

**The Reconnection Process:  
Mobilizing the Social Capital of Dormant Ties**

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# **The Reconnection Process: Mobilizing the Social Capital of Dormant Ties**

## **Abstract**

Prior research has identified the value of reconnecting dormant ties (i.e., people you used to know), allowing individuals to refresh relationships and mobilize the value inherent in a tie (i.e., its social capital). However, less well understood is *how* this reconnection process occurs, including how it can be done well or poorly. To address this lack of knowledge, we conducted multi-organizational research combining an inductive, qualitative field study of professional reconnections by individuals in the North Italian textile district (Study 1) and, to validate our findings, a vignette-based experiment with U.S. workers (Study 2). We find that the process of reconnecting dormant ties can and does fail, sometimes dramatically, when people do not refresh the tie and, as a result, do not trust where they stand with each other. Specifically, we find that three elements—remembering, catching up, and perceiving the tie similarly—are key to successfully mobilizing the value of a dormant tie.

**Keywords:** social capital, dormant ties, social network, networking, latent ties, relationships

*“Unbelievable, did you hear what he asked me? That’s so rude... I will never talk to that guy again!”*  
(Innovation Manager to one of the authors while walking away after a dormant contact had attempted to reconnect; Observation)

Individuals hope to—and sometimes do—benefit from resources rooted in their network ties. Scholars refer to these benefits as social capital, defined as “the sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit” (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998:243). With the aim of benefiting from resources in their network ties, individuals might decide to either consult their currently active ties or to reconnect with dormant ties (e.g., Yang et al. 2021). Dormant ties consist of former ties, now out of touch, that can be reconnected, thereby making the tie active again (Levin et al. 2011a). People probably have more dormant than active ties, especially as they get older and advance in their careers (Killworth et al. 1990, Quinn 2013). After all, dormant ties exist primarily because of network overload: it is not cognitively or physically possible to stay in active communication with every individual in one’s network, so some ties inevitably lapse in activity, even without a negative falling out (Levin et al. 2011a, Roulet and Laker 2020, Walter et al. 2015). Like active ties, dormant ties have a history of being active, a history with relevance to the present (Uribe et al. 2020), and social capital that can be potentially mobilized (Levin and Walter 2018).

Reconnected dormant ties can at times provide even more value than active ties—especially as sources of novelty—since during the tie’s dormancy, the other person has been learning new things that can now be tapped in a reconnection (Levin et al. 2011a, Vissa 2011). Indeed, reconnections among individuals can be an important source of value for organizations, as novelty is an important building block of innovation (Kauppila et al. 2018), and they are quite commonly found in project-based working environments (Bengtson et al. 2018). Despite the relevance and efficiency that characterize many dormant ties (Levin et al. 2011a, Offer and Fischer 2022), scholars have yet to provide an explanation of *how* such reconnections actually happen. This is consistent with recent calls for “greater attention to the ‘how’ behind network dynamics” (Chen et al. 2022:1631).

To delve deeper into social capital mobilization in relation to reconnection, we embrace a dynamic, process-oriented view (e.g., Bansal et al. 2018) that overcomes the cross-sectional perspective adopted

by much of the network literature. Given the intermediate state (i.e., between nascent and mature) of theory on the phenomenon (Edmondson and McManus 2007), we engage in a ‘sequential strategy’ (Creswell 2009) by implementing a qualitative study (Study 1) followed by an experiment (Study 2). One strength of this combination of studies is that it provides both internal and external validity. In Study 1, we take a grounded approach to understand how the reconnection process unfolds, embracing the perspective of both the reconnection initiator and the target person. As described below, we ultimately identify three elements—remembering, catching up, and perceiving the tie similarly—that determine how organizational actors succeed or fail in their efforts to reconnect dormant ties and mobilize the related social capital. In Study 2, we then validate these ideas in an experiment focused on the perspective of the reconnection target, to show the link between these three elements and successful reconnection, which we define as a reconnection attempt where a tie transitions from dormancy to activity, thereby allowing one or both actors to mobilize the related social capital (e.g., productive collaboration, useful advice). By examining the reconnection process itself—through interviews, observation, archival documents, and an experiment—we shed light on how people convert potential into actual social capital across relational events and states (Chen et al. 2022).

Although these three elements of remembering, catching up, and perceiving the tie similarly might appear intuitive, they have not to our knowledge been previously identified or examined in either the practitioner or academic literature as something to focus on or be concerned about for reconnections. Indeed, the impression given by the literature on dormant-tie reconnection is that it is a relatively simple and straightforward process (e.g., King and Kovács 2021), i.e., that “reconnecting [is] fairly easy” (Walter et al. 2015:1447) and can happen based on “a whim and minimal effort” (Levin et al. 2011b:45). Yet our findings suggest that such reassurance in the literature may have been premature, as we find evidence that individuals can and do bungle their attempts to reconnect, ultimately preventing the mobilization of social capital. Thus, our investigation contributes to current understanding of network dynamics by systematically depicting the stream of events occurring in the reconnection process, explaining how the interpretation of these events influences a tie’s relational state (Chen et al. 2022). In particular, we unveil the need for reconnectors to solidify these three elements so as to *refresh* their ties—akin to refreshing a webpage—in the sense of being up to date on the relationship in order to create

a sense of trust and align the interpretations of the current state of the relationship.<sup>1</sup> In so doing, reconnectors can also refresh social and organizational embeddedness (Uzzi 1997) to ease the process. Once refreshed, a tie can then be mobilized more fully and successfully. These findings allow us to go beyond the idea that mobilizing social capital is important (Lin 1999, Smith et al. 2020). After all, from an instrumental standpoint, the act of mobilization is arguably the *most* important thing about networks and network ties (Fang et al. 2011, Kwon and Adler 2014, Maurer et al. 2011), including dormant ones. Although our goal is largely to enhance theoretical understanding of reconnections, our findings are also of practical relevance in terms of which elements and steps are likely to be most helpful in eliciting value and cooperation from dormant ties.

We also contribute to the ongoing efforts of social network scholars to more fully understand the phenomenon of network evolution and change. While we already know that reconnections occur and can be valuable (Levin et al. 2011a), our study unveils *how* they happen (Bansal et al. 2018, Langley et al. 2013). In particular, we take not only a longitudinal approach—which, although laudable, often suffers from being a collection of periodic snapshots of static network structure (e.g., Lin 1999, Maurer et al. 2011, Seibert et al. 2001, Zhang and King 2021). Instead, we take a process perspective to capture reconnections in the making, enabling us to fill this important gap in the literature (Chen et al. 2022) and reveal what can go wrong in the reconnection process (e.g., Brass 2022). We also go beyond the focus on only the reconnection initiator’s perspective (e.g., Levin et al. 2011a), bringing in the target’s perspective, which is crucial to understanding how and why network actors share only a little vs a lot of their knowledge. Initiators, after all, may never know if their efforts are in fact suboptimal, as the mobilized social capital depends on how much the target actor is willing to participate and share.

### **Theoretical Background**

Individuals develop networks of contacts that enable the mobilization of social capital, including resources such as knowledge/advice, referrals, or emotional support (Adler and Kwon 2002). However, the limited nature of time makes it impossible to keep all network ties active (Killworth et al. 1990, McFadyen and Cannella 2004), leading some ties to become dormant. Dormant ties—also called latent

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<sup>1</sup> There are multiple dimensions to perceiving someone as trustworthy, i.e., their ability, benevolence, or integrity (Mayer et al. 1995). Key in the reconnection process is perceived benevolence, i.e., relational trust.

(Mariotti and Delbridge 2012) or decayed (Kleinbaum 2018)—are so inactive that scholars used to consider them as dead ties, not even counted as potential social capital (e.g., Adler and Kwon 2002, Coleman 1988, Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998). Indeed, tie maintenance was considered a necessary condition for keeping relationships alive (e.g., Coleman 1988), as they would “die of natural causes unless an effort is made” (Burt 2002:347). This activity-based perspective (Levin and Walter 2018) often portrayed individuals as trapped in the trade-off between network overload—trying to create and maintain as many active relationships as possible—and tie decay (Mariotti and Delbridge 2012). Yet dormant ties are not dead. They remain alive “in mind” during the period of dormancy, and even without being reconnected, can enhance people’s attachment to their organization (McCarthy and Levin 2019). Moreover, recent research, embracing a memory-based perspective (Levin and Walter 2018), has increasingly identified the benefits—instrumental (Levin et al. 2011a, Walter et al. 2015) and otherwise (Yang et al. 2021)—that individuals can extract from dormant ties that are reconnected.

Ties become dormant for many (conscious or unconscious) reasons. Major life transitions, such as graduating, switching jobs (Levin et al. 2011a), moving (Lubbers et al. 2010), breaking up (Fischer and Offer 2020), or becoming widowed (Zettel and Rook 2004), can all trigger relationships to transition from activity to dormancy, or from dormancy back to activity. However, this network churn can also occur during relatively stable periods—from a third to half of a person’s ties in just one year (Marin and Hampton 2019)—due to lack of time or diverging interests (Boase et al. 2015). Importantly, dormant ties are not the same as weak ties (Granovetter 1973), as both strong and weak ties can fall dormant (Levin et al. 2011a), i.e., tie dormancy is independent of the level of intimacy and emotional intensity characterizing tie strength (Marsden and Campbell 1984). Unlike new or active ties, dormant ties represent a form of network that maintains a sense of relational history (Haythornthwaite 2002) and memory ready to be re-enacted (Maoret 2013).

On the one hand, dormant ties can be less convenient to mobilize than active ties, as active ties already have ongoing, regular interactions happening anyway, so it tends to feel easier to request or obtain resources from the other person. As a result, people often feel anxious and uncomfortable about reconnecting dormant ties (e.g., Yang et al. 2021), and these reconnection anxieties can make people reluctant to reconnect at all, or reconnect only their most familiar dormant ties, even if this might

compromise the novelty of information accessed (Walter et al. 2015).

On the other hand, despite these obstacles, dormant relationships are incredibly efficient (Levin and Walter 2018, Levin et al. 2011a) in that they do not need to be nurtured or maintained, often for years, but nonetheless conserve potential value over time (Mariotti and Delbridge 2012). Moreover, the benefits of reconnecting dormant ties are not limited to resources known to be available beforehand, but also include unexpected, novel resources the other person learned during dormancy (Levin et al. 2011a). In contrast, active ties require investment and often provide redundant information, as repeated interactions lead to a similar stock of knowledge (Reagans et al. 2005), whereas reconnecting sometimes provides better support and higher relational commitment (Omar and Higgs 2015). For instance, in the entrepreneurial context, Steier and Greenwood (2000) find that reconnections are an importance source of venture capital from angel investors when starting up a new business. Vissa (2011) finds that entrepreneurs would rather reconnect dormant ties than form new ties. Thus, entrepreneurs do not need to keep all their ties active, as reconnecting dormant ties can ease the entrepreneurial process (Jack 2005). In short, reconnecting is as an efficient network strategy (Roulet and Laker 2020), especially in times of need (Quinn 2013).

Leveraging relationships is a core competency for any professional (Kuwabara et al. 2018) and crucial to better understanding how to make use of social capital (Granovetter 1992, Linder et al. 2020). While some research has investigated this issue for active ties, little is known about how individuals actually engage in reconnecting their dormant ties, including how this is done well or poorly. After all, potential access to resources through dormant ties does not necessarily guarantee successful social capital mobilization in the reconnection (Smith 2005). As such, going beyond mere access is crucial to understand *how* actors can turn potential resources accessible via dormant ties into actual resources.

## **Study 1**

### **Research Setting**

As our goal is examining in depth the process of dormant-tie reconnection and related social capital mobilization, we looked for a setting where work-related reconnections are common. We reasoned that reconnection would be easier to find in settings that rely heavily on project-based work, innovation, tacit skills, and collaboration. Project-based work not only creates dormant ties when the project ends and

people go their separate ways, but also relies more heavily on reconnections, because when assembling a new project it is easier to know about and trust a dormant contact than a stranger (Bengtson et al. 2018). This use of project-related reconnections occurs in a variety of industries, such as theater production (Uzzi and Spiro 2005), film making (Soda et al. 2004), technology, management consulting, fashion/garment manufacturing, and more. Reconnections are especially likely to provide novel information (Levin et al. 2011a), hence tending to flourish in settings where novelty and innovation are important. Similarly, settings that rely on tacit skills—i.e., knowledge that is not easily codified (Berman et al. 2002)—are more likely to draw on interpersonal relationships in general, since it is more difficult to gain the needed knowledge simply by looking things up online or elsewhere. Settings that rely on, value, and encourage collaborations are also where social capital mobilization is more likely to occur. A setting with these features should therefore make it easier to observe and investigate naturally occurring dormant-tie reconnections in action, without having to rely on artificially induced reconnections (e.g., Levin et al. 2011a). Accordingly, we conducted a qualitative study—preferable when addressing process, content, and network dynamics (Bansal et al. 2018, Lechner and Dowling 2003)—in a network of businesses operating in the Textile District of Northern Italy (TDNI).

TDNI firms rely heavily on project-based work, as there is high demand for developing seasonal fashion collections involving different individuals and firms depending on their competencies and knowledge. TDNI is also innovative and internationally recognized as a shining example of Italian excellence and the cradle of ‘Made in Italy’ (Tinaglia and Gandola 2015). To be competitive and confront low-cost imitations, TDNI firms target niche markets, develop highly innovative products of exclusive quality, and continually launch innovation projects to develop novel products. Firms in the TDNI are mostly small- and medium-sized and thus rely on external experts and collaborations with other firms to innovate. However, even with such collaborations, the external environment moves too quickly to keep these ties constantly active, as the contacts that possess specific tacit skills are too numerous (Dunbar 1993), and those that are relevant are only needed when in sync with the latest fashion trends. Furthermore, the heterogeneity in TDNI products, production segments, and target markets engenders greater opportunities for managers to collaborate across firms. In response to these opportunities, organizations encourage TDNI managers to gather in business associations to co-develop



products, machinery, and chemical components. Not only local institutions, such as universities and banks, but also individuals and their role in textile business associations at the local, national, and international level (e.g., Confindustria, SMI-ATI, Tex Club Tec, EURATEX), play a crucial role in fostering these collaborations. For example, international exhibitions organized annually (FILO and Milano Unica) or every five years (ITEMA) present novel fashion collections and innovative products, stimulating networking, trade, and collaborations. In short, TDNI is a setting where we expect to find a great many reconnections of dormant ties.

Our exposure to TDNI started through the local business association, where the first author was invited to participate in meetings as a non-participant observer. Building on a collaboration with the local business association of which TDNI is a part, we gained access to our informants. In fact, the local business association has a specific division for textile firms, and during data collection, the first author could rely on these connections and a deep understanding of field dynamics to participate as observer in their monthly meetings.

### **Data Collection**

Study 1 combines primary (interviews and observation) and secondary (archival material) sources of data collected over a 25-month period from March 2015 to April 2017. To corroborate and refine the emerging findings, the first author went back to the field in 2019 to attend a main exhibition and gather additional evidence. The selection of managers to contact started from the list of textile firms subscribing to the TDNI business association. We either personally contacted managers at meetings or emailed them with details of our research project and asking for interviews. In all, managers from 16 firms agreed to be involved.

*Interviews.* Using a semi-structured interview protocol (in Italian) based on the framework for conversational qualitative interviewing (Kvale 1996, Solarino and Aguinis 2021) that ensured consistency between the data collection and our research question, we conducted 71 interviews (70 in person; 1 via Skype) with managers of TDNI firms, suppliers, and institutional actors (see Table 1 for details). Since the interviews were designed to be exploratory, our protocol included open-ended questions focused on: (a) the role of interpersonal relationships across organizations and institutions in TDNI; (b) the main innovation projects conducted in the last five years requiring external partners; and

(c) mobilizing social capital by reconnecting dormant ties related to these innovation projects. This last part of the interview consisted of two subsections: in the first, interviewees were asked to recall episodes when they acted as initiators of a reconnection; in the second, they were asked to narrate anecdotes about being the target of a reconnection for innovation purposes. The interviews were recorded (almost 100 hours) and then transcribed verbatim (more than 2000 pages). Throughout the data collection, we had numerous informal discussions with stakeholders in the textile district to supplement our understanding of the empirical phenomena under investigation. In the first eight interviews, without being prompted, our informants mentioned that gaining access to resources through reconnection is not so simple, requiring certain “necessary elements” and practices. In delving deeper into the underlying mechanisms, we followed the recommendations for inductive research (Glaser and Strauss 1967), adding questions focusing more closely on how the reconnection process unfolds (e.g., “How do you initiate a conversation when approaching a dormant tie?”, “How do you formulate your request when in need for reconnecting a tie that has been dormant for a few years?”, “How were you approached?”, “How did you react?”) (Bansal et al. 2018). To understand the social interaction dynamics beyond the TDNI boundaries, we interviewed key suppliers located outside the TDNI district, selected according to the archival documents and information shared by informants.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

**Observations.** The second data source consisted of non-participative observation of events and meetings. This evidence was particularly valuable in exploring real-time reconnections, providing an insider perspective and in-depth understanding of the actors’ meanings and practices (Easterby-Smith et al. 2012), as well as mitigating retrospective bias (Van Burg et al. 2020). This perspective—involving actual observations of reconnections in action—has often been lacking in prior research (e.g., Levin et al. 2011a). The observed meetings took a variety of forms: professional meetings, business association meetings, conferences, events and workshops, commercial meetings, exhibitions, and plant visits. We tape-recorded and transcribed the audio of the observations whenever possible and combined them with onsite pictures, video recordings, and field notes collected during and at the end of each day. The observed events included professional (board meetings, conferences, workshops, textile laboratory visits) and recreational (visit to a local museum, lunches, and coffee breaks) activities. Observing TDNI

managers engaging in the reconnection of dormant ties was crucial for our research objectives. Two of the most important worldwide textile exhibitions (FILO and ITMA) provided the ideal setting to observe real-time reconnections, since many TDNI managers were present as exhibitors or visitors and met people after years without contact.

*Archives.* Archival documents were key to familiarizing ourselves with the TDNI and complementing the primary data, including identifying exhibitions as key loci for reconnections and arranging non-participant observation in these settings (Van Burg et al. 2020). We began collecting the archival data with a search of press reviews using keywords<sup>2</sup> for articles from January 2010 until March 2015. These articles helped us understand the dynamics of the context as well as the specific language needed to absorb and analyze the primary data. We gathered additional documents through the firms' and the TDNI business association's websites (e.g., historical company books, profiles, leaflets). We also had access to documents during the interviews (e.g., innovation plans, reports, personal notes, brochures, an entrepreneur's master's thesis on the company) and observation events (e.g., minutes of meetings, industry reports, advertising material). Furthermore, we collected some artifacts, such as samples of innovative products, and checked the social media profiles of the firms and interviewees to gather further evidence. We conducted additional press reviews to update our records. During the data-collection period, the TDNI business association sponsored a monograph on the TDNI (Tinaglia and Gandola 2015), including interviews with executives and owners of the firms in our study and their stakeholders, which proved useful for verification.

### **Data Analysis**

Taking an inductive analytic approach (Strauss and Corbin 1990), we conducted iterative steps between the data, relevant literature, and an emerging set of theoretical ideas (Miles et al. 2014). In analyzing the data, we adopted a triple perspective: direct observation and engagement in the field to obtain interpretive insights; experience with the cultural and social context to critically examine the data; and fresh eyes detached from the context and with a different cultural background to recognize recurrent patterns. We held regular meetings to discuss key themes, concepts, and relationships using interview

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<sup>2</sup> The keywords related to the textile district, business associations (local, national, and international), and the names of the textile companies in the district.

data as the initial driver of our theorizing, supplementing these with observational evidence and archival documents. Our analysis unfolded in four main steps.

**Step 1.** Aiming to study the process of reconnecting dormant ties in the context of innovation in TDNI, we began by analyzing the archival data collected from press releases and publicly available documents. This first stage was crucial to acquiring the specific language of the field and building common ground to interact with informants while collecting the primary data. By analyzing the documents, we deepened our understanding of the relevance of dyadic interpersonal collaborations across organizations, both within and outside the TDNI. Then we collected and analyzed the interview transcripts by isolating all the quotes related to reconnection efforts involving our informants. We did not focus on the search and selection of reconnection targets and its antecedents, as this has already been addressed in the literature (e.g., Kleinbaum 2018, Walter et al. 2015). Rather, we focused on the dynamics of the reconnection process itself, i.e., on what happens during the interaction. Indeed, we observed that reconnecting can be difficult and complicated. While nearly all informants described the existence of dormant ties as valuable in the case of needing access to knowledge, information, or other types of resources, they also stated that the existence of a formerly active tie does not imply that such contacts are willing to share their resources. We refined our analysis through subsequent observations, as attending industry events allowed us to witness several episodes of reconnection. For instance, when walking into exhibitions with the TDNI managers, we observed how they met, approached, and were approached by their dormant ties and engaged in reconnection. During the interviews and observation events, informants underlined the potential benefits of reconnecting, expressing their enthusiasm when they were able to access the resources needed for innovation projects through reconnection. Therefore, following this initial step, we decided to delve deeper into the link between an individual's intention to reconnect and the actual reconnection, leading to the second step in our analysis.

**Step 2.** To unpack how participants described the reconnection process, we began categorizing the interview quotes using open coding (Locke 2001) on each culled episode, considering both the initiator and target perspectives. To this end, we initially coded each passage with the *in vivo* terms and phrases our informants used, then grouping those with similar meaning or keywords into first-order categories (Gioia et al. 2013). Thereafter, we turned to the observation transcripts to identify additional evidence

corroborating the first-order categories and any novel aspects that had not emerged in the interviews. For example, whereas the interviews highlighted the rational actions and thoughts the interviewees reported through retrospective accounts, observations highlighted more subtle mechanisms that occurred during the reconnection. For instance, one interviewee mentioned:

*When I need to contact someone for a suggestion, even if we have not been in contact for a while, what I need to do is just pick up the phone and ask. The same holds for people who need something from me. (CEO and President, D5)*

Yet, observing an international exhibition where he approached another manager he had not seen for more than five years revealed that the process was not so easy, because the other person did not remember him, and it took a while to refresh the relationship. Finally, we searched the archival data for further evidence of collaborations achieved through reconnection. After several iterations, we gradually collapsed the first-order categories by aggregating codes that shared a similar essence into more analytical second-order categories. These second-order categories compose the building blocks of our model, including the array of actions, thoughts, and cognitive mechanisms through which reconnection unfolds. After several iterations, we grouped the seven second-order codes into three broader categories: remembering, catching up, and perceiving the tie similarly. These three theoretical aggregates allowed us to capture the majority of statements in the second-order codes. Figure 1 depicts the complete data structure that emerged. With these three elements in mind, we triangulated evidence by revisiting the original interviews, field notes, and archival documents to verify that we did not miss any relevant data.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

**Step 3.** In this step, we met to identify patterns across the reconnection episodes. First, we turned to axial coding (Strauss and Corbin 1990) to uncover relationships among our categories and develop the emerging theoretical framework. Second, we used our comparative analysis to uncover and explain the variance observed in the three core elements across different situations. This second part was essential to unveiling potential reconnection pitfalls hampering access to needed resources. In light of this, we considered alternative frameworks until we assembled our categories into an overarching process model fitting our evidence. In this third step, we iteratively discussed our emergent insights and model with colleagues and key informants to validate our interpretations until we converged on our final framework presented in the next section.

**Step 4.** Finally, in response to encouragement from reviewers, we reanalyzed all the data to address two questions that arose from the prior steps. First, we had noticed and mentioned relational trust—namely, perceived benevolence, i.e., trusting that someone cares about you and will look after your best interests (Levin and Cross 2004, Levin et al. 2011a)—but were less systematic in describing its role for each of the three elements. Upon further examination of the data, we more explicitly clarified the role of relational trust across the three elements. Second, we delved deeper into the role of contextual circumstances in reconnection. Although our main focus remained on the internal dynamics or elements of reconnection, in examining the evidence considering contextual circumstances, we noticed that managers involved in reconnection referred to organizations (organizational affiliation) and contacts (structural embeddedness) they had in common to prepare a common ground and help refresh the tie.

## **Findings**

As expected, reconnecting dormant ties is crucial in TDNI. In fact, this district is populated by managers with very specific skills that cyclically become relevant in relation to current fashion trends and thus require reconnection. As several informants confirmed:

*Having contacts to reconnect in our industry is fundamental, even more than in other sectors, because know-how is still based on experience. Probably in other sectors, such as medicine, knowledge is more codified, analyzed, and studied; there are protocols, operators can rely on statistics and case records about every treatment. This is not the case in our job. There are many unwritten recipes that belong to those who elaborated them. In the case of need, I have to know who has those competencies and call them. (Managing Director, W2)*

*Reconnecting dormant ties in the innovation process makes it possible to shorten time. If I don't know any expert of a specific product or technology, I have to go from 0 to 100 and this would take me years, or I could not even make it because I cannot be an expert in everything. Oftentimes, I need someone who is able to provide suggestions, to start from 50 rather than 0, and this saves me a lot of time. The market is moving fast and to be competitive, we need to move faster. Therefore, accessing timely information is crucial, and reconnecting with people who have this know-how is a huge benefit. (R&D Manager, W2)*

*Relationships cannot be totally forgotten, and there will always be a thread connecting us. (CEO, W2)*

Despite the importance and prevalence of reconnecting in TDNI, we soon realized that this is not a straightforward process but actually fairly complicated and difficult. Particularly notable in our observation coding is that, for a reconnection initiator, simply restarting interactions with a dormant tie is not enough to restore the relationship back to activity, and such reconnection attempts fail easily, sometimes with long-term consequences:

*The fact that I worked with this person until five years ago might be an advantage if I need to ask him for help. However, our past connection does not allow me to rely on him based on a cold call. It is not that simple. I need to be accurate in reconnecting or would totally destroy the good memories he has about me and that*

*might imply that I lose this contact...maybe forever. (CEO, C4)*

This initial finding spurred our interest in understanding not only how a dormant tie is reconnected, but also why such reconnections might succeed or fail. During the observations, we took notes and observed episodes of successful (and failed) social capital mobilization where knowledge, information, and advice were directly shared (or not). In addition, in the interviews, informants reported on reconnections that did (or did not) lead to collaboration and resource sharing. We did not necessarily find evidence that the reconnection process always follows the same linear sequence, but rather that each of three elements helped make a reconnection more successful. As elaborated below, the evidence suggests that the three elements of *remembering*, *catching up*, and *perceiving the tie similarly* determined whether and how TDNI managers mobilized the social capital of a dormant tie. Figure 2 presents the outcome of this analysis with the three core elements.

[Insert Figure 2 about here]

***Element 1: Remembering.*** When interviewed about how they initiate a reconnection, some TDNI managers stated something similar to what one CEO mentioned:

*When I need something from one of my old [dormant] contacts, I just pick up the phone and call him. "How are you? Listen I have this issue and I would be grateful if you could help me." (CEO, C6)*

However, when stimulated to discuss specific episodes of past reconnections, informants referred to their discomfort in calling someone they have not been in touch with for a long time. Observation allowed us to grasp the facets that triggered this discomfort. First, managers showed the importance of *recognizing* each other (1.1 in Figure 1), whether in the role of reconnection initiator (e.g., advice seeker) or target (e.g., advice giver), since reciprocal identification during initial contact after dormancy is crucial for the reconnection process. When walking through the ITMA exhibition with informants, we observed individuals scanning each other with the aim of identifying dormant ties (1.1a in Figure 1). They scrutinized the appearance and/or badges to identify faces or names that could be associated with past memories. When reconnection took place in person, identification was particularly important, and they compared the image of the individual they had in their mind over the years with the current image as a measure of the time that elapsed during dormancy. For instance, we witnessed these two episodes:

*Walking among the stands in the FILO exhibition, Mario (former sales manager) sees John (current sales manager), one of his former colleagues.*

*R&D Manager (W1) Mario: Hi John! It has been a while since we've seen each other!*

*John: Hey...Mario? (hugs and smiles) So nice to see you after so many years! Well... your hair is grayer but apart from that...let me see...you look exactly the same!*

*Max: Hi Simon, how are you?*

*Managing Director (D4): [smiling and scrutinizing his face... after a few silent seconds] Hi!! With the beard it was hard for me to recognize you! How are you?*

In these exchanges, asynchrony occurred when one individual recognized the other, but the other took longer to remember, requiring further scanning efforts. More generally, we noted that often they did not allow a reconnection attempt to proceed until both parties recognized each other. Interestingly, our data reveal that the process of recognizing happens both in person and when mediated (e.g., over the phone). People trying to reconnect relied on a variety of clues to identify the other person. For instance, when reconnecting via phone, the information adopted to identify the other includes the number calling, the introduction of the individual calling (usually mentioning first name, surname, and the organization), and the voice. Conversely, when meeting in person, the face, the context where the meeting occurs, potentially the people with whom the individual is gathering, and other visual elements (e.g., badges, branded bag) are sources of information for identification.

Our evidence also reveals that by remembering, TDNI managers engaged in associating the current situation with memories of the past (1.1b in Figure 1). Whether in the role of reconnection initiator or target, they started associating memories of the past with other individuals to whom they are related by a dormant tie. As one informant stated:

*When I think about a dormant contact, I use the elements I have, the memories of our relationship. I have to rely on things I remember from our past experiences together. (CEO, C6)*

Therefore, our informants indicated that remembering past interactions when the tie was active and preserving those memories were crucial to mobilizing the tie's social capital (1.1c in Figure 1). Underlying these preserved positive memories was often the sense that the other person could be trusted to care about the TDNI manager. For example, one informant reported:

*What makes the difference is the memory, the image of the experience that is imprinted in my mind about that person. Years ago, I worked with Armand, we had great time, and we achieved very good results in that project. By working with him I understood he is a good and trustworthy person, so if I need to start a new project, I will try to involve him. (CEO, C4)*

When managers re-start interacting, they also engage in *reminiscing together* by referring to episodes of their shared past in an effort to refresh the reactivated relationship (1.2 in Figure 1). Our



data indicate that it is easier for the two individuals to refresh their relationship by anchoring the present in their shared past, creating a bridge between past memories and present interaction that sets the relationship in motion (1.2a in Figure 1). For example:

*When there is a memory of past experiences that we lived together, it is easier to activate such off-relationships. (CEO, C3)*

*She called me and we spent half an hour talking about the old days when we used to collaborate on different projects as our firms were partners. (CEO, D2)*

By reminiscing together about the relationship, informants referred to aspects of the shared past that motivated reconnection. This was particularly prevalent on the phone, due to the absence of visual cues and reminders. Our evidence further reveals that in co-reconstructing their past (1.2b in Figure 1), the informants referred to episodes, places, people, and objects they have in common to create a more vivid image of their memories. One of our interviewees told us about such a phone conversation:

*Hey Will, do you remember when during the master's we had the plant visit at your headquarters? It was a great experience and I remember that when I came to visit your company, we saw that laminating process you were operating on book covers. (R&D Manager, W2)*

We also witnessed or heard accounts of episodes of individuals not remembering the other. These were often painful. For instance, the R&D manager from W1 called a contact he met at an exhibition years before, and when the other did not recognize him, he felt hurt, then tried to spur the other to recall their shared past by referring to the place where they had interacted. However, when finally the other recognized him, the R&D manager no longer wanted to formulate his request. In fact, he felt so let down about the failed attempt at reconnecting that he never called the other again, as if the dormant tie that he considered valuable had never existed.

*My first memory goes back to the beginning of my career, when young and exuberant I attended an international event and I met the eminent CEO of a multinational company, leader in our sector. We talked a lot, sharing our opinions about the market trends and potential breakthrough innovation. At the end, he gave me his contact details and told me to call him if I needed any advice. How presumptuous I was! After a few months, I tried to call him for an opinion on a new project we had started. His secretary asked me to introduce myself twice, and when I finally ended up talking to him, I had to reintroduce myself and explain where and how we met. After a few minutes he exclaimed, 'Ohhh the young guy with very big hope.' That was enough for me to feel embarrassed, I just told him I wanted to share some news and I have never called him again. (R&D Manager, W1)*

In this case, the lack of positive remembering was perceived as a sign that the CEO did not care about him, i.e., a lack of relational trust. Similarly, another manager reported:

*I called him after a few years of no contact. 'Hi, I'm [name and surname], how are you?' He was silent, and then repeated my name twice and asked, 'Please remind me, when and where did we meet?' It was very awkward. I remembered him, but he had forgotten me! So, I had to explain all the experiences we had shared*

*and recall some contacts we had in common. After a couple of minutes, he seemed to realize who I was, but I don't know whether it was true. So, our conversation did not go very far, and after that, I never called him again. (Quality Manager, W2)*

Again, struggling to remember someone undermined the willingness to engage, due to feeling that the other person could not be trusted to care about the “forgotten” individual.

We also observed efforts to revive past feelings—especially of trust—and create the common ground to bring past memories into the present. Sometimes, individuals were explicit in refreshing trust during remembering. For example, a manager at an ITMA exhibition said to a former colleague:

*Sales Manager (W3, Observation): Hey, you know you can ask me everything! I owe you a lot for the help you gave me in those days.*

Other times, such efforts were more subtle, such as:

*At the time I re-contacted this person, I guess his perception of trust and confidence improved...because I called him and he remembered. (Supply Chain Manager, W1)*

In short, it is difficult to refresh a dormant tie if the two parties do not recognize each other or cannot reminisce about their shared past, and underlying this effect seems to be an issue of relational trust. In other words, lack of remembering is seen as not caring about the other person, which is often devastating to the ability to mobilize the dormant tie's social capital.

***Element 2: Catching up.*** Besides bringing the past into the present through remembering, TDNI managers also used catching up to reconstruct the time that elapsed during a tie's dormancy. At the exhibitions, our informants often found themselves updating others about what had happened since their tie was last active (2.1 in Figure 1). Similarly, they received information about salient personal and professional events in the others' lives. TDNI managers trying to reconnect would converse about professional matters by sharing information about jobs and projects they had been involved in (2.1a in Figure 1), with the overall intent of filling each other in on the interim period. Moreover, they spent time describing things that occurred in their personal lives, updating each other about themselves, their family, and their lifestyle (2.1b in Figure 1). Although catching up on personal aspects in a working environment with people they had not been in contact with for years might seem too intimate, TDNI managers reported that this type of conversation was able to mitigate the transactional feeling that a reconnection might bring, such as in a cold call. As one manager reported:

*When I called him it was so hard to catch up because he wanted to know what I had been doing for the 8 years since our last meeting. I tried to create a good feeling with him before asking him for help. Since my business*

*problem is not his problem, but we both have family and children, family issues can be similar I tried to create some 'trait d'union' [linkage], to create neutral territory. This is the reason why people ask 'how are you?'. Then, I didn't want to cross the line and be too intrusive, so I tried to limit this to pleasantries, showing that I care without being indiscreet. That really depends on the intimacy I had with him before. (R&D Manager, W1)*

Interestingly, this manager highlighted the level of intimacy, in other words the trust that the two individuals had in the past, as a crucial aspect that determined the content of catching up. Our evidence shows that catching-up conversations were not intended to provide a reliable and detailed account of the events that the individuals had experienced throughout dormancy, but only salient aspects referred to in relation to the intensity of their past relationship. For instance, one informant did not mention previous projects or information about his job, but provided a brief account of his career to arrive at what he is currently doing, as shown in the following exchange observed at an exhibition:

*Marketing Manager (C3): I was at Alpha company until 2010, then I spent 3 years at Beta until it shut down.*

*Ewan: What are you currently doing? Are you retired now?*

*Marketing Manager (C3): I actually retired after 42 years, but still work as a consultant. When we closed Beta, which was the last yarnning company that shut down in 2013 because it could not survive, together with a former colleague and friend who had been doing business with China for a few years, we started importing flax fiber from China.*

For TDNI managers, catching up consisted of paving the way from the past to the present, i.e., a kind of shortcut through the dormancy period, so that they could return to knowing and trusting each other. Besides sharing stories about their journey toward their current personal and professional situations, they also engaged in creating common *present* ground (2.2 in Figure 1) by sharing opinions on current matters [2.2a in Figure 1), and summoning up shared contacts (2.2b in Figure 1), mostly in terms of professional aspects. As one manager noted:

*When I have the opportunity to catch up with someone I have not been in touch with for a while, it is great to share opinions about facts that are affecting both of us or we share passion about. When I have common topics of interest it is a pleasure to catch up, and operating in the textile sector, oftentimes we discuss that. It is a pleasure. (Marketing Manager, W3)*

Interesting to observe at the exhibitions was how the situation and surrounding space triggered broader conversations on the industry and the market. We note that this was not small talk about trivial matters like the weather or traffic (Methot et al. 2021), but discussions of substantive issues relevant to their work and businesses. In sharing opinions, TDNI managers often compared present and past situations when their tie was active, sometimes referring to contacts they had in common or organizations they knew. The following exchange at an exhibition illustrates this:

*CEO (C1): How are you? Are you still working for ABX?*

*Luke: Yes, sure! All is fine, it is a good period for the market, sales are growing... let's hope it lasts for a while!*

*CEO (C1): Yes, let's hope so. It is hard, it will go back to the golden times when we worked at XYZ. Is your father still active in the business?*

*Luke: Yes, sure, he is working part-time. Mostly taking care of raw material supply but partially retired.*

*CEO (C1): He is such an active man, he has been in the business for ages now!*

*Luke: Almost 50 years...*

*CEO (C1): Wait, what?! He is an institution...!*

Catching up thus helps build relational trust and rapport, but is also a sort of test of trust. In other words, each side obtains useful information about the other's current situation and surroundings, proving whether this still is (or not) someone to be trusted before agreeing to or requesting help. Our data reveals that catching up can occur at different moments in the reconnection process, sometimes early in an exhaustive description of the current state, sometimes in a follow-up meeting over lunch, dinner, or coffee. Either way, this helped to refresh the tie.

Despite the positive benefits of catching up, our investigation shows that even when the two individuals remembered each other, they sometimes encountered difficulties in catching up that ultimately harmed the success of the reconnection attempt. This was the case when catching up was too intrusive in terms of personal and/or professional matters. For example, at an exhibition, we were following the CEO of D1 when he was stopped by Angel, who after remembering asked him about his new job, wondering about the amount of money the CEO had received when he left his former company. The CEO, the reconnection target, replied politely but kept the conversation very short and vague. When we moved away, he complained about Angel's intrusive questions. We do not know if Angel had hoped to follow up by asking something more substantive—perhaps in an effort to lay the groundwork for a future collaboration—but Angel never got the chance to formulate any such request, as the CEO was so irritated by his behavior that he decided to leave the conversation. Here is the full exchange:

*Angel: I heard that you moved to a new job...*

*CEO (D1): Yes, you heard right. I changed city and company, and now I am happy.*

*Angel: Great to hear that, did they at least pay you well when you left?*

*CEO (D1): Oh...you know...I had family duties...many issues...at that point of life crisis...the best way to recover was to keep moving. I did not really care about money...I had the time to reorganize myself and find a new way to improve my life. It was good for me to keep myself busy!*

*Angel: Well, that's life!*

*CEO (D1): True, very true...that's already an old story now! Well it was great to see you!*

*[The CEO, after walking away from Angel said to the observer: Would you ever ask such an intrusive question?! My goodness, people are so mean...]*

Interestingly, catching up can also fail when the initiator knows much more about the dormancy period than expected. For example, Felix had lost his wife three years earlier—after his tie to the Sales Manager at D4 had already become dormant—yet the Sales Manager seemed to know more than Felix expected, and Felix was overwhelmed by the Sales Manager’s knowing so much detail about Felix’s life.

*Sales Manager (D4): So how is life without Clarissa, how long since her death? Three years?*

*Felix: Oh how do you know about Clarissa? Have you ever met my wife?*

*Sales Manager (D4): Once in a workshop, but I heard from John that she was sick and then suddenly passed away from cancer, is that right?*

*Felix: Well...yes, that's right...it was three years ago. Sorry, but now I have to go.*

Also in this case, the overly intimate conversation was not consistent with the level of intimacy related to the tie, so Felix felt that the Sales Manager was too intrusive with his question. This led Felix to end the conversation, preventing the Sales Manager from formulating any request or restoring any exchange in the relationship. Therefore, the reconnection was not established.

We also observed that when informants skipped catching up altogether—moving directly from meeting each other (or minor small talk) to formulating a request right away—then the reconnection went poorly and was perceived as purely instrumental. This happened, for example, with an Innovation Manager (W1) who, after having met a dormant contact, jumped straight into a request for advice, causing suspicion and a lack of trust by the target, who asked why the information was relevant.

In sum, talking about personal and professional matters allows people to create a feeling of goodwill (i.e., relational trust) that makes it easier to achieve a productive reconnection. Showing some level of care, particularly in relation to not only their professional but also personal life, enhances reciprocal trust. As one informant noted:

*First, when you reconnect with people, you try to create a feeling of goodwill and then you talk about the problem. Since your problem is not his problem, instead his family and your family are our problems, first we talk about the family, then you start discussing work. (Sales Manager A, W1)*

Conversely, if catching up is done poorly or not at all, then relational trust is not refreshed and the reconnection can fail, as we heard and observed on several occasions.

***Element 3: Perceiving the tie similarly.*** In addition to remembering and catching up, we identified a third key element driving the success or failure of a reconnection attempt: the extent to which the parties see themselves as having a similar perception of the tie at the present time. Technically, what we observed or heard was the individual’s own perception of whether or not there was a similar perception

of the current tie between the reconnection initiator and target. We refer to this as ‘perceiving the tie similarly’ (even if only one party felt this way). In other words, when one or both parties do not perceive the tie similarly, it is much more difficult to reconnect successfully. TDNI managers referred to their perception of the relationship with the other individual shaped by the preserved memories of when the tie was active. Our analysis led us to identify three main aspects of this perception that help refresh the tie: *conflict of interest*, *tie strength*, and *relative status/prestige*. In particular, we noticed that reconnection attempts often did not go well if the two people involved did not share the same view of whether or not they were competitors, of how strong vs weak their tie was, or of whether one person’s professional status was lower, equal, or higher than the other’s. If such perceptions are not similar, then the two sides are less likely to trust each other, thereby hampering the reconnection. In contrast, agreeing—even implicitly—on these perceptions smooths the way for a more successful reconnection.

As one informant explicitly noted, if the mobilization element of perceiving the tie similarly in terms of *conflict of interest* (3.1 in Figure 1) is not met—e.g., collaboration back when the tie was active involved conflicts of interest (3.1a in Figure 1)—then the reconnection process might not even begin:

*In the NewPattern project, one of our partners is the competitor of a business of our holding company; therefore, when we did some tests, our board did not allow me to invite these collaborators to visit us. The board did not like that competitors observed pieces of machinery being installed in our plant. After some years, I had an issue to solve with a chemical in our process. Although I created a good relationship with him and I knew he was leading an innovative project on new finishing solutions, I could not call him because we are in competition in that market. (CEO, D4)*

However, the conditions for conflict of interest may change over the dormancy period and be revealed during the reconnection process (3.1b in Figure 1), as reported by a manager targeted for a reconnection.

*Before going into details with a supplier or partner, I need to be sure that this guy will go out without saying a word about our discussion to anyone else, nor anyone working with us. One day I was contacted by a former colleague and friend with whom I worked pleasantly in the past. He needed to develop a new product, but I knew that in a few years’ time, my company would enter that market, becoming a competitor. Therefore, I clarified the situation and said, “I cannot help you because the commercial strategies of our companies would clash.” He said, “Thank you anyway I appreciate your frankness.” (R&D Manager, W4)*

In some cases, it was possible to reconnect successfully and then collaborate even with competitors (e.g., in areas that did not involve confidential information, such as promoting the district to external stakeholders), but only if both parties shared the perception that they were competitors and thus had to treat each other accordingly.

*Tie strength* also emerged as an aspect of perception where misalignment may constitute an obstacle

to the reconnection process (3.2 in Figure 1). When both individuals have good memories of a strong relationship in the past (3.2a in Figure 1), then reconnection is eased by relying on and refreshing their trust, as both parties are on the same page about still having a strong tie (3.2b in Figure 1):

*I have some close colleagues who I know will always be friends even if we don't hear from each other for a long time. (President, W2)*

*He is the owner of our key supplier, we started collaborating when we were both young and started in the companies. Years ago, we directly collaborated for a study on raw materials, he came to us for some months and we worked together. I am not a stranger to him. So, when we reconnected after few years, we had some level of mutual trust, he believes in me. When we met again after a few years, we made many jokes about our gray hair. We were both very relaxed and informal, updating each other about our personal and professional lives, and this eased the beginning of our new collaboration. (Supply Chain Manager, W1)*

Even with weak ties, agreeing that it is in fact a weak tie (and remains so) is sufficient for a reconnection to proceed. As Sales Manager B (W1) recounted:

*I was in Israel to visit some clients and I did not have an appointment with Frush. However, when I passed by their headquarters, I decided to stop and see whether the President was there. Although we met many times at exhibitions he had never been a client, so the connection between us was not strong. However, when I arrived, there he was at the door, recognized me, and surprised by my visit, invited me out for lunch. It was not like visiting an old friend, but we already had some background that was the basis for our conversation when asking him to test some of our new products and start a collaboration.*

Finally, a third aspect that emerged as relevant in the reconnection process is the perception of *relative status/prestige* (3.3 in Figure 1). TDNI managers reported that when they reconnected a dormant tie, they took into account whether they were peers, a former boss, employees, or external to their organization covering institutional roles (3.3a in Figure 1). In cases when reconnection was initiated, it was not actually higher vs lower status that shaped the reconnection, but how similar (vs not) the perception of their relative status was. For example:

*During my experience as president of the XYZ European network, I met many Turkish entrepreneurs. My compatibility with them, since we share the same issues as entrepreneurs, allowed our relationships to endure even if I am not in charge anymore. After a few years, we decided to set up a new plant abroad, and I called them for a suggestion. It was easy. (W2, CEO)*

In this case, the perceived relative status of the parties actually shifted over time, but this was mutually recognized and perceived similarly, thus not a barrier to reconnecting (3.3b in Figure 1). In contrast, when the R&D manager of W1 had to call his former employee, Brian, who three years earlier left on good terms to work for another business and is now CEO of that company, reconnection was hampered by the fact that the R&D manager treated Brian as if he were still his employee, without acknowledging Brian's status progression.

*We have to fine-tune some recipes, and I had to contact our former employees, now CEO of a small but fast-*

*growing chemical company. I had a goal and tried to use my contacts to fulfill it, although we had not been in contact for a few years. When I called him and asked for help, he told me he no longer deals with such technicalities since he now has to take more important decisions, and he kept the conversation very brief before hanging up. Reflecting on that conversation, maybe I was too bossy in asking for help, expecting that he owed me something. Maybe he felt like I was treating him as my employee instead of the CEO of an important company. (R&D Manager, W1)*

We noted that in most cases, the view of the tie back when it was active (at time  $t-1$ )—in terms of conflict of interest, tie strength, and relative status/prestige—was relevant to reconnection success primarily in terms of how this informed people’s view of the tie currently (at time  $t$ ). This was especially the case for current perceptions of conflict of interest and relative status/prestige, as these sometimes changed and evolved during the dormancy period. However, we noted more stability in terms of the perception of tie strength currently vs in the past. Ultimately, what seems to matter most for reconnection success is that the two sides are on the same page in their views of their tie now (i.e., at time  $t$  in Figure 2).

Underlying this third element of shared tie perception is again the role of refreshed mutual trust in smoothing the reconnection. For example, one interviewee reported:

*In reconnecting, I try to advance my interests but never putting the other on the spot and always finding a balance. We set a new stage for mutual trust by understanding how we feel about our relationship and laying the foundations for considering a new collaboration. (Supply Chain Manager, W1)*

Hence, ensuring that both sides perceive the tie similarly is a way to show they care about the other person and their interests, i.e., this builds relational trust. As a result, they are more willing to mobilize resources for the reconnected tie. Conversely, the lack of a similar tie perception becomes almost a deal breaker, making the other seem less trustworthy and thereby undermining the reconnection.

**Contextual circumstances.** Across the three elements, we observed that having a more embedded context sometimes makes it easier to reconnect ties. This emerged especially when reconnection conversations referred to either the people or organizations that both individuals have in common. This empirical evidence is consistent with the existing constructs of structural embeddedness (having people in common, e.g., Krackhardt 1999, Tortoriello and Krackhardt 2010) and shared social foci (organizational affiliation, e.g., Qin and Estrin 2015, Van Tubergen and Volker 2015). We observed that refreshing the embeddedness of the tie sometimes makes it easier to refresh the tie itself.

In terms of structural embeddedness, we observed people mentioning experiences they had with common contacts in the past (close to our element of remembering but referring to a third party), as the two observations below exemplify:



*Sales Manager B (W1): Were you there in the period when Bob was CEO?*

*Julie: Of course, I travelled with him to India to develop the new plant.*

*Sales Manager B (W1): He was such a character...I learned more from him than at uni about how to manage customer relationships and conduct negotiation. Assisting him in meetings with clients was a learning journey.*

*Julie: Yes, I know what you mean. He was one of a kind.*

*Mark: I was sharing the office with Mat in those days, do you remember him?*

*Innovation Manager (W2): Not sure, what was he responsible for?*

*Mark: He was the area manager for South America.*

*Innovation Manager (W2): Oh yes, sure, he was the tall blond guy, right?*

*Mark: Right! We'd worked together for 3 years.*

*Innovation Manager (W2): I see, he was close to my officemate Julia. We had lunch together from time to time.*

*Mark: Yes, Anna was hand in glove with Mat.*

Moreover, third-party connections may have developed during the period of dormancy and so reconnection also becomes an opportunity to catch up:

*Sales Manager (W3): So you now live in Farcity, I know a couple of people from that region. One of my schoolmates was from there I think, he is now a well-known entrepreneur, owner of a clothing manufacturing company, Allan Gordon.*

*Oscar: Sure I know him! Allan is a big name in the region, I met him at the local business association meeting and we are now working together on a project. Didn't know you were connected.*

*Sales Manager (W3): Ahaha...it is such a small world! Allan is the same age as me, and when I was a child, we use to attend the same middle school in my hometown close to Farcity.*

This is close to our earlier discussion of catching up by summoning up contacts in common, but here the effort is not so much in finding out what so-and-so is up to now, but discovering new contacts in common. This helps solidify and embed the reconnected tie more securely.

Similarly, organizational affiliation is adopted as a contextual reference point both for reminiscing and catching up. Reconnecting conversations are filled with the names and anecdotes of organizations (and business associations) that set a common ground for the two individuals as being part of the same clique. For example:

*Brad: Do you remember when we used to have lunch at the canteen of BOOKYX? The food was awful, I think I gained 5 kilos in 2 years back then.*

*Sales Manager C (W1): Yes, it was an experience! I remember the line was always crowded with people wondering how to choose the least bad.*

*Brad: Right! We were always in a rush because of that!*

This is a special kind of reminiscing, as it is not about the tie itself or past experiences with each other. Rather, these are separate experiences but nonetheless experiences in common, embedded in a shared organizational context. Another conversation illustrates this point:

*Sales Manager (D2): In those years the OPO firm was like a gym for training new entrants in the industry.*

*Matt: I agree, people that worked at OPO in those years are now in the top management of the largest*

*European textile businesses.*

*Sales Manager (D2): That's true, but OPO was a context where being a buyer meant marrying the firm.*

*Matt: Yes...not the best work-life balance, but in those days, the market was booming and the rhythm was fast.*

*Sales Manager (D2): Right, very different from what we are living nowadays...look around, there are few people, half of the businesses have failed, and most are now buying from other continents.*

Thus, in addition to the three main elements of successful reconnection, we also find evidence that these elements can sometimes be buttressed by two contextual clues (network and organizational) that help embed the tie in a shared and trusting context. The evidence here is not as strong or consistent as for the three main elements but does at least suggest that such contextual circumstances may help ease the elements of the reconnection process.

### **Summary and Limitations**

Our study of TDNI reveals three key elements that make it easier to refresh dormant ties and access resources, advice, and goodwill (i.e., mobilizing social capital): remembering, catching up, and perceiving the tie similarly. Study 1 suggests that mobilizing a dormant tie's social capital is much more likely when the reconnection occurs via these three elements: bringing the tie from the past into the present (remembering); providing a relevant and appropriate summary of key activities during dormancy (catching up); and ensuring the perception of the tie is seen as consistent (perceiving the tie similarly), thereby establishing a certain basis for trust going forward. In analyzing the evidence, we realized that, independently of whether a tie is strong or weak when active, the three elements clarify that the initiator does not intend to take advantage of the other, i.e., there is relational trust. The three elements thus help mobilize social capital by persuading a target that the initiator can be trusted. Some evidence also suggests that these elements might be enhanced when the individual refers to contextual aspects during reconnection, refreshing their tie's embeddedness in a shared network or organization.

Although the three elements emerged from the grounded experience of people in an overall context where dormant ties are crucial, this initial investigation is subject to a number of limitations. First, TDNI is a sector with substantial network churn, generating a steady stream of dormant ties and also the need for reconnection, whereas other sectors are less cyclical. Second, the cultural setting (Northern Italy) may have influenced the behavior of our informants in managing their relationships. Third, as with most qualitative research, our aim was an analytical rather than statistical generalization to current knowledge

(e.g., Eisenhardt 1991, Yin 2013). To investigate whether our findings can be statistically generalized in another environment, and to more definitively establish cause and effect, we validated the three elements, along with the potentially mediating role of relational trust, in an experiment.

## Study 2

In Study 1, the presence of the three elements induced reconnection targets to share resources with the initiator as a result of relational trust. To confirm these findings and more closely examine the issue of causality—and do so in a different cultural context—we designed an experiment involving U.S. workers on Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), an online marketplace where individuals are paid to participate in studies (Buhrmester et al. 2011, Mason and Suri 2012). In 2019, using the CloudResearch platform (Litman et al. 2017) to identify and access the MTurk sample, we randomly assigned participants to imagine they were the protagonist in a reconnection vignette in a 2 (remembering vs not) x 2 (catching up vs not) x 2 (perceiving the tie similarly vs not) between-subjects design.

### Sample

We took several steps to ensure a high-quality sample, given the limitation that some MTurk workers can be inattentive. For example, we required that participants have a 99% or higher MTurk approval rating. We also began our survey with the selective attrition remedy that Zhou and Fishbach (2016) recommend, explaining that participants should expect to read long passages, and why they should only take the survey if intending to finish, followed by a consent form, demographic questions, the vignette, reading-comprehension checks (which they could retake if wrong) after each of the vignette's four sections, their reactions to the vignette, and an attention check. Each participant received \$1.80 to complete the survey. We received 384 responses: 9 failed to finish, 6 failed the attention check, and 24 failed one or more reading-comprehension questions on the second try. For the remaining 345 participants, median completion time was 10.6 minutes. Using a rule of thumb (suggested by a survey firm) designed to exclude overly rushed—and thus potentially less reliable—participants, we excluded another 14 “speeders” who finished in less than half the median time (i.e., in 5.3 minutes or less). This left 331 participants in the final sample.

Excluded respondents who finished the survey ( $N = 44$ ) did not differ significantly by condition from included participants ( $N = 331$ ):  $\chi^2(3, N = 375) = 1.31, p = .727$ , i.e., there was no selective

attrition by condition. Compared to these excluded participants ( $N = 44$ ), our final sample ( $N = 331$ ) on average has more years in the workforce (17.6 vs. 9.0,  $p < .001$ ), is more female (43% vs 27%,  $p = .047$ ), older (39.3 vs. 34.1 years old,  $p < .001$ ), and works for larger organizations (2.94 vs 2.28 log of the number of people employed by the largest organization ever worked for,  $p = .001$ ). There are no statistically significant differences in terms of education level, English as primary language, being a full- or part-time employee, or the log of the number of people employed by current organization. For the final sample, the median response for the largest organization ever worked for is 800 employees, and most (79%) are part- or full-time employees. In addition, most (80%) of the final sample completed the survey in 7 to 20 minutes ( $M = 12.3$ ,  $SD = 7.2$ , range: 5.4 to 91.4).

### **Experimental Design**

Participants read a vignette (see the Appendix for the verbatim text) about their hypothetical family and work background and then a transcript of a phone conversation between them and Alex, a dormant contact from their prior employer, calling to reconnect. Based on Study 1, we only expected three main effects, but we thought it prudent to check whether the impact of any element depended on any other element (i.e., an interaction effect), so we fully crossed all three elements and randomly assigned participants to read one of eight versions of the (2 x 2 x 2) vignette. In the remembering condition (shown to half our participants), the protagonist remembers and reminisces with Alex. In the non-remembering condition (shown to the other half), Alex unsuccessfully tries to jog the protagonist's memories of shared experiences, per Study 1. The catching-up condition is a conversation about what each of them had been up to in recent years, both professionally and personally. The non-catching-up condition is friendly small talk (about the weather, traffic, and stock market) similar to catching up in terms of length (264 vs 267 words), emotional valence (friendly, agreeable), and commonalities/agreement.<sup>3</sup> For the section on

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<sup>3</sup> We struggled to find a clear or ideal non-catching-up (control) condition. We considered leaving it blank but wanted to avoid conflating the absence of catching up with being brusque or socially awkward. We considered designing an overly intrusive catching-up conversation, or conversely one where the other person remained vague about their past, but these "partial" options would have included some key aspects of catching up, and thus the comparison would not have isolated the main effect. Small talk has the disadvantage that it might seem slightly awkward to some, although we tried to minimize this. It also sets a high bar to overcome in terms of comparison with our main effect (i.e., it is a stronger test), as small talk itself makes people feel friendlier and closer (Methot et al. 2021). Nevertheless, this struck us as the best way to isolate the key aspects of catching up that we observed in Study 1, but also rule out certain alternative explanations (such as friendliness per se). To be realistic, we had

perceiving the tie similarly, we included examples of tie characteristics that could be perceived similarly (main effect) or differently (control) by each party. As expected, participants assigned to perceiving the tie similarly were significantly more likely to indicate later that they and Alex had similar perceptions of their tie strength ( $r = .81$ ), relative status/prestige ( $r = .55$ ), and being competitors ( $r = .46$ ); these perceptions were uncorrelated with the other two elements. After we briefly recapped all three manipulations, Alex then requested a meeting in the next week or two to get advice on a work project related to the participant's area of expertise.

### Measures

Based on three items adapted from Walter et al. (2015), our main outcome is willingness to help ( $\alpha = .92$ ), measured as the participant's intention to go above and beyond in sharing knowledge with the initiator (e.g., "I would answer completely and openly any question Alex asks"; see the Appendix for all verbatim items). As secondary outcome variables, we also looked at how long (in minutes; logged) participants would be willing to meet with the other person in a week or two, as well as the likelihood of agreeing to meet at all (3 new items, e.g., "Realistically, how likely would you be to actually meet with Alex?";  $\alpha = .97$ ). We also investigated, as possible mediator, a three-item measure of relational trust ( $\alpha = .93$ ) adapted from Levin and Cross (2004), focusing on the initiator's perceived benevolence. Our multi-item variables showed good discriminant validity in a confirmatory factor analysis. Specifically, a three-factor model (willingness to help, meeting likelihood, and relational trust) shows good fit indices: RMSEA = 0.035 (below the cutoff of 0.08 and ideally 0.05), CFI = 0.997 (above the cutoff of 0.90), TLI = 0.996 (above the cutoff of 0.90 or 0.95), SRMR = 0.013 (below the cutoff of 0.08 or 0.05). The reliability of these measures is also excellent, with all Cronbach's alphas  $> .90$ .

To obtain a more precise estimate of our effects, we added four covariates to cut down potential noise (Simonsohn et al. 2014) attributable to the comprehension and relatability of the vignette. Specifically, we controlled for participants' education level, work experience, being an employee or not, and whether English is not their primary language, as these variables might affect a participant's ability

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the protagonist at the end of this condition wonder, in a neutral and matter-of-fact way, why there was no catching up, since we were concerned this might not occur to some people reading a vignette. However, we acknowledge this as a limitation, as some participants may not have come to this realization on their own.

to understand and identify with the vignette's protagonist (a software project manager working as a company employee). In any event, all our results remained unchanged without these covariates, with the exception that the impact of catching up on one of the secondary outcomes (proposed meeting length) is marginally rather than fully significant.

## Results

As predicted, all three elements are fully significant for our main outcome variable, willingness to help. In the three-way between-subjects ANCOVA, participants in the remembering condition are more willing to help (estimated marginal mean ( $EMM$ ) = 5.08,  $SE$  = 0.10) than those in the non-remembering condition ( $EMM$  = 4.54,  $SE$  = 0.11,  $F_{1,319} = 12.80$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta_p^2 = .04$ ). In the catching-up condition, participants are more willing to help ( $EMM$  = 5.01,  $SE$  = 0.11) than those in the non-catching-up (i.e., small talk) condition ( $EMM$  = 4.61,  $SE$  = 0.11,  $F_{1,319} = 7.20$ ,  $p = .008$ ;  $\eta_p^2 = .02$ ). In the perceiving-the-tie-similarly condition, participants are more willing to help ( $EMM$  = 5.25,  $SE$  = 0.10) than those in the not-perceiving-the-tie-similarly condition ( $EMM$  = 4.37,  $SE$  = 0.11,  $F_{1,319} = 34.44$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta_p^2 = .10$ ). Based on the partial eta squared ( $\eta_p^2$ ) results, all three effect sizes would be considered either small/medium or medium/large (Cohen 1988). To be thorough, we also checked to see if the three main elements are interdependent in some way (e.g., if not remembering the other person changes the impact of the other two elements) but did not find much evidence of this, as none of the two-way or three-way interaction terms are statistically significant (see Table 2). To visually illustrate the magnitude of the three main effects, we ran a regression with just these three variables and the covariates (see Table 3) and plotted the results (see Figure 3).

[Insert Tables 2-4 and Figure 3 about here]

We ran similar analyses with our two secondary outcome variables: meeting likelihood and length (see Table 2). These yielded similar results, as expected, for the two elements of remembering and perceiving the tie similarly. Interestingly, participants in the catching-up condition are not significantly more likely to agree to meet ( $EMM$  = 4.18,  $SE$  = 0.11) than those not catching up ( $EMM$  = 3.97,  $SE$  = 0.11,  $F_{1,319} = 1.85$ ,  $p = .174$ ;  $\eta_p^2 = .01$ ). However, those in the catching-up condition are willing to spend a little more time meeting with the reconnection initiator ( $EMM$  = 1.61 (equal to 40 minutes),  $SE$  = 0.37) than are those not catching up ( $EMM$  = 1.50 (equal to 32 minutes),  $SE$  = 0.36,  $F_{1,319} = 3.93$ ,

$p = .048$ ;  $\eta_p^2 = .01$ ). These results are consistent with Study 1: people are sometimes willing to meet with a dormant contact even without catching up, but they remain wary and even a little suspicious, i.e., less willing to fully share their knowledge without first experiencing the element of catching up.

Next, we tested whether relational trust mediates our results (see Table 4) using Hayes's (2018) PROCESS macro. As expected, we find that relational trust mediates all three main effects on willingness to help. Specifically, per the special procedure in Hayes (2018:141-145) for a simultaneous mediation model with only one mediator but multiple independent variables, we detect three statistically significant indirect effects via relational trust: for remembering (indirect effect = 0.42; 95% C.I. [0.25, 0.63]), for catching up (indirect effect = 0.20; 95% C.I. [0.04, 0.36]), and for perceiving the tie similarly (indirect effect = 0.48; 95% C.I. [0.31, 0.68]). These results suggest that all three elements make people less wary that the other party may be trying to take advantage of them in some way and, as a result, are more willing to fully help the other party. Relational trust also has significant indirect effects for all three elements on our secondary outcomes (see Table 4), again suggesting that trust is a particularly important underlying mechanism for a successful reconnection process.

### **Discussion**

Reconnecting a dormant tie is an efficient and effective way to access network resources (Levin and Walter 2018, Levin et al. 2011a), but reconnections can and do fail, sometimes dramatically. Our evidence suggests that asking for knowledge or other resources can lead to suboptimal results when the initiator reconnects poorly, ignoring the three key reconnection elements of remembering, catching up, and perceiving the tie similarly. This finding stands in contrast to prior research, which has (perhaps prematurely) reassured reconnection initiators that the process is easy and straightforward (e.g., King and Kovács 2021) and can occur based on “a whim and minimal effort” (Levin et al. 2011b:45). Thus, the anxiety that individuals often feel about the prospect of reconnecting (Yang et al. 2021) may not be totally unwarranted, as we find that people sometimes bungle their attempts at reconnecting a dormant tie, thereby limiting the possibility of mobilizing its social capital. In fact, mobilizing a dormant tie's social capital, i.e., converting it from potential to actual value (Maurer et al. 2011, Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998), occurs best when the reconnecting parties refresh their tie so that they know where they stand with each other in the present moment.

## **An Emerging Framework of the Reconnection Process**

Our study reveals that refreshing a dormant tie encompasses the three mobilization elements of remembering (from time  $t-1$ ), catching up (about time  $t-1$  to  $t$ ), and perceiving the tie similarly (at time  $t$ ), as noted in our emerging framework (see Figure 2). These elements make the mobilization of social capital less likely to fail, thereby avoiding situations such as in our opening quote. Specifically, we find that an individual is more willing to trust and provide a dormant contact with access to resources once the two have recognized and reminisced with each other (remembering), filled each other in on what they have been up to and created common present ground (catching up), and determined that they both view their tie similarly in terms of conflicts of interest, tie strength, relative status/prestige, and so forth (perceiving the tie similarly). We identified these three elements in Study 1, analyzing evidence from observations, interviews, and archival records gathered from reconnections among managers in the North Italian textile district. We then supplemented this analysis with Study 2, a vignette-based experiment with U.S. workers that allowed us to make more definitive claims about causality, validate our three main findings, and confirm relational trust as a mediating mechanism.

The identification of the remembering element is linked to the literature on memory in social networks. The important but imperfect nature of human memory often leads to failures in recalling information about others and past episodes during social interactions (Young et al. 1985). Prior research has shown that forgetting someone's name, face, or actions is a powerful signal that affects interpersonal relationships. Having memory of past social interactions signals something's subjective importance, and such signals shape current and future social interactions (Ray et al. 2019). Our study expands research on network memory (e.g., Ahuja et al. 2012, Soda and Zaheer 2012) by unveiling the importance of remembering in the reconnection process and identifying how recognizing someone and reminiscing together about past shared interactions signals caring (i.e., relational trust) and helps mobilize the dormant tie's social capital.

In unpacking the catching-up element, we show that the reconnection initiator and target pave the way from the past moment of tie activity ( $t-1$ ) to the current one ( $t$ ). As with active ties, this may have a ritualistic function (e.g., "how are you?") that also signals caring. However, there is an instrumental function, too. Reconstructing what happened during the period of dormancy allows people to check if



their mental image of the other person, including trustworthiness, is accurate and up to date. In this way, dormant ties are kind of in-between a new and an active tie: they are like new ties in that effort is needed to get to know the other person now (Levin and Walter 2019) and move the tie to a relational state of activity, but unlike new ties, there are still residual cues of the formerly active relationship, so they do not need to start from scratch. Catching up is the reconnection element that highlights these network dynamics (Clegg et al. 2016), as the dormant tie moves from a sort of hybrid not-new but not-active to becoming active again. With existing active ties, this knowledge of the other person is learned through ongoing interaction. This is important, as it helps people tailor messages and requests for resources (Hirsh et al. 2012). However, this knowledge can become lost or outdated during a tie's dormancy. Catching up thus reestablishes the flow of information in the empty pipe of social structure (Podolny 2001) between the two parties by offering additional data on how each party thinks and reasons (Sytych and Kim 2021), thereby updating their knowledge of the other's experiences, goals, values, and attitudes. In so doing, catching up allows the parties to check if the other person (still) represents a viable tie.

The third reconnection element, perceiving the tie similarly, addresses the recent call by Jacobsen et al. (2022) to better understand the link between perception and networks and to examine the co-evolution of social cognition and social dynamics in networks. Scholars have already examined how a tie is perceived in general (e.g., Casciaro and Lobo 2008) and with respect to conflict of interest (e.g., Moore et al. 2006), tie strength (e.g., Levin and Cross 2004), and relative status/prestige (e.g., Westphal 1999), including for dormant ties (e.g., Walter et al. 2015). Less well understood, however, is the importance of *how similarly* the two parties perceive the tie. We find that, at least for reconnections, perceiving the tie similarly is critical. A key reason may be that being on the same page about the tie helps set the boundaries for what is or is not appropriate when making resource requests. If both parties see the tie similarly, then they can trust that the other will not pressure them into sharing resources they are not comfortable sharing, and so may be more open to a mobilization effort. In contrast, if the two parties are not in agreement about their tie perceptions, they are more likely to be wary and distrustful about any mobilization effort, as they may suspect that the other will try to take advantage of them in some way, such as revealing company secrets to a competitor or not valuing the time of someone with a higher status. Perceiving the tie similarly thus reassures that social capital mobilization efforts will not

be out of bounds or inappropriate for the kind of tie that someone believes they have. There has been some effort in the literature to analyze shared perceptions along these lines, but typically at the team level (e.g., Schulte et al. 2012) rather than the dyadic or tie level, especially in the networks literature with respect to conflict of interest, tie strength, or relative status/prestige. However, given the importance of shared perceptions for refreshing relational trust and ultimately social capital mobilization, we would encourage further research in this area, beyond just for reconnections.

Another underlying part of our framework, as noted, is the mediating role that relational trust plays in linking *each* of these three elements to a successful reconnection. For remembering, it is about not feeling vulnerable to the initiator's actions, based on past memories and shared past experience, and feeling confident that you understand the other person and who they are. For catching up, it is about not feeling suspicious about the time gaps during dormancy. For perceiving the tie similarly, it is about perceiving limited uncertainty and positive expectations about the actions, characteristics, and intentions of the other person. Overall, the elements emerging from our study stimulate relational trust, consistent with a view of trust as "a type of expectation that alleviates the fear that one's exchange partner will act opportunistically" (Bradach and Eccles 1989:104). In this vein, trusted reconnections are much like ties in general, where relational trust is essential for initiating, maintaining, repairing, and elevating work ties (e.g., De Jong et al. 2016, Dirks and Ferrin 2002, Ghosh 2014, Klotz et al. 2013, Kong et al. 2014, Mayer et al. 1995, McAllister 1995, Rousseau et al. 1998, Schaubroeck et al. 2013). Given the uniqueness of dormant ties, our study contributes to the field's understanding of trust dynamics by showing that a reconnection, if properly conducted, allows actors to reinvigorate (refresh) residual trust from the past, enabling social capital mobilization. Thus, our findings on refreshing relational trust respond to recent calls to explore the possibility of trust recalibration over time (Baer et al. 2021).

Taking a step back from our emerging framework of the reconnection process itself, we find suggestive evidence in Study 1 for the role of contextual aspects—in terms of people and organizations the two individuals have in common—as potentially easing the reconnection process. First, in terms of people in common, our evidence resonates with the concept of structural embeddedness (Uzzi 1997) and network closure (Coleman 1988). For remembering and catching up, the initiator and target may discuss a third party, e.g., reminisce about situations that involved that person or catch up about that

person's life or current state. This is consistent with the concept of triadic closure, i.e., the tendency to form and maintain ties among "friends of friends," thereby creating tight-knit circles or cliques (Simmel 1950). Here, though, the network-closure principle is invoked verbally but not actually implemented with interaction, as the third party is not present. By referring to the third party they have in common, the two reconnecting individuals refresh the dormant tie. Second, in terms of organizations in common, our analysis shows that shared affiliations—such as firms, industry associations, or schools (Walsh et al. 2018)—engender a sense of belonging to a broader frame that anchors the reconnection to contexts where the tie was active. The evidence of these two contextual aspects, although not as strong as for the rest of our framework, nonetheless suggests that refreshing a tie's embeddedness makes it easier to refresh the tie itself. Put differently, the embeddedness of the context often seems to go dormant, too, and so a little "embeddedness refreshing" also seems to help enhance social capital mobilization.

### **Contributions and Theoretical Implications**

The literature has identified two views of tie maintenance: the activity-based perspective assumes that extracting benefits from a relationship requires keeping it active and nurturing it over time (e.g., Walsh et al. 2018); and conversely, the memory-based perspective (Levin and Walter 2018) considers that once a relationship has been created it remains in the memory of the individuals who experienced it and therefore maintaining the tie is not required to extract related benefits, i.e., it can lie dormant until needed. Our results are consistent with the memory-based view, as we find that ties can lie dormant for years before being reconnected, and, despite the elapsed time, allow access to the social capital needed (Levin et al. 2011a). However, we enrich this view, as we find that to access the social capital, actors need to refresh the tie, enacting a reconnection process that creates a sense of relational trust between the parties—an act more in keeping with the activity-based view. As such, our findings integrate these two perspectives. First, we find that new activity is necessary to ascertain the relational trust needed to mobilize a dormant tie's social capital, i.e., some mobilization of refreshing the tie is needed. It is not enough to simply show up and ask for resources, even if the potential for receiving assistance is present. Converting potential into actual social capital requires actively refreshing the dormant tie and is not merely a consequence of long-ago activity. Second, successful reconnections may enhance mobilization not just in the short term but also in the long term. Even if not required (Levin et al. 2011a), tie

maintenance through sporadic reconnection seems to enhance remembering the past, getting more up to date about what the other has done, and even helping to align perceptions of the tie. In other words, by refreshing a tie from time to time, individuals may strengthen the elements that will eventually be needed to mobilize the tie's social capital down the road. This suggests that efforts to integrate the activity- and memory-based views of tie maintenance may be key to understanding the dynamic nature of network ties (e.g., Jacobsen et al. 2022).

Our study also addresses calls for more investigation of relational events as critical components of network dynamics (Chen et al. 2022). Our theoretical development helps explain the mechanisms that link relational events (e.g., A and B meet for lunch) to relational states (e.g., A and B are friends). Chen et al. (2022) argue that dormant ties are relatively stable relationships in terms of relational state, but with declined frequency in relational events. We elaborate on this idea by demonstrating that to successfully transition a tie from dormant to active, both parties need to recognize where they stand with each other, ensuring a shared interpretation of the current state of the tie. The relational events of reconnection include a stream of actions that help individuals refresh their relational trust and interpret the current state of the relationship so that if such interpretation is shared, then social capital mobilization can proceed. In so doing, we extend current research on network activation, considered an intermediate step for resource mobilization (Nai et al. 2022).

One area we did not examine directly but might be fruitful for future research is networking preparation prior to a reconnection. We mainly investigated intentional reconnections, where the initiator has some time to think about and prepare for the potential reconnection. Such preparation takes place during the search/selection phase, which is outside the scope of our study of the interaction phase. Nevertheless, prior research has shown that people in need of resources will cognitively scan their network of contacts to identify who can provide access to such resources (Smith et al. 2020), for instance, studies on transactive memory systems (e.g., Argote et al. 2018) and dormant ties (e.g., Walter et al. 2015). Thus, we suspect that the initiator of an intentional reconnection, when engaging in search and selection to identify a reconnection target, also prepares for the interaction through a "pre-reconnection" mental exercise that includes remembering what happened in the relationship in the past, searching for information about the target through other connections and/or social media (Ramirez et al.

2017) to catch up on what the target has done during tie dormancy, and reflecting upon where the relationship with the target stands. Thus, the two individuals may approach the reconnection with an asymmetric “tie freshness,” at least initially. This perspective is consistent with what Shea et al. (2019) observe in network activation. Such pre-reconnection cognitive activation would presumably prepare the initiator—by thinking about the three reconnection elements during the search/selection phase, even if briefly—to enter the interaction phase with a fresher perspective of the dormant tie. This in turn might allow the initiator to better solicit the needed resources from the target by signaling memory and care.

Although most of the reconnections in our study were fully intentional, at least on the part of the initiator, we observed some that seemed more unintentional or serendipitous, such as at industry exhibitions. With this in mind, we looked at our data to see if there was a difference in the reconnection process between the recalled vs observed episodes, but found no such differences in terms of the three reconnection elements. However, the episodes we observed at exhibitions took place in an environment where networking was expected and often one of the goals of participants. Thus, we may not have observed completely unintentional reconnections, such as people randomly bumping into each other on the street. If we were to speculate, we suspect that such completely unintentional reconnections would be similar to intentional (and semi-intentional) reconnections in that they would still need to refresh the tie if any social capital were to be mobilized (assuming this was a spontaneous goal in that situation). Thus, we expect that all three reconnection elements are important here too. However, in this case, since *neither* party has done any networking preparation—such as thinking through what to recall about the past, what to say about themselves, or how to think about the tie—it might be harder or require more effort to refresh the tie and relational trust. Conversely, if *both* parties have had a chance to do this networking preparation during the search/selection process, as could occur with an asynchronous reconnection (e.g., initiated via email), then this may result in fewer missteps during the reconnection process and thus a better chance of successfully refreshing the dormant tie. Although we did not study asynchronous reconnection, future research could examine this process, as it essentially postpones the interaction phase by forcing the initiator to wait for the target to respond, during which time the target can potentially prepare for a reconnection, perhaps enhancing any subsequent refreshing of the tie.

In reflecting on the idea of refreshing a tie—its three elements, relational trust, and maybe even the

surrounding context—we realized that this is a distinctive networking strategy or phenomenon. Specifically, we argue that “network refreshing” is a third type of networking effort that actors might adopt to obtain resources from others, an effort that is complementary to network broadening (reaching out to new people) and network deepening (strengthening existing ties), as illustrated in Vissa (2012). This network-refreshing approach may be unique to reconnections, but we wonder if it might also apply to other situations or types of ties that future research could explore. For example, network refreshing resonates with interaction ritual theory, which emphasizes how people’s actions when interacting lead to a common focus (e.g., Collins 2004, Goffman 1967). While our study mostly examines the cognitive and behavioral aspects of such interactions, interaction ritual theory also considers emotional aspects. By embracing this theory, future research could delve deeper into the emotional aspects of reconnection. Interestingly, Collins (2004) underlines that intensively shared emotions experienced in the past are reduced to memories if not renewed in subsequent rituals. It would be interesting to examine whether individuals who shared intensive emotional experiences reconnect differently, and whether this influences the mobilization of social capital. Such theoretical perspectives could also help analyze reconnection patterns over time, as “refusal of a request for assistance becomes a delicate matter, potentially destructive of the asker’s face” (Goffman 1967:44), thereby creating negative affect that could hamper future reconnections (e.g., Casciaro and Lobo 2008). In this vein—and given the importance of relational trust as an underlying mechanism in the reconnection process—future research might also look for additional “trust builders” (Abrams et al. 2003) that could enhance the impact of the three reconnection elements identified here.

Finally, in line with the recent debate on network agency and agentic network change (Gulati and Srivastava 2014, Hallen et al. 2020, Tasselli and Kilduff 2021), we contend that people and not networks are the sources of action (Burt 2012). As such, we help bring the individual back into the analysis of social networks, examining the interplay and dynamics of individual perceptions of others’ actions as drivers of social capital mobilization (Bensaou et al. 2014), which is deeply shaped by people’s minds (Smith et al. 2020). Recent studies have highlighted the importance of misaligned network perceptions and the need to synchronize different perceptions to convert potential into actual social capital (Jacobsen et al. 2022, Tasselli and Kilduff 2021). Building on this idea, our results emphasize that the individual’s

actions, cognitions, and perceptions reveal not only how agentic individuals with diverse knowledge may try to mobilize needed social capital, but also how not only the reconnection initiators but also the targets act as agents, with their willingness to help (or not). Therefore, we shed light on relational agency that is dyadic interdependent wherein a person's ability to benefit from their social network requires not only cognitively activating the network by recalling ties (Smith et al. 2020), but also co-constructing actions, cognitions, and trust to mobilize the right social capital at the right time. We interpret these mechanisms as “negotiated agency” whereby two actors co-construct a reciprocal understanding, and their sequential actions ultimately lead to the mobilization (or not) of social capital depending on the interpretive act the two actors enact by scrutinizing their interactions. In so doing, and by studying relationships such as dormant ties that explicitly embody temporal characteristics, we recognize and elaborate on the temporally embedded nature of human agency, as informed by the past and oriented toward the future (Chen et al. 2022).

### **Limitations**

In addition to the limitations mentioned earlier, we note that our research overall could have been deeper or broader. By deeper we mean that although we studied the behavioral and cognitive dynamics of the reconnection process, we did not examine the sub-micro (“nano”) processes that may also be worth studying. For example, future research might look at the rhetoric and discourse of a reconnection, such as the specific wording that reconnection initiators and targets use, including metaphors, narrative structure, and so forth. This could be fruitful, as the timing and the way requests are presented can affect social capital mobilization (Hallen and Eisenhardt 2012), e.g., phrasing a referral request using reciprocity is preferred to active-persuasion tactics (Nai et al. 2022). Discourse analysis of ethnographic data based on observation or archival data, such as email exchanges, might uncover additional tactics across the three reconnection elements that help refresh the tie and mobilize relevant resources. Such analyses might also help to more fully distinguish among the three mobilization elements. For example, some of the failures in catching up involved discussing information deemed too personal for the type of tie. In other words, one way catching up can go wrong is if it violates a similar perception of the tie. For conceptual clarity, we have treated these three elements as separate—and empirically, they turned out in Study 2 to be additive, not multiplicative, in their impact on social capital mobilization. Still, future

research might use content analysis or other techniques to examine ways in which these three elements may sometimes interrelate. In addition, future studies could conduct fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) (e.g., Fiss 2011) to investigate the most efficient or successful patterns—temporal, geographic, or otherwise—of resource mobilization. For instance, in Study 1 we relied on geographically close firms, yet such proximity might influence network dynamics (Hallen et al. 2020). Hence, future research might examine more physically dispersed settings. Scholars could also investigate how different institutional and cultural backgrounds (Boase et al. 2015) and societal norms influence the process of mobilizing network ties and soliciting resources (Kim et al. 2006, Kim et al. 2008, Lim et al. 2020).

Second, our research could have been broader by looking not just at the reconnection process but a tie's entire life cycle (Levin et al. 2011a). Such research on the broader temporal span of a tie might involve multiple phases, such as tie formation, tie activity, the genesis of tie dormancy, search/selection before reconnection, and the reconnection process itself, as well as following up months or years after a reconnection. Indeed, there may be an interesting overlap or interaction among these phases worth exploring, such as the downstream effects of networking preparation during the search/selection phase of a reconnection. Another way in which our research could have been broader would be to consider the social and organizational embeddedness as contextual elements more formally and throughout a tie's life cycle. For instance, the genesis of a tie could be a third party (i.e., a network broker) who refers one individual to another (e.g., Kwon et al. 2020, Obstfeld 2005), but the two individuals then let their tie become dormant. Future research might ask: How important is the broker's continued connection to the two parties for a reconnection to occur in case of need? Similarly, for the organizational context, sharing the same affiliation can enable the creation of ties that then fall dormant (e.g., due to moving or retiring). Future research could examine if reconnections encouraged by such organizations—e.g., holding reunions of former employees or members—are less vs more successful than reconnections initiated solely by one of the two individuals. Broadening the scope in such ways would allow better exploration of the role of contextual elements in the network dynamics of dormant ties.

### **Conclusion**

In sum, by delving into the reconnection of dormant ties through an inductive study and an experiment,



we identify three key elements (remembering, catching up, and perceiving the tie similarly) that, when absent, can lead to failed attempts to reconnect. In so doing we contribute to current debates on network dynamics, cognition, and agency.

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**Table 1.** Data Sources (Study 1)

<b>Interviewee, number of interviews</b>	<b>Firm</b>	<b>Turnover 2014*</b>	<b>Production stages</b>	<b>Main products</b>
CEO, 2 Managing Director, 2 Innovation Manager, 3 (BA) Sales Manager A, 2 Sales Manager B, 1 Sales Manager C, 1 Operations Manager, 1 Product Manager, 1	W1	30-50	Yarning, weaving	Flax yarn
CEO, 3 (L) President, 1 (BA) Managing Director, 1 Sales Manager, 1 Project Manager, 2 Innovation Manager, 2	W2	70-100	Yarning, weaving, dyeing, finishing, sewing	Soft furnishing fabrics
President, 1 (BA) General Manager, 1 Marketing Manager, 1 Sales Manager, 1 Innovation Manager 1 Product Manager, 1 Quality Manager, 1	W3	>100	Growing, yarning, weaving, dyeing	Shirt fabrics
Marketing Manager, 1 R&D Manager, 1 (BA)	W4	70-100	Weaving, dyeing, finishing	Fabrics for interior and exterior furnishing
Vice President, 1 (BA)	W5	70-100	Weaving, knitting, dyeing	Sportswear, industrial applications
CEO and President, 2 (BA) Product Manager, 1	C1	20-30	Cutting, Sewing	Work-wear
President, 1 (BA) Sales Manager, 1	C2	10-20	Cutting, Sewing	Sportswear, Outdoor clothing
CEO, 1 (L) Marketing Manager, 1 R&D Manager, 1	C3	10-20	Cutting, sewing, printing	Sportswear
CEO, 2 (BA)	C4	10-20	Cutting, sewing, retailing	Underwear, Home-wear
CEO, 1 (BA)	C5	< 10	Cutting, sewing, retailing	Clothes
CEO, 2 (BA)	C6	<10	Cutting, sewing, retailing	Underwear
CEO, 1 Managing Director, 1	D1	30-50	Printing, finishing	Under contract
CEO, 1 (BA) Sales Manager, 1	D2	10-20	Dyeing, finishing	Under contract
CEO, 1 Accounting Manager, 1	D3	<10	Printing, finishing	Advertising banners
Managing Director, 1 (BA) Sales Manager, 1	D4	<10	Dyeing, finishing	Under contract
President, 2 (L)	D5	<10	Dyeing, finishing	Under contract

*Continued on next page*

**Table 1 ... cont.**

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Institution</b>	<b>Role, # interviews</b>	
I1	University	Professor – In charge of the textile-chemical research laboratory, 2	
I2	University	Professor – In charge of the textile-mechanical research laboratory, 1	
I3	International bank (district branch)	Managing Director, 2	
I4	Technical textile business association	President, 1	
<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Supplier's core business</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Role, # interviews</b>
S1**	Flax grower	Belgium	CEO, 2 Sales manager, 2
S2***	Flax grower	France	Former CEO, 2
S3	Cotton grower	Egypt	CEO, 1
S4	Textile Machinery designer	Italy	Sales Manager, 1
S5	Textile Machinery designer	Italy	Marketing Manager, 1

*Note.* \* million euro, (BA) business association representative, (L) leading business association role, \*\* interview conducted via Skype in English, \*\*\* interview conducted in French.

**Table 2.** Three-way ANCOVAs of Reconnection Elements (Study 2)

Dependent Variables =	Main Outcome			Secondary Outcomes					
	Willingness to Help			Meeting Likelihood			Proposed Meeting Length		
Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	$\eta_p^2$	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	$\eta_p^2$	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	$\eta_p^2$
(1) Remembering (vs not)	1	12.80***	.04	1	41.74***	.12	1	12.16***	.04
(2) Catching up (vs not)	1	7.20**	.02	1	1.85	.01	1	3.93*	.01
(3) Perceiving the tie similarly (vs not)	1	34.44***	.10	1	87.86***	.22	1	27.61***	.08
(1) x (2) (interaction)	1	1.76	.01	1	0.05	.00	1	0.00	.00
(1) x (3) (interaction)	1	2.47	.01	1	2.69	.01	1	0.16	.00
(2) x (3) (interaction)	1	0.24	.00	1	0.21	.00	1	1.44	.00
(1) x (2) x (3) (interaction)	1	0.79	.00	1	0.49	.00	1	1.11	.00
Error	319			319			319		

*Notes.* All analyses control for the four comprehension and reliability covariates (English not primary language, education level, work experience, employee). \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; †  $p < .10$ .

**Table 3.** Regression Results of Reconnection Elements (Study 2)

Dependent Variables =	Main Outcome		Secondary Outcomes			
	Willingness to Help		Meeting Likelihood		Proposed Meeting Length	
Constant	4.02 <sup>***</sup>	(1.09)	3.25 <sup>**</sup>	(1.12)	1.54 <sup>***</sup>	(0.38)
English not primary language	0.20	(0.98)	0.13	(1.01)	-0.08	(0.34)
Education level	0.07	(0.09)	0.01	(0.09)	0.02	(0.03)
Work experience	-0.68 <sup>**</sup>	(0.23)	-0.66 <sup>**</sup>	(0.23)	-0.16 <sup>*</sup>	(0.08)
Employee	0.23	(0.18)	0.09	(0.19)	-0.10	(0.06)
(1) Remembering (vs not)	0.56 <sup>***</sup>	(0.15)	1.01 <sup>***</sup>	(0.15)	0.18 <sup>***</sup>	(0.05)
(2) Catching up (vs not)	0.41 <sup>**</sup>	(0.15)	0.20	(0.15)	0.11 <sup>*</sup>	(0.05)
(3) Perceiving the tie similarly (vs not)	0.89 <sup>***</sup>	(0.15)	1.47 <sup>***</sup>	(0.15)	0.27 <sup>***</sup>	(0.05)
	$R^2 =$	.161 <sup>***</sup>		.287 <sup>***</sup>		.122 <sup>***</sup>
	Adjusted- $R^2 =$	.143		.272		.103

Notes. Unstandardized coefficients shown, with standard errors in parentheses, based on ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models.  $N = 331$ . <sup>\*\*\*</sup> $p < .001$ ; <sup>\*\*</sup> $p < .01$ ; <sup>\*</sup> $p < .05$ ; <sup>†</sup> $p < .10$ .

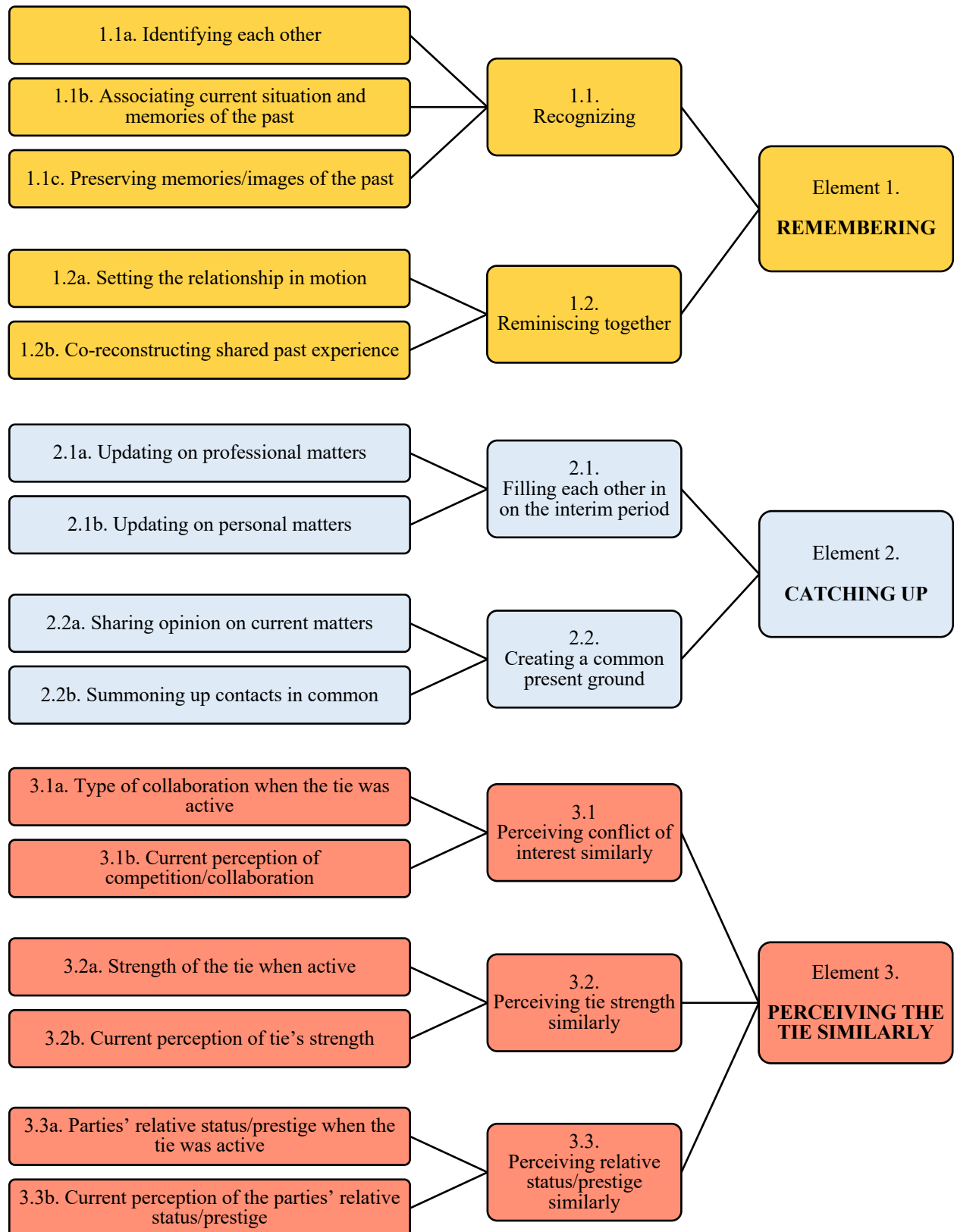
**Table 4.** Indirect Effects via Relational Trust (Study 2)

Dependent Variables =	Main Outcome		Secondary Outcomes	
	Willingness to Help		Proposed Meeting Length	
	Indirect Effect (via relational trust) [LLCI, ULCI]	Indirect Effect (via relational trust) [LLCI, ULCI]	Indirect Effect (via relational trust) [LLCI, ULCI]	Indirect Effect (via relational trust) [LLCI, ULCI]
(1) Remembering (vs not)	0.42 [0.25, 0.63]	0.42 [0.26, 0.61]	0.09 [0.05, 0.14]	
(2) Catching up (vs not)	0.20 [0.04, 0.36]	0.20 [0.04, 0.36]	0.04 [0.01, 0.08]	
(3) Perceiving the tie similarly (vs not)	0.48 [0.31, 0.68]	0.48 [0.31, 0.69]	0.10 [0.06, 0.15]	

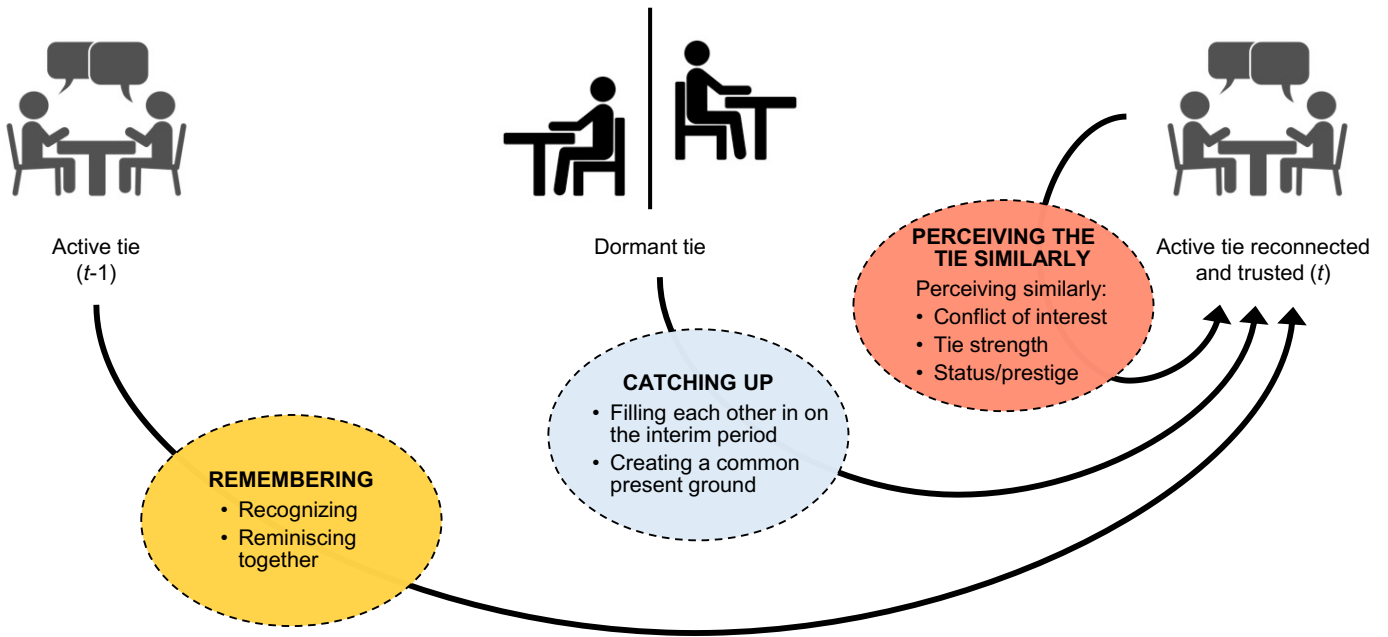
Notes. Bold indicates a statistically significant effect. Unstandardized estimates shown. LLCI = lower level of 95% confidence interval; ULCI = upper level of 95%. All analyses control for the other two between-subject factors (elements) and for the four comprehension and relatability covariates.  $N = 331$ .



**Figure 1.** Data Structure (Study 1)

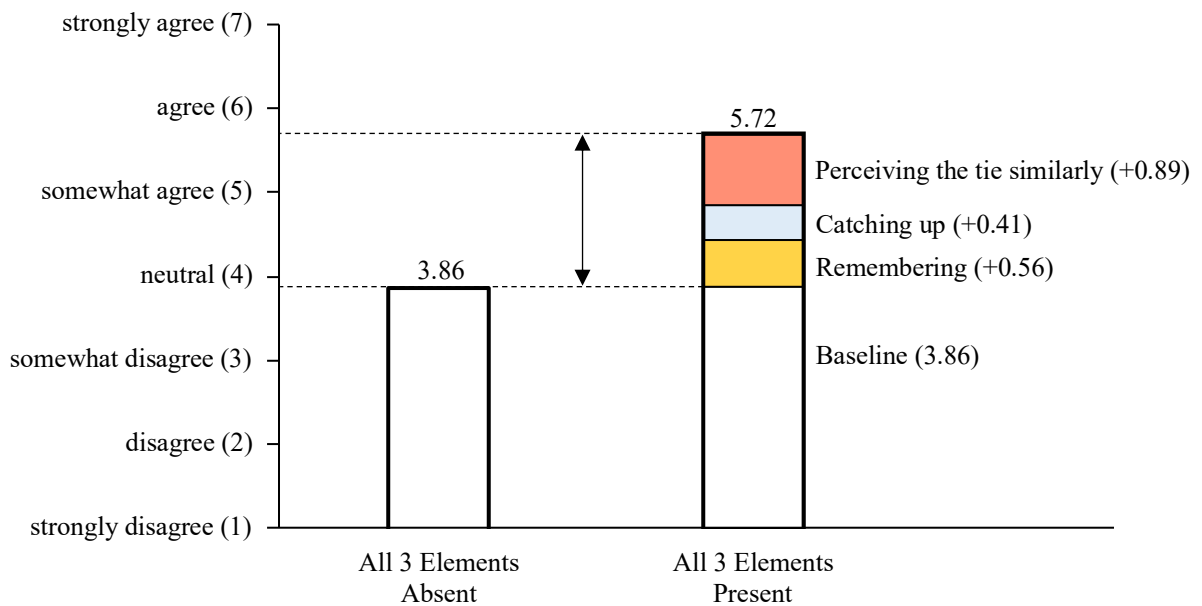


**Figure 2.** The Three Core Elements of a Successful Dormant-Tie Reconnection Process (Study 1)



*Note.* All three elements occur (or not) at time  $t$ , however, remembering is focused on time  $t-1$ , catching up is focused on the key events between  $t-1$  and  $t$ , and perceiving the tie similarly is focused on time  $t$ .

**Figure 3.** Main Effects of the Three Reconnection Elements on Willingness to Help (Study 2)



*Notes.* Mean willingness to help (e.g., “I would answer completely and openly any question Alex asks”). Results are based on the regression results in Table 3. The baseline corresponds to the regression constant plus the four comprehension and reliability covariates set at their mean values, i.e., when none of the three elements are present.  $N = 331$ .

## Appendix. Vignette and Survey Questions (Study 2)

Read the following scenario carefully. Be prepared to answer questions about this scenario, to make sure that you have read it thoroughly and paid attention.

You will also be asked how you think you would realistically react in this situation. Please imagine that you yourself are confronting the exact situation described.

### *[Introduction]*

For the past five years, you have been working full time as a software project manager at XYZ Corp, a technology company. As project manager, you oversee a half-dozen software coders working to maintain the technical parts of XYZ's news and entertainment website. Before getting hired as a project manager at XYZ, you worked at another company, RunCorp, where you were an assistant project manager. You and your spouse are raising your two school-age girls. You like your job maintaining the website at XYZ. It is challenging: sometimes stressful with deadlines, but also rewarding.

*Please select the correct answer:*

I used to work at RunCorp until about five years ago. Now I'm a project manager at XYZ. (Yes, I agree; No, I don't agree; This topic has not been addressed so far) [Of the 331 participants in the final sample, 95% were correct on the first try, and 5% on the second try.]

### *[Element 1: (a) remembering / (b) not remembering]*

*(You are sitting in your office at XYZ when your phone rings. You answer it.)*

**You: Hello?**

Alex: Hey, this is Alex M who used to work at RunCorp. How are you?

**You: Fine, how are you?**

Alex: What's it been, five years?

**You: [Must be. Let's see, I left RunCorp to come to XYZ about five years ago, so, yeah, about five years, I guess.] / [I'm sorry, could you remind me, did we work on any projects together at RunCorp?]**

Alex: [I remember working together on a couple big projects with you when we were at RunCorp together.] / [Oh, definitely. Before you left RunCorp about five years ago, we worked together there. I remember working together on a couple big projects with you.]

*(You [totally / don't] remember Alex, so out of curiosity and nostalgia for RunCorp, while Alex talks, you pull up on your computer an old RunCorp employee directory, which includes Alex's photo.)*

**You: [That's right, exactly.] / [Huh. I guess my RunCorp memory's a little fuzzy.]**

Alex: Do you remember that project where we had to work until 1:00 in the morning for a week, just to meet the deadline, and then we were all so tired we all started wearing silly hats, just to stay sane?

**You: [Totally. You got to wear a top hat. How could I forget that.] / [Sorry, that doesn't ring a bell. I must have blocked it out.]**

Alex: We had fun.

**You: I worked on a lot of different projects at RunCorp, but [I totally remember you] / [I'm sorry I don't remember you].**

*Please select the correct answer:*

I definitely recall knowing Alex. (Yes, I do; No, I don't; This issue has not been addressed so far) [Of the 331 participants in the final sample, 98% were correct on the first try, with no difference by condition.]

### *[Element 2: (a) catching up / (b) not catching up]*

#### *[Element 2a. catching up]*

**You: So what have you been up to these past five years?**

Alex: I'm actually located not too far from you. I left RunCorp a couple years after you, and now I work for a company that runs a weather website, where I'm a software project manager.

**You: How funny, I'm also a software project manager now, but for a news and entertainment website. We don't cover the weather, though. How do you like working at your new company?**

Alex: It's great. I started out as an assistant project manager, like you were back at RunCorp. I spent my first year at the new website focusing on how to identify ads that our customers would actually like to see and might find useful but without annoying the customers in the process.

**You: And now you're a—**

Alex: Yeah, I just got promoted to project manager. Honestly, it's so different when you have to know everything on the technical side and also manage a team of people.

**You: Definitely. Hey, are you still in touch with anyone from RunCorp?**

Alex: Sure. Casey's still at RunCorp and has become a real expert on website platforms there. Oh, and get this, Casey now has five kids.

**You: Wow, that's great. I really liked Casey but lost touch over the years.**

Alex: And how's life outside work these days for you?

**You: I still have just the two girls. They're doing great, loving school. What about you?**

Alex: Also two kids, a boy and a girl. I can't say they love school, but they do love playing lots of different sports.

*[Element 2b. not catching up]*

**You: So what's the weather like where you are?**

Alex: I'm actually located not too far from you. Luckily the weather's been kind of mild lately.

**You: I know. Wasn't yesterday a totally beautiful day?**

Alex: Amazing. I hear we're supposed to get rain all next week, though.

**You: Can they really predict rain so far in advance? I thought those forecasts are only accurate for a couple days in advance.**

Alex: I think I've read that they're getting more accurate all the time. You may be right, though. I'm not sure they can predict a whole week in advance.

**You: Well, let's hope they get this one wrong. I can only imagine what the traffic will be like with that much rain, causing accidents.**

Alex: Wow, I hadn't thought of that. Were you caught in that huge traffic mess yesterday that I heard about on the news?

**You: No, I was lucky and missed that. But speaking of the news, I did see that RunCorp is doing well these days.**

Alex: Are they?

**You: Well, at least in terms of the stock market it's doing well.**

Alex: Yeah, I guess that's true, but I think that's probably the case for their industry in general. Overall the stock market tends to go up over time, although obviously with a lot of ups and downs along the way.

**You: Hopefully more ups than downs.**

Alex: Exactly.

*(You wonder to yourself what Alex has been up to for the past five years (and is doing now), but Alex doesn't bring it up, so neither do you.)*

*Please select the correct answer:*

I have been able to catch up on what Alex has been up to since my days at RunCorp. (Yes, I have; No, I haven't; There's no way to know if this topic did or did not come up) [Of the 331 participants in the final sample, 92% were correct on the first try. This was higher in the catching-up condition (95%) than in the not-catching-up condition (89%,  $z = 2.09$ ,  $p = .036$ ). However, on the second try (i.e., after re-reading this section), 100% of all included participants chose the correct answer.]

*[Element 3: (a) perceiving the tie similarly / (b) not perceiving the tie similarly]*

You and Alex talk for another couple minutes about some other topic, and that's when you come to realize that your perception of the "relationship" between you two is really [similar to / different from] Alex's perception. That is, the conversation itself went well, and you enjoyed talking with Alex, but separate from that, it occurs to you that you and Alex see where you stand with each other in [the same way / a very different way]. It's not any specific thing that Alex has done or said, but you just have the strong sense that your own understanding of the situation between the two of you—things like if you two are competitors or not, or how informal or close you should act with each other, or if you have the same level of status or not—are [just / not] really in alignment with Alex's understanding of the situation.

It's interesting how your perception of the nature of your association with Alex at this point is so [near to / distant from] Alex's perception, even after all these years and after a fairly short phone call. But that's how you see it.

*Please select the correct answer:*

I feel that Alex and I see the current attributes of our “relationship” (for example, how we should behave with each other) in a very similar way. (Yes, I agree; No, I don’t agree; There’s no way to know from the description if I did or did not think about this issue) [Of the 331 participants in the final sample, 97% were correct on the first try, with no difference by condition.]

*[Recap]*

While you and Alex continue to chat, you have three thoughts going through your mind:

– I definitely worked with Alex back at RunCorp, [and I can totally recall all of it / but I cannot seem to recall it].

– I [did / did not] catch up with Alex, so I have [a fairly clear / absolutely no] idea what Alex has been up to in terms of work ([and / or] family) in recent years.

– I feel strongly that Alex’s understanding of our “relationship” at this point is very [similar to / different from] mine.

*Then there is a brief pause in the conversation, and Alex says:*

Alex: I actually have a project I’m working on where I could use some advice. It’s fairly related to your area of expertise.

**You: Oh yeah?**

Alex: I was wondering if you could spare some time to meet with me about it sometime in the next week or two.

*[Post-vignette survey]*

Imagine you have just had the preceding phone conversation with Alex.

(There is no right or wrong answer to any of these questions. Just answer how you would feel.)

**Meeting likelihood.** (1) How likely would you be to agree to Alex’s request to meet in the next week or two? (2) How likely is it that you would say yes to Alex? (3) Realistically, how likely would you be to actually meet with Alex? (1=not at all; 2=very slightly; 3=a little; 4=moderately; 5=quite a bit; 6=to a large extent; 7=extremely) [ $\alpha = .97$ ]

**Meeting length.** How many minutes, if any, would you be willing to spend (in a week or two) interacting with Alex? [recoded as logarithm of raw number (plus one)]

**Willingness to help.** (1) I would answer completely and openly any question Alex asks. (2) I would be very willing to share any of my knowledge with Alex, even if Alex does not specifically ask for something. (3) I would do my best to provide any information / advice that would be helpful to Alex. (1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=somewhat disagree; 4=neutral; 5=somewhat agree; 6=agree; 7=strongly agree) [ $\alpha = .92$ ]

**Relational trust.** (1) I expect that this person (Alex) will always look out for my interests. (2) I expect that this person will go out of their way to make sure I am not damaged or harmed. (3) I feel like this person cares what happens to me. (1=strongly disagree; [etc.]; 7=strongly agree) [ $\alpha = .93$ ]

**English not primary language.** Is English your primary language? (1=yes, 2=no)

**Education level.** Please indicate your highest level of education: 1=some high school, 2=high school degree / GED, 3=some college, 4=four-year college degree, 5=graduate degree (master’s or higher)

**Work experience.** If you were to add it all up, about how many years have you had in the paid workforce? [logged]

**Employee.** What is your employment status at the moment? (check all that apply) unemployed or between jobs, self-employed or free-lancer, part-time employee, full-time employee, full-time student, Retired, stay-at-home spouse or parent. [recoded as 1=part- or full-time employee, 0=other]