consultants who are external to the organization. Thus, we highlight the importance of the broader social system and an employee’s social network of relationships as an essential source of influence on attitudes, cognitions, and behaviours.
In the next section, we describe the structural diversity of ties and the strength of ties. We then further delineate structural diversity of ties by differentiating proximal and distal ties. This is an important point because the existing literature does not conceptualize proximal ties and distal ties as different constructs. Differentiating these ties conceptually allows us to consider their separate and interactive (joint) effects in ways that can enrich our understanding of social influence. Thus, our approach should have theoretical implications not yet addressed by existing research on social networks.

**Types of ties**

Two structural characteristics of an employee's network are especially relevant to our theory building: structural diversity of the social network and strength of the ties in that network. This is because diversity and strength of ties in a work-related social network enable five key interaction mechanisms that affect an individual's influence at the workgroup level: (1) ease of access and frequency of interaction with others in the workgroup; (2) trust, liking, and status; (3) visibility and salience to co-workers; (4) access to non-redundant information; and (5) third-party support.

*Structural diversity of ties* This is the degree to which those in a network are similar or dissimilar (Burt, 1992; Granovetter, 1973; Higgins & Kram, 2001). When employees have diverse ties, they have access to non-redundant information and the opportunity to transfer information and referrals among otherwise unrelated individuals. Diverse ties enable employees to use/control information and contacts that are not generally available to others.

*Strength of ties* This is the level of emotional affect, reciprocity, and frequency of communication within a relationship (Granovetter, 1973; Higgins & Kram, 2001; Krackhardt, 1992). When employees have strong ties in their workgroup network, they have enhanced access to resources that provide them with more influence mechanisms within that network. Strong ties enable employees to gain information and support from others.

**Proximal and distal ties**

The structural diversity of ties can be further specified by differentiating proximal ties and distal ties. In organizations, social ties between individuals reflect the interdependencies among formal positions (i.e., as defined by workflow diagrams and organizational charts), the interdependencies among informal positions (i.e., personal relationships between individuals), or both. Thus, individuals may interact with others because of
their particular work interdependencies, because of informal ties (e.g., advice), or because of the development of informal ties within a formal work relationship (e.g., friendship that develops from a formal mentoring programme and extends beyond it).

We define proximal ties as ties that are totally or partially characterized by the requirements of workflow interaction (Brass, 1984), such as those that reflect task interdependence. Proximal ties may have low or high range. For example, proximal ties could include all the analysts working in the loan department (low range) or they could include all analysts in the department and their work-task-interdependence contacts (high range: e.g., the sales-force members and the supervisor of the loan department). Since our theorizing addresses new issues related to social networks and social influence, we focus in this chapter on the relative constraints and reinforcements faced by individuals in similar organizational positions (i.e., with shared or similar proximal network configurations) for exercising influence (either majority or minority).

In organizational contexts, distal ties represent work-related informal ties beyond the workflow (Brass, 1984; Podolny & Baron, 1997). These ties arise independent of work-task interdependencies but include work-related content. For example, an employee might have cross-functional ties horizontally across departments (e.g., a loan analyst's personal relationship with an employee in the bond department), vertically across hierarchical levels (e.g., a loan analyst's personal relationship with the vice president of the loan division), or across organizational boundaries (e.g., a loan analyst's personal relationship with loan analysts in other organizations).

*Weak and strong ties*

Ties can also be characterized as weak or strong. Strong ties involve ongoing relationships, including obligations and dependencies. Strong ties have been alternatively characterized as involving regular contact and interaction (Granovetter, 1973, 1982), commitment and investment in close personal relationships (Lund, 1985), empathy and unconditionality of regard (Cramer, 1986), and intimacy (Wegener, 1991). Through intense, repeated, or durable interaction, strong ties lead to particularistic relationships and particularistic knowledge of each other (Marsden, 1990). In organizations, however, frequency and duration may be a result of formal interdependencies, as was found by Marsden and Campbell (1984) in their study of best-friend ties and by Mitchell's (1987) work on ties among homeless women. For example, some information is exchanged in the workplace based purely on formal positions, while other information (more political in nature) is exchanged based on informal conditions like attraction, trust, or friendship (Podolny & Baron, 1997). Therefore, for the purpose of our theorizing, we define strong ties in organizations as ties between employees that reflect high levels of closeness or intensity. Weak ties, on the
other hand, involve occasional interaction, impersonal relationships, and high substitutability (Granovetter, 1973, 1982; Lin, Ensel, & Vaughn, 1981). When employees have weak ties, their relationships are less personal, contain less affective content, and are less likely to be reciprocal.

To summarize, an employee’s network contains proximal ties (those who are in the work-task interdependence network of the focal employee) that may be weak or strong. Also, an employee’s network may or may not contain distal ties. When distal ties exist, they can be internal or external to the organization and they can also be weak or strong.

**Influence mechanisms as a function of an employee’s WSIN**

Integrating these concepts, we propose that an individual’s types of ties (proximal and distal, weak and strong) help determine the causal influence mechanisms he/she has available for exercising influence. An individual’s network structure provides access and control of valued resources to exercise influence. These resources are independent of minority and majority perspectives and influence mechanisms. Thus, considering each separately and then jointly should expand our thinking about influence mechanisms.

In other words, the nature of an employee’s ties (distal and proximal, weak and strong) provides facilitating and inhibiting factors that affect influence behaviours. In addition, individuals hold majority or minority positions within the group on various topics. Thus, employees have access to specific influence mechanisms associated with their position as minority or majority members. Finally, our model also explicates the joint effects of ties and situated perspectives. The first two columns in Table 13.1 list specific types of ties and the corresponding causal mechanisms. The next four columns in the table describe specific influence implications within an individual’s workgroup.

**Proximal ties and causal influence mechanisms**

Social interaction between people is promoted by proximity (Festinger et al., 1950; Shaw, 1981), similar tasks (Carley, 1991), formal structure, and workflow design (Brass & Burkhardt, 1992). When employees have proximal ties, they share workflow and communication content. In some situations, these interdependencies expand to include advice and friendship (Bridge & Baxter, 1992), which increases the amount and breadth of shared information (Brass, Galaskiewicz, Greve, & Tsai, 2004; Sias & Cahill, 1998) as well as the level of trust in the relationship (Gibbons, 2004). Strong proximal work ties are characterized by interpersonal attraction, trust, support, and information sharing. Strong ties enhance the employee’s social position in the workgroup and make it easier to influence others to support their ideas for change (Gibbons, 2004). Finally, trusting relationships that are characteristic of those with strong ties allow people to take the risk of speaking up and
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of ties</th>
<th>Causal mechanisms</th>
<th>Minority influence (MI)</th>
<th>Majority influence (MAJ)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong proximal</td>
<td>(a) Ease of access and frequency of interaction with others in the workgroup</td>
<td>Increases effectiveness of (MI) because of:</td>
<td>Increases effectiveness of (MAJ) because of:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perceived certainty, consistency, and commitment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Trust, liking, and status</td>
<td>Less discounting and role stress</td>
<td>Increased social impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reduced threat to the agents’ relationships</td>
<td>Increased threat to the agents’ relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(c) Visibility and salience to co-workers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reduced effort needed to communicate agents’ position (influence economy)</td>
<td>Reduced need to communicate position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong distal</td>
<td>(a) Access to non-redundant information</td>
<td>Higher quantity and quality of arguments</td>
<td>Higher quantity and quality of counter-arguments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Third party support</td>
<td>Less discounting of agent’s position</td>
<td>Augmentation of majority position</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
proposing changes in work practices (LePine & Van Dyne, 2001) because generalized trust allows employees to experience change as not threatening to the relationships. In sum, employees with strong proximal ties have more influence within their workgroup.

Strong ties provide employees with several resources that have direct relevance to influence that are independent of situated position (minority or majority position with respect to a particular issue). First, strong proximal ties provide easy access to others. Strong proximal ties also increase the frequency of interaction with others in the workgroup. Thus, strong proximal ties provide more, and better, opportunities to obtain and share information—as well as opportunities to discuss alternative views. Second, strong proximal ties indicate trust, liking, and status that allow the employee to attract more attention and gain more consideration for their views, regardless of whether they are in the minority or the majority on a particular issue (Ridgeway, 1982, 1984). Third, employees with strong proximal ties (friendship) are especially visible and salient to co-workers in workgroups. This, in turn, further enhances their interpersonal influence during the process of establishing uniform cognitions and opinions (Festinger et al., 1950).

Additional support for the general proposition about the influence level embedded in strong proximal ties can also be inferred from the leadership literature, which demonstrates that those who are liked and respected in their groups (i.e., strong proximal ties) are more likely to emerge as leaders and will have greater influence in the group (Hollander & Julian, 1969). For example, Friedkin's (1993) longitudinal study of the structural bases of interpersonal influence in groups demonstrated that stronger ties increased influence within the group, even after controlling for the elementary basis of interpersonal power (e.g., reward, coercive, legitimate, expert, and referent; French & Raven, 1959). In conclusion, employees with strong proximal ties have more influence in the workgroup, and those with weak proximal ties have little or no structural sources of influence.

We note that the above description of the causal mechanisms associated with strong proximal ties differs from some traditional approaches. This is intentional and represents one of the potential contributions of our approach. In the past, scholars have typically assumed that dense networks of strong ties constrain independent action by providing sanctions for behaviours that deviate from group norms (Coleman, 1988, p. 103). For example, Coleman demonstrated a negative relation between cohesion in parent–teacher networks (strength of proximal ties) and dropping out of school (deviant behaviour; Coleman, 1990, pp. 306–307).

Our approach differs from Coleman's in two ways. First, we focus on an individual's own network and the personal benefits to that individual (in our model: influence effectiveness and influence involvement). We argue that strong proximal ties within the workgroup allow employees to influence others (based on liking and trust). In contrast, the strong cohesive
network in Coleman’s example belonged to the parents and the outcome focused on benefits to the students. Second, we emphasize the broader social system and the possibility that actors also have additional ties (e.g., weak to strong distal ties). In contrast, Coleman’s study adopted Simmel’s (1955) group-affiliation perspective and focused on the development of trust and norms in a singular affiliation group. Thus, our approach considers additional group affiliations, both proximal and distal ties, as well as the situated perspective of the employee (minority or majority on the issue at hand).

In sum, differentiating proximal and distal ties and the influence mechanisms associated with each is another potential contribution of our theorizing. We expand upon each of these processes later in the chapter when we develop our specific propositions for majority and minority influence.

**Distal ties and causal influence mechanisms**

In addition to proximal ties, some employees also have distal ties outside the immediate workgroup. When employees have distal ties, they have access to non-redundant information and external support. Strong distal ties provide easy access to unique information (different from that shared within the proximal workgroup) and thus are a potential source of important influence in the proximal group (Ancona & Caldwell, 1992). For example, an employee can share (or not share) information from distal ties as a technique for influencing others in the group. Strong distal ties also provide employees with easy access to external support (Druskat & Wheeler, 2003). For example, an employee can obtain outside ‘objective’ support that can be useful for influencing others in the workgroup. In sum, strong distal ties allow employees to expand their social capital and increase their influence based on access to non-redundant information and third-party support.

Even weak distal ties can provide employees with influence mechanisms that are not available to those with only proximal ties. For example, even though weak distal ties are not as easily accessed as strong distal ties, weak distal ties still provide access to non-redundant information and external support. In both cases, this creates influence opportunities because the information and support are generally not available to others in the workgroup. Note, therefore, that distal ties can be shared (redundant) or not-shared (non-redundant) ties outside of the proximal workgroup. While shared ties are less likely to provide non-redundant information and support, the differential strength of ties may result in different information and levels of support being transferred through the tie. Distal ties that are not shared by all group members will provide more non-redundant information. Distal ties that are partially shared within the group will still provide differential amounts and quality of information based on their strength. Thus, we acknowledge the number and the strength of the distal
ties held by an employee. We define strength of distal ties as the number of distal ties held by an employee weighted by the strength of those distal ties.

We note that the above description of the causal mechanisms associated with distal ties diverges from some traditional approaches. Initial social-network research typically implied that strong ties represent shared access to social resources (redundancy). In contrast, weak ties were viewed as non-redundant, more likely to bridge structural holes, and more likely to provide access to broader social resources (Granovetter, 1973). More recent approaches, however, acknowledge that non-redundant ties are not necessarily weak ties (Gabbay, 1997; Higgins & Kram, 2001). When people are members of parallel social systems, they hold a combination of strong and weak ties (without redundancy) across social systems. At the same time, however, each partner usually has strong, unshared relationships with other people in other areas of life. For example, McEvily and Zaheer (1999) demonstrated that new ideas, information, and opportunities can be sourced through contacts that are simultaneously strong and non-redundant. Thus, our theorizing moves beyond prior research that has viewed strong ties as redundant (focused on only one social system). Instead, we consider proximal and distal relationships in the broader social context.

To summarize, differentiating proximal and distal ties allows us to enrich the conceptualization of ties by specifying causal-influence mechanisms as a function of the characteristics of both proximal and distal ties. We specify strength of proximal ties and strength of distal ties, which allows us to consider their separate and joint effects (e.g., main effects and the interactions between proximal and distal ties). In the next section, we present a typology of WSINs and contrasting causal-influence mechanisms that become the basis for our predictions about influence involvement and influence effectiveness.

**A typology of workgroup social influence networks (WSIN typology)**

As noted above, employees can have various combinations of weak proximal ties, strong proximal ties, weak distal ties, and strong distal ties. Combining these types of ties produces the four cells in our typology and creates four distinct types of WSIN: Entrepreneurial; Developmental; Coordinating; and Adaptive (see Figure 13.1). In the following paragraphs, we explicate the typology and each of the four network types in more detail. Later, we build on these differences as the basis for our propositions.

*Entrepreneurial workgroup social influence network*

An *entrepreneurial WSIN* (cell 1) exists when an employee has strong proximal and strong distal ties. These individuals have the most social network resources for exercising influence and will be most successful in
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weak distal ties</th>
<th>Strong distal ties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weak proximal ties</td>
<td>ADAPTIVE&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong proximal ties</td>
<td>COORDINATING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 13.1* A typology of workgroup social influence networks (WSINs). *Note:*<sup>a</sup>Cell name = type of workgroup social influence network.

effecting change (compared to the other three networks). This is because they have access to all five of the influence mechanisms we describe in this paper based on their social capital (social network ties). Consistent with Burt (1997) and Higgins and Kram (2001), we refer to this type of network that spans multiple groups and exhibits brokerage capabilities as entrepreneurial. Prototypical holders of an entrepreneurial WSIN are high potential middle managers with extensive strong networks.

**Developmental workgroup social influence network**

A *developmental WSIN* (cell 2) is based on weak proximal ties and strong distal ties. Like those with an entrepreneurial WSIN, employees with a developmental WSIN have access to the influence mechanisms based on strong distal ties: (a) access to non-redundant information; and (b) third-party support. Unlike entrepreneurial-WSIN employees, however, they do not have access to the other three influence mechanisms. We refer to this configuration of social network ties as developmental because these
employees are newcomers to their immediate work unit and thus have weak proximal ties. Since they also have strong, trusting relationships in other parts of the organization, however, they are well positioned to develop proximal ties. Examples include employees recently promoted across functions or divisions and those who have long tenure with the organization.

**Coordinating workgroup social influence network**

A coordinating WSIN (cell 3) is defined by strong proximal ties and weak distal ties. Individuals with this kind of network can use the influence mechanisms that derive from having strong proximal ties: (a) ease of access and frequency of interaction with others in the workgroup; (b) trust, liking, and status; and (c) visibility and salience to co-workers. We refer to this type of network as coordinating because those with strong ties within the group are ideally positioned to facilitate exchanges within the group. Prototypical examples include informal workgroup leaders with weak links to other parts of the organization.

**Adaptive workgroup social influence network**

An adaptive WSIN (cell 4) is based on weak proximal ties and weak distal ties. These employees have generally weak ties. As a result, their ties provide them with minimal network resources for exercising influence within the workgroup. We refer to this type of WSIN as adaptive because these employees most likely must adapt to the influence efforts of others who have strong ties (proximal and distal). Examples include employees who have recently finished cross-functional rotation in management development programmes and have just started regular positions in the firm.

**WSINs and influence effectiveness and involvement**

In this section of the chapter, we consider the effects of WSINs on two key behavioural outcomes with direct relevance to minority influence. First, we focus on influence effectiveness. Second, we shift our attention to influence involvement.

**WSINs and minority influence: Influence effectiveness**

Our first outcome of interest is influence effectiveness. This is the most commonly researched outcome of agent minority influence: the extent to which a minority-influence agent can persuade others to change their attitudes, cognitions, and/or behaviours. Prior research has identified at least four factors that enhance effectiveness of minority-influence agents. These are: (1) consistency of position; (2) quality (persuasiveness) of arguments; (3) positive attributions regarding status, prestige, and trust of the
minority-influence agent; and (4) the level of discounting applied to those in the minority position (Alvaro & Crano, 1997; Clark, 1999; Moscovici, 1980, 1985).

In developing our propositions, we start in the lower right corner of the matrix (Figure 13.1, cell 1) and contrast the entrepreneurial cell with the other three cells. Strong proximal and strong distal ties give employees with entrepreneurial WSINs four important advantages based on the structure of their WSIN.

As illustrated in Table 13.1 and Figure 13.1, strong proximal ties provide several key resources that facilitate exercise of minority influence (speaking up and expressing an opinion that differs from the majority position). First, ease of access and frequent informal interaction with others in the workgroup provide more and better opportunities to share information and discuss alternative views. Thus, employees with an entrepreneurial WSIN have repeated opportunities to present their positions. Repetition of the minority position increases their potential to influence majority targets because it increases perceptions of certainty, consistency, and perceived commitment (Maass & Clark, 1984). Second, strong proximal ties indicate trust, liking, and status, which, in turn, allow the employee to attract more attention and consideration to their ideas, regardless of their position (minority or majority) on a specific topic (Ridgeway, 1982, 1984). Having strong proximal ties reduces the possibility that others will discount their opinions and arguments based on alternative and/or negative causal attributions (Mugny & Papastamou, 1980; Shackelford, Wood, & Worchel, 1996). In addition, strong proximal ties also have psychological implications for the agent that undoubtedly enhance his/her effectiveness as a minority-influence agent. For example, minority-influence agents who have higher trust and status in the group experience less role stress because they anticipate positive responsiveness of their influence targets (Ng & Van Dyne, 2001).

Strong distal ties also provide key resources that facilitate use of minority influence. More specifically, these ties facilitate more and easier access to unique information. Since distal ties are not redundant with proximal ties (they are different from), they are a critical source of new or unique information, which is different from that shared within the proximal workgroup. This non-redundant information can be shared or withheld (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) and can be an important source of influence in the proximal group (Ancona & Caldwell, 1992). More important, non-redundant information allows those with an entrepreneurial WSIN to improve the quality and persuasiveness of their arguments (Anderson & Graesser, 1976; Clark, 1994). Finally, strong distal ties provide employees with access to external support (Druskat & Wheeler, 2003), which can reduce the amount of discounting that targets apply to opinions and arguments because external (e.g., cross-functional or organizational level) support causes the targets to perceive minority positions as less idiosyncratic and more representative of
a larger social reference group. In addition, external support and validation can have second-level normative effects on other group members, further enhancing the influence of employees with an entrepreneurial WSIN. For example, a high-tenured employee that worked on an international rotation and is back in her or his former division with strong proximal ties from her or his former tenure in that area and with strong distal ties developed in her or his business rotation. She or he may now be in an excellent position to be effective in proposing and implementing minority position initiatives because she or he has access to non-redundant information to propose and defend her or his positions, access to informal opportunities to discuss it, trust based on her or his strong relationships in the group and external support to provide background influence to her or his claims. Overall, the strong social position provided by the entrepreneurial WSIN provides employees with the most resources and causal influence mechanisms to succeed at exercising minority influence (compared to other WSIN types). Thus, we propose that minority members with entrepreneurial networks will have the highest influence effectiveness.

**Proposition 1a:** Minority-influence agents with an entrepreneurial WSIN are more likely to be effective in persuading majority targets to adopt their alternative perspectives than minority-influence agents with other types of WSIN.

We now further refine our comparisons by contrasting the resources and mechanisms available to those with developmental and coordinating WSINs (cells 2 and 3) compared to those with an adaptive WSIN (cell 4). Those in developmental and coordinating networks are similar in that they both have strong and weak ties. Developmental-WSIN holders (strong distal ties) have access to non-redundant information and third-party support. In contrast, coordinating-WSIN holders (strong proximal ties) have ease of access and frequent interaction, positive relationships and status, as well as visibility and salience to co-workers. Although these differences in influence mechanisms most likely cause differences in the specific influence efforts of those in these two WSINs, they do not suggest differences in effectiveness. Thus, we propose that developmental and coordinating WSINs have relatively equal influence effectiveness. In contrast, those in adaptive networks have only weak ties. Since weak ties provide few resources and influence mechanisms, we posit that minority member employees in developmental and coordinating networks will have higher influence effectiveness than those in an adaptive WSIN.

**Proposition 1b:** Minority-influence agents with developmental or coordinating WSINs are more likely to be effective in persuading majority targets to adopt their alternative perspectives than minority-influence agents with an adaptive WSIN.
WSINs and minority influence: Influence involvement

We now focus on our second outcome: influence involvement. Although influence effectiveness is important and commonly considered in the minority-influence literature, we suggest that influence involvement is also important. Overall, research has paid less attention to involvement than to effectiveness. Thus, it represents a potentially useful area for extending work on minority influence. We define influence involvement as the level or amount of minority-influence behaviour. Influence involvement represents the quantity of influence. It is a behaviour. Thus, it is different from motivation to influence and quality of influence.

Overall, we propose that, when in minority positions, employees with strong proximal ties will have higher influence involvement (they will exhibit a higher quantity of influence behaviour than those with weak proximal ties). In other words, those with strong proximal ties are more likely to voice their minority positions. Those with strong proximal ties have the benefits of friendship and liking that provide a comfortable context for discussing uncertainties and concerns. In addition, these relationships are more stable and enduring (Shah, 2000) and thus less likely to be threatened by professional divergence (Gibbons, 2004) or functional conflict (Jehn, 1995).

Strong proximal ties allow employees to be more active in expressing their views (especially when these views represent minority positions) because speaking up will not threaten their relationships and social structure. In contrast, employees who do not have strong proximal ties do not have local support or a comfortable context that facilitates speaking up with divergent or controversial ideas. In this sense, new members of a team who typically have no strong relationships in the group are known to be less likely to voice their minority opinions and positions until they develop a safety net of strong relationships within the group. Returning to Figure 13.1 and the WSINs allows us to summarize this prediction based on cells in the typology. Thus, we propose that minority members with strong proximal ties (entrepreneurial and coordinating networks) will have higher levels of influence involvement than those who have weak proximal ties (developmental and adaptive networks).

Proposition 1c: Minority-influence agents with entrepreneurial or coordinating WSINs are more likely to be involved in persuading majority targets to adopt their alternative perspectives than minority-influence agents with developmental or adaptive WSINs.

WSINs and majority influence: Influence effectiveness

We now take a different perspective and consider these same relationships for majority-influence agents. Thus, we make predictions for the effects of
the network ties of majority-influence agents on their influence effectiveness and their influence involvement. Prior research has identified four key factors that enhance the effectiveness of majority-influence agents. These, as we discussed in our brief review of majority influence earlier in the chapter, are: (1) group continuity; (2) validation of personal views; (3) normative processes; and (4) positive attributions for status, trust, and prestige of majority-influence agents.

Once again, we start in the lower-right corner of the matrix and contrast the entrepreneurial WSWIN (cell 1) with the other three cells in the typology. When majority employees have strong proximal ties and strong distal ties, they have access to all four facilitating factors that enhance effectiveness for exercising majority influence. As illustrated in Table 13.1 and Figure 13.1, strong proximal ties provide specific resources that enhance the individual’s position. First, strong proximal ties indicate trust, liking, and status that attract more attention and consideration toward their positions, regardless of situated status on an issue (being in the minority or the majority; Ridgeway, 1982, 1984). When a majority opinion is held by a highly regarded other, this creates an additional need for minority member to validate their personal views. Thus, it represents a higher threat to group continuity (i.e., locomotion or achievement of group goals). Consistent with social-impact theory, status and personal relationships provide benefits, even to majority members (Latané, 1981; Latané & Nida, 1980; Latané & Wolf, 1981; Tanford & Penrod, 1984).

Second, employees who have majority views and also have strong proximal ties (friendship) in the workgroup are especially visible and salient to their peers, further enhancing their interpersonal influence in the group during the process of establishing uniform cognitions and opinions (Festinger et al., 1950). This salience and visibility allows economy in expressing views. It also causes their views (majority perspective) to be the reference point used by others who propose counter positions. Strong proximal ties reduce the effort the agent must use to communicate. They also cause targets to consider the majority position more carefully. These processes make majority-influence agents with strong proximal ties more effective in influencing others towards their majority position.

Third, strong distal ties provide majority members with more access and easier access to unique information (different from that shared within the proximal workgroup). As with minority members, this non-redundant information can be an important source of influence in the proximal group (Ancona & Caldwell, 1992). Non-redundant information increases the quantity and quality of counter-arguments available to majority agents. In addition, strong distal ties provide majority employees with easier access to external support (Druskat & Wheeler, 2003). External support further augments the weight of opinions and arguments used by those in the majority position. By gaining external support, majority members become a ‘double majority’ in that they are in the majority within the group and they
also have external validation and support. This augmentation of arguments requires minority targets to search further for validation of their minority views. This augmentation is the opposite of traditional conceptualizations of 'double minorities' (Maass, Clark, & Haberkorn, 1982; Tajfel, 1978), where holding a minority position is harder if the individual is also perceived as member of an additional idiosyncratic (minority) group (Van Dyne & Saavedra, 1996).

Linking these four sources of influence back to our network typology allows us to summarize these points. Since majority members with an entrepreneurial WSIN have strong proximal ties and strong distal ties, they are in a better structural position than majority members in other types of WSIN. This is because their strong ties provide them with more resources that facilitate influence effectiveness in persuading others to change their attitudes, cognitions, and behaviours (Anderson & Graesser, 1976; Clark, 1994). Consequently, their strong social position (strong proximal ties and strong distal ties) provides them with more opportunities and causal mechanisms to succeed at exercising majority influence (compared to other WSIN types). Thus, we propose that majority members in an entrepreneurial WSIN will have the highest influence effectiveness.

Proposition 2a: Majority-influence agents with an entrepreneurial WSIN are more likely to be effective in persuading minority targets to adopt their prevalent perspective than majority-influence agents with other types of WSIN.

We now further refine our comparisons by contrasting the resources and mechanisms available to those with developmental and coordinating WSINs (cells 2 and 3) compared to those with an adaptive WSIN (cell 4). We noted in earlier sections that those in developmental and coordinating networks are similar because they both have strong and weak ties. Holders of a developmental WSIN (strong distal ties) have access to non-redundant information and third-party support. Holders of a coordinating WSIN (strong proximal ties) have ease of access and frequent interaction, positive relationships and status, as well as visibility and salience to co-workers. Although these differences in influence mechanisms most likely cause differences in the specific influence efforts of majority members in development compared to coordinating WSINs, they do not suggest differences in majority-influence effectiveness. Thus, we propose that developmental and coordinating WSINs have relatively equal influence effectiveness. In contrast, majority members in adaptive networks have only weak ties. Since weak ties provide few resources and influence mechanisms, we posit that majority member employees in developmental and coordinating networks will have higher influence effectiveness than those in adaptive WSINs.

Proposition 2b: Majority-influence agents with developmental or coordinating WSINs are more likely to be effective in persuading
minority targets to adopt their prevalent perspective than majority-influence agents with an adaptive WSIN.

**WSINs and majority influence: Influence involvement**

We now focus on our second outcome for majority members: influence involvement. In contrast to our influence involvement prediction for minority influence where we proposed that minority members with strong proximal ties would have higher influence involvement (they will exhibit a higher quantity of influence behaviour than those with weak proximal ties), we here predict that majority members with strong proximal ties will have lower influence involvement (they will exhibit less influence behaviour than those with weak proximal ties). In other words, we argue that employees with strong proximal ties are less likely to speak up and voice their majority positions than employees with weak proximal ties.

When majority members have strong proximal ties, their views are salient in the group. Others try to anticipate and support their positions. Their views are the referent point – the foundation. As a consequence, they have less need for high involvement in influencing others, less need to communicate their position actively, and less need to take on the threat to their personal relations that can result from exercising power from a majority position. In contrast, majority members with weak proximal ties can use speaking up as an opportunity to develop their local social capital with minimal social cost.

Returning to Figure 13.1 and the WSINs allows us to summarize this prediction based on cells in the typology. Thus, we propose that majority members with strong proximal ties (entrepreneurial and coordinating networks) will have lower levels of influence involvement than those who have weak proximal ties (developmental and adaptive networks).

*Proposition 2c: Majority-influence agents with developmental or adaptive WSINs are more likely to be involved in persuading minority targets to adopt their prevalent perspective than majority-influence agents with entrepreneurial or coordinating WSINs.*

**Discussion**

In this chapter, our goal was to develop and explicate a theoretically based model of social network factors that combine with employee-situated perspectives (minority or majority member status on a particular topic) to provide employees with five differential influence mechanisms. Extending the model, we also predicted differential effects on two key outcomes: influence involvement and influence effectiveness. In doing this, we emphasized the social context of work and the nature of employee social capital (distal and proximal ties). In the process, we developed a WSIN typology
that characterizes the basic influence mechanisms available to those in four
generic social networks. Finally, we used this typology as the basis for
making theoretical predictions for differences in influence involvement and
influence effectiveness.

This is important because considering similarities and differences in the
social networks of minority and majority members allows us to enhance our
understanding of why some minorities succeed in persuading others to
adopt their views and why some majorities fail to persuade others to adopt
their views. Additionally, this theorizing provides complementary argu-
ments for influence effectiveness and influence involvement beyond the
traditional focus on numerical comparisons.

In the next section, we expand upon these ideas and address the question
of why we think it is important to theorize about the social structures of
actors in minority and majority positions. To answer this question, we
move beyond the initial arguments in this chapter to explicate further
possible implications for this socially embedded view of minority and
majority influence. Our goal here is to stimulate further research and
theorizing.

Scholars have previously noted a large discrepancy between laboratory
results and historical evidence regarding the success of minorities in
imposing their views (Clark, 1994). For example, empirical studies show
that minorities rarely have the direct effect of changing the views of others
(compared to majority influence). In contrast, managerial accounts and
history provide a more balanced narrative of the impact of minorities and
majorities on issues that are important to group functioning. These narra-
tives indicate that successful minority influence is not as rare as indicated in
laboratory experiments (Clark, 1994), that the majority can be dependent
on the social positions of minority actors and, interestingly, that different
outcomes result, depending on the specific actors involved in the influence
process. While there are alternative versions of the evolutionary model
(e.g., Wallace’s evolutionary model), Darwin exercised minority influence.
Darwin was able to diffuse and impose his model. Perhaps Darwin
succeeded because of his social network; perhaps Wallace could not impose
his views because he was less established and academically embedded than
Darwin. Interestingly, if Wallace had been able to impose his model, which
was based on a cybernetic metaphor, cybernetics may have emerged 60
years earlier. Similarly, our example of Nils at the beginning of the chapter
could represent an individual with strong social capital that allowed him to
impose his preference for a particular technology platform (from a minority
position and without any other source of power). Perhaps his social
embeddedness in the organization had implications not only for the
decision that was adopted, but also for the manner in which the project was
implemented.

As described in this chapter, minority and majority influence operate
through different mechanisms and produce different reactions in influence
targets. The leniency contract holds that minority messages are elaborated without derogation and counter-argument (Crano & Chen, 1998). Minorities are not seen as threatening and therefore do not incite defensive derogation and/or aggressive counter-arguments (Alvaro & Crano, 1997). It is therefore expected that minorities will be active and their success is usually associated with involvement, insistence, repetition, and consistency. Majority members typically do not engage in negative or defensive reactions when exposed to minority influence. Instead, they elaborate the inputs of minority messages in an attempt to evaluate whether the minority position corresponds with reality (Moscovici, 1980, 1985; Nemeth, 1986). More minority input triggers more elaboration by targets. This leads to more involvement and more effectiveness in getting minority positions heard. Contrarily, majority activity may be viewed as overly intrusive or as illegitimate pressure (Alvaro & Crano, 1997).

Moving to the group level of analysis suggests a number of interesting implications with relevance to both majority and minority influence. When minority member factions of a group are more involved and more effective, the potential composite influence of the minority faction is higher. They have a better chance of successfully persuading the majority to adopt their position. Based on our model, involvement and effectiveness reflect stronger ties. Thus, minority factions who have strong ties in the overall group and also have distal ties are more likely to be successful in promoting their views. Group-level implications of our model, however, differ for majorities.

In most situations, people assume that majority positions are true. Thus, the majority conveys influence by serving as a reference point that validates personal views, norms, group locomotion needs, and prestige. As described in our model, majority influence does not rely on argumentation and activity (i.e., involvement). Instead, majority influence is based on the simple connotation (labelling) of being a majority-held view, which promotes conformity to the majority position in group members. Therefore, activity or involvement is not necessary for majority members and may, in fact, trigger conflictive, defensive, or counter-arguments from minority members—who then may instigate minority activity. Since majority involvement may be seen as pressure tactics, it may create reactions within the majority in defence of minority in-group members, since criticizing or putting pressure on a fellow in-group member may threaten the self-identity of in-group majority members (Alvaro & Crano, 1997).

By being active, those in the majority increase the opportunities for the minority faction to present their views. This, thus, can have debilitating consequences on the majority position and goal of achieving conformity. Furthermore, consistent with proposition 2c, majority members with weak proximal ties to others in the group are more likely to be active in trying to impose their views on others in the group. This activity by weakly embedded members may produce conversions to the minority position and
should promote maintenance of group structure (e.g., the set of close relationships within the group). In sum, extending our model to the group level suggests that group majority involvement has the potential to decrease overall group majority influence effectiveness based on conformity to the majority.

This suggests an important new avenue for research on minority influence. While much prior research has emphasized specific minority behaviours and size of minority in explaining minority-influence success, our socially embedded view of minority and majority influence suggests the possibility of social structural factors as a source of advantage for minority influence. It also identifies potential weaknesses in majority-influence positions based on majority member structural positions and behaviours. In our view, this opens a wide range of research opportunities that may identify alternative explanations for reconciling the differences between previous laboratory findings and historical evidence.

For example, minority-influence research may find the opportunity to reconcile field and laboratory findings by adding social structure through longitudinal laboratory studies in which network structure is allowed to emerge. Similarly, taking into account social structure in field settings may explain away the differences in previous research. Another interesting line of questioning beyond testing our model would come from the implications of debilitating factors to majority positions that emerge from our theorizing. When socially disconnected actors jump start the discussions on majority positions this may create opportunities for the minority arguments to be heard and succeed.

In practice, this opens several avenues for both majority- and minority-position defenders to strengthen their positions and a series of institutional avenues to promote or silence minority views. Minority positions should benefit from developing strong in-group ties or attracting actors with strong ties in the group since those actors can be more vocal and also more effective in their arguments. Also, actors supporting a minority position should be aware of the value to their position of extending and strengthening their distal ties in ways that allow for access to new information and relevant external support. Majority-position supporters will benefit by normatively silencing their membership to avoid promoting group reactions, especially when structural ties in the group are divided between positions. Also, they may want to strengthen the relationships with disconnected co-majority position holders to avoid intra-group defence of in-group minority position holders that might otherwise debilitate their majority-position claims.

Although our theorizing has a number of strengths, our approach is under-specified and incomplete. Since we have presented an initial conceptual model of the effects of social network ties on minority and majority influence, additional theorizing could consider key boundary conditions to the relationships we have proposed. Thus, we recommend that future
research expand and refine the ideas we have presented here. We also encourage future research that moves beyond our focus on social-network influence. This could include organizational-level influences (e.g., organizational culture, norms, and climate), individual-level influences (e.g., interpersonal basis of power), task influences (e.g., task complexity and criticality), and supervisory influences (e.g., personality and management style).

To conclude, we have theorized that proximal and distal ties in employee social networks can be differentiated and that they can range from weak to strong. We also have proposed that specifying these network-tie characteristics enhances our conceptualizations of influence processes. This is because they combine to provide differential causal influence mechanisms for exercising minority and majority influence. Based on these ties, we have developed a typology of workgroup social influence networks (WSINs) and used these conceptual differences as the basis of our propositions that predict differential influence effectiveness and influence involvement for minority and majority members. We hope our theorizing stimulates empirical research and additional theory building.

References


