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Meeting entrepreneurs’ expectations: The importance of social skills in strong relationships

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Abstract

In this study, we are interested in whether and when individuals’ ability to interact with others influences their tendency to provide social support to nascent entrepreneurs. We argue that social skills are not only necessary for entrepreneurs to obtain resources, but also important for those people (alters) providing entrepreneurs with support, and especially so in strong relationships. We argue that in strong relationships, expectations of social support exchange pressure potential support providers to provide support in order to meet those expectations. Empirically, we found an association between social skills and exchange of social support, dependent on the strength of the relationship between the resource provider and the nascent entrepreneur. The hypotheses were tested on a dataset containing 458 individuals who know a nascent entrepreneur in Denmark.

Keywords: nascent entrepreneur, social support, social skills, tie strength.

Word count: 11194
Introduction

Social support matters in entrepreneurship. The literature has well established that entrepreneurs obtain social support (i.e. emotional and instrumental support) from their social networks (e.g. Aldrich and Zimmer 1986; Birley 1986; Brüderl and Preisondörfer 1998; Davidsson and Honig 2003) that help them evaluate and develop their opportunities (Wood and McKelvie 2015), stay persistent and committed to their venture goals (Klyver, Honig, and Steffens 2018; Treffers et al. 2018) and ultimately start and develop their businesses successfully (Arregle et al. 2015; Kim, Longest, and Aldrich 2013). Predominantly, network access to resources in the form of support – whether it be information, help, finance or social support – has been explained from a structural network perspective (Birley, Cromie, and Myers 1991; Casson and Della Giustas 2007; Gedajlovic et al. 2013; Lee et al. 2018; Stam, Arzlanian, and Elfring 2014; Witt 2004). Such a structural perspective focuses on the entrepreneur’s network and explains the entrepreneurial outcome as a function of different network structures such as network size, structural holes, centrality, diversity, and balance of strong and weak ties.

One significant challenge to understanding how entrepreneurs access social support is associated with the structural approach. Essentially, investigating the structure of the entrepreneur’s social network unintentionally reduces actors in the network to homogenous individuals. Actors are treated as average people, ignoring that people in the entrepreneur’s network – also termed alters – might have very different skills, abilities and motivations. Not everyone is equally beneficial for the entrepreneurs, even though they are structurally equivalent (Reinholt, Pedersen, and Foss 2014). The structural perspective tends to overlook uniqueness among actors in the entrepreneurs’ social network. We argue that there is a gain from a deeper understanding of exactly these people; that is, there is a need for an alter perspective to supplement the prior ego perspective on entrepreneurs and the structure of their social networks.
To study the uniqueness of individuals in entrepreneurs’ social network – that is, alters – we bring in recent studies that took a more agency-oriented approach as part of a microfoundational understanding of social networks (e.g. Baron and Tang 2009; Semrau, Sigmund, and Wegner 2015; Shaw, Wilson, and Pret 2017; Tasselli, Kilduff, and Menges 2015; Tocher, Oswald, and Hall 2015). This agency-oriented approach focuses on how individuals differ in their abilities and motivations to interact with others and in different situations, which in various ways enables them to activate, apply and function in their network (Baron and Tang 2009; Fang et al. 2015; Semrau and Sigmund 2012; Semrau, Signum, and Wegner 2015). Specifically, we bring in ideas of network agency in the form of social skills. We combine an alter perspective (focusing on people in entrepreneurs’ networks) with an agency perspective to study how support providers’ social skills influence how much they support entrepreneurs.

We understand social skills as the ‘ability to interact effectively with others’ (Baron and Markman 2003, 107) or, more precisely, as ‘both interpersonal perceptiveness and the capacity to adjust one’s behavior to different and changing situational demands and to effectively influence and control the responses of others’ (Witt and Ferris 2003, 811). Such an understanding implies that successful interaction depends on how well individuals interact and communicate in social contexts and, importantly, is context dependent across social circumstances. Understanding how social skills matter for providing support is important for those interested in promoting entrepreneurship and regional development, including policy makers, consultants, and friends and family of entrepreneurs.

Specifically, the purpose of this study is to investigate whether individuals’ abilities to interact with others (i.e. their social skills) affect the social support – including emotional and instrumental support – these individuals provide to nascent entrepreneurs, as well as to what extent the social contexts in which this takes place matters. Because social support is much less tangible
than the other types of resources entrepreneurs need (Kim, Longest, and Aldrich 2013), high social skills are required to provide and deliver this type of support (e.g. Ahuja, Soda, and Zaheer 2012; Ferris, Witt, and Hochwarter 2001; Tasselli, Kilduff, and Menges 2015).

Meanwhile, social skills depend on social contexts and circumstances. Bringing social skills into play in relation to specific social circumstances enables a better understanding of the role of those skills. We argue that social circumstances, particularly those characterized by a strong relationship between the entrepreneur (ego) and the social support provider (alter), create greater social support expectations. These expectations act as social pressure on those support providers who intend to fulfil and meet the expected obligations in the relationship (Kim, Longest, and Aldrich 2013; Montgomery 1998). They are a function of the strength of the relationship between individuals and therefore are not expectations only one party enforces in the relationship (Agneessens, Waege, and Lievens 2006; Freeman and Ruan 1997). We argue that in such situations, support providers’ social skills enable them to meet those expectations because the social skills empower their ability to understand the entrepreneur’s need for social support and how to deliver it appropriately (Reinholt, Pedersen, and Foss, 2014; Tasselli, Kilduff, and Menges 2015).

This study contributes to understanding the functioning of social networks in entrepreneurship; specifically, it challenges the structural assumption that people in entrepreneurs’ networks are homogenous by investigating their social skills. This contribution includes two important elements. First, it is reveals that not only the social skills of entrepreneurs, as previously shown (e.g. Baron and Tang 2009; Semrau, Signumd, and Wegner 2015), but also the social skills of those people providing the social support, are important for exchange of emotional support. This is a significant finding because it underlines the relevance of studying not only the support recipients, but also its providers. Second, it demonstrates the boundary conditions for the support providers’ social skills; that is, social skills are especially vital in strong relationships due to the
pressure on the support providers to meet expectations embedded in their relationships with the nascent entrepreneur.

**Theoretical background**

**Social support theory**

Historically, social support theory was developed in health science to explain individuals’ health, happiness and longevity of life (Gottlieb and Berger 2010). It focused on explaining the effects of social support exchanges among individuals. Social support has been defined as ‘the degree to which a person’s basic needs are gratified through interaction with others. Basic needs include affection, esteem or approval, belonging, identity, and security’ (Thoits 1982, 147). This is considered a multidimensional construct, often divided into an emotional and an instrumental dimension (Gottlieb and Bergen 2010; Suurmeijer et al. 1995; Tardy 1985), although it is generally accepted that these dimensions intermingle and overlap (Nielsen 2017; Semmer et al. 2008).

Later, social support theory was introduced to social science and specifically to management (Borgatti and Foster 2003), including entrepreneurship (e.g. Kim, Longest, and Aldrich 2013; Klyver, Schenkel, and Nielsen 2020; Neergaard, Shaw, and Carter, 2005). Following Klyver, Honig, and Steffens (2018, 713) we define ‘instrumental support as tangible assistance aimed at solving problems’ and ‘emotional support as listening and providing empathy’. Whereas prior research indicated that instrumental support follows a social integration logic with a direct effect, and emotional support follows a stress buffer logic having an effect only under stressful situations (Klyver et al. 2018), social support theory does not presume differences in the support antecedents. In our later hypothesis development, we therefore develop arguments for alters’ provision of emotional and instrumental support simultaneously and in parallel.
**Social skills**

Various skills have been discussed in entrepreneurship. Particular skills that are domain specific to starting, developing and running a new business – that is, entrepreneurial skills – have been discussed intensively both broadly (Deakins, Bensemann, and Battisti 2016; Dimova and Pela 2018; Rasmussen, Mosey, and Wright 2011) and more specifically, including alertness (Obschonka et al. 2017), balanced skills (Chen and Thompson 2016), and labour market skills (Qian 2017). Social skills – the focus of our study – also have been addressed as important in entrepreneurship (Baron 2007; Baron and Markman 2003).

Many fields, including education (Warnes et al. 2005), psychology (Bellack and Hersen 1979), health science (Argyle 2013), organizational theory (Suddaby, Viale and Gendron 2016), and entrepreneurship (Baron and Markman 2003) are interested in social skills. The skills also have been conceptualized and defined on various levels and from multiple perspectives (Rose-Krasnor 1997). However, common for those conceptualizations is a focus on effectiveness in interactions with others and that such effectiveness is contextual dependent; that is, the usefulness of social skills varies across different social circumstances. Although social skills develop over time and especially during childhood (Warnes et al. 2005), they become more stable traits that characterize individuals’ abilities to interact with others across contexts – although with different usefulness – as individuals mature. Some individuals are generally better skilled at interacting with people. Their social skills are more important in some circumstances than in other situations depending on, for instance, the social intensity of the interaction. For example, social skills presumably matter more for a counsellor’s success in a counselling situation than for a salesperson’s success expediting a customer in a grocery shop.
**Social skills in entrepreneurship**

Social skills are receiving increasing interest in entrepreneurship. Developing as a counter to traditional studies into how network structures influence entrepreneurial behaviour, social skills also have been emphasized as important in entrepreneurship (Baron and Markman 2003; Baron and Tang 2009; Fang et al. 2015; Lans et al. 2015). This development represents a shift from focusing on benefits accrued from the network as solely a function of an individual’s structural position in the network (Wellman and Wortley 1990) to considering the individual’s ability to benefit from social interactions. It implies a more dynamic view of social networks (Jack 2010) wherein the actor is seen as purposively enacting and navigating the social network ‘by choosing or not choosing to establish network connections with certain other actors in their network, by forming or dissolving network links, or by strengthening or weakening relationships’ (Ahuja, Soda, and Zaheer 2012, 438). In this process, actors are relying on their social skills to become embedded in their social surroundings and networks (Anderson and Jack 2002; Jack and Anderson 2002).

Baron and Markman (2003) were among the first researchers in entrepreneurship to address entrepreneurs’ social skills. They discussed specifically how entrepreneurs’ abilities to interact with others are important for turning resource availability into actual support. This shows how traditional structural explanations, often relying on mere availability of resources, miss out individuals’ varying abilities to use those resources (Klyver and Schenkel 2013; Semrau and Hopp 2016). Social skills influence entrepreneurial success by enhancing effectiveness in acquiring information and obtaining essential resources (Baron and Tang 2009), as well as positively influencing the network’s size (Semrau and Sigmund 2012). Social skills also influence other parts of the entrepreneurial process, such as opportunity creation, in which interaction with others is vital. Entrepreneurs with social skills find this interaction process easier. They are better at reducing
uncertainty with stakeholders and building shared understanding and therefore are more likely to translate business ideas into realized opportunities (Tocher, Oswald, and Hall 2015).

However, despite the growing number of studies that consider social skills when explaining entrepreneurial behaviour and performance, those studies focused solely on the importance of the entrepreneurs’ social skills. They left out the social skills of the actors in the entrepreneur’s network – the alters’ social skills. This one-sided focus problematically implies that variations in what entrepreneurs gain from their network are explained solely in terms of entrepreneurs’ social skills (e.g. Baron and Tang 2009; Fang et al. 2015). It conflicts with Fletcher and Watson (2007), who emphasized the importance of studying individuals as part of a social context with the interaction in focus. In line with Fletcher and Watson, Sarasvathy’s (2009) ideas on entrepreneurship as a process of co-creation also emphasized the importance of looking at the people around the entrepreneur. Finally, Tasselli, Kilduff, and Menge (2015) addressed this co-creation by discussing the combination of a social psychological view on entrepreneurship with the more structural perspective considering social dynamics and the interrelational influence people have on each other. Thus, two persons are involved in the exchange of support: a provider and a receiver.

We build on these ideas and argue that whenever an entrepreneur receives support, someone also is providing that support. To understand the exchange of support, consideration of the provider is equally important. Therefore, we argue, regardless of the entrepreneur’s social skills, the social skills of those providing support also influences the support the entrepreneur receives. In the following section, we further develop this argument and build hypotheses about how social skills influence the provision of support. Particularly, we argue that alters’ social skills are positively associated with the level of social support – both emotional and instrumental – provided to entrepreneurs, and that level depends on the strength of relationship between the alter and the entrepreneur. Our theoretical model is graphically illustrated in Figure 1.
Hypothesis development

Social skills required to provide social support

Social support is important for entrepreneurs to start and develop their businesses (Birley 1986; Davidsson and Honig 2003; Gudmunson et al. 2009; Kim, Longest, and Aldrich 2013; Klyver, Honig, and Steffens 2018). Studies showing how emotional support helps individuals cope better with work-related stress—in both traditional employment (Mallinckrodt and Bennett 1992; Noor 2002; Parasuraman, Greenhaus, and Granrose 1992) and among entrepreneurs (e.g. Baron 2008; Klyver, Honig, and Steffens 2018; Lawrence, Gardner, and Callan 2007; Wayne, Randel, and Stevens 2006) underline the importance of emotional support. Similarly, studies showing that entrepreneurs make better qualified decisions and are more creative with high levels of instrumental support (Kim, Longest, and Aldrich 2013; Klyver, Honig, and Steffens 2018; Li et al. 2018; Lim et al. 2019) highlight the significance of instrumental support.

The question is why some entrepreneurs receive more social support than others. Instead of explaining this difference solely as the entrepreneur’s lack of social skills, part of the explanation possibly can be found in deficiencies among those who provide the support (Samter 1994). People vary in their abilities to provide social support (Burleson 2003a, 2003b); providing support then becomes a skill in itself. We argue that the influence from social skills on the provision of social support functions in two ways.

First, given the overlap and intermingling of instrumental and emotional support (Nielsen 2017; Semmer et al. 2008), social support is more sensitive than other types of support, such as finance. There can be differences in providers’ intentions with their support and how entrepreneurs perceive it. Due to this potential discrepancy between the intended meaning and the perception of the support provided, the act of providing support becomes a sensitive matter in which specific
skills are required to ensure the desired effect. We therefore argue that resource providers will do their best to reduce the discrepancy between the intended meaning and the perception of their support by using their social skills. As such, social skills are important for delivering social support, and high social skills thereby increase the chance of delivery. Second, because social skills are also about empathy – being able to put oneself in others’ situations (Ferris, Witt, and Hochwarter 2001) – it may be assumed that people with high social skills are better at perceiving when and what support is needed. This also increases the likelihood of providing more social support.

Accordingly, providing emotional and instrumental support to a nascent entrepreneur requires high social skills because they are a more intangible and sensitive type of support compared to, for instance, finance. High social skills are required to identify the entrepreneur’s need for support and to ensure the support is perceived and understood as intended. Therefore, individuals with high social skills will find it easier to provide emotional and instrumental support.

Hypothesis 1a: Individuals’ social skills are positively associated with the level of emotional support they provide to nascent entrepreneurs.

Hypothesis 1b: Individuals’ social skills are positively associated with the level of instrumental support they provide to nascent entrepreneurs.

Social support in strong relationships

A social network consists of individuals with different kinds of relationships to each other. Following Granovetter (1973), a number of studies have shown how individuals experience different support from weak versus strong ties (Davidsson and Honig 2003; Hoang and Antoncic 2003; Ruef 2002). Weak ties are important for obtaining access to a broader network (Granovetter 1973) and can provide nonredundant, nonsensitive information (Burt 2001). Strong ties can provide access to sensitive information, such as instrumental support and emotional support (Jack, Dodd, and Anderson 2004). Previous studies linked social support to strong ties in terms of family, friends
and spouses (Gudmunson et al. 2009; Kim, Longest, and Aldrich 2013; Menzies, Diochon, and Gasse 2004; Van Auken and Werbel 2006) because, as Granovetter (1983) argued, the motivation and commitment to provide such support is stronger in strong relationships. There are at least two possible explanations for why social support is tied to strong relationships. First, because emotional support concerns esteem, affect, trust, concern and listening (Neergaard, Shaw, and Carter 2005) – all of which are sensitive in nature and require a level of intimacy – it is more likely to be exchanged in strong relationships where people know each other well. This is supported by Krackhardt (1992, 218), who argued that ‘strong ties constitute a base of trust that can reduce resistance and provide comfort in the face of uncertainty’. Similarly, for instrumental support, a high level of commitment – together with expectations of support embedded in strong relations – also is required of the providers. Thus, entrepreneurs expect instrumental support to a higher extent from strong ties, and those same strong ties are more motivated and committed to help.

Secondly, in a strong relationship, individuals can detect when the other person is in special need of social support – either or both emotional and instrumental – simply because they know that individual’s general behaviour under normal, as well as abnormal, circumstances. Therefore, we argue that the provided emotional and instrumental support depends on how closely the support provider is connected to the nascent entrepreneur.

**Hypothesis 2a:** The stronger the relationship between a nascent entrepreneur and the resource provider, the greater the provision of emotional support.

**Hypothesis 2b:** The stronger the relationship between a nascent entrepreneur and the resource provider, the greater the provision of instrumental support.

**Social skills in strong relationships with expectations of social support**

The effectiveness of social skills, as previously explained, is contextually dependent; that is, the usefulness of social skills varies across social circumstances. As Rose-Krasnor (1997, 120)
noted, ‘Behaviors which are effective in one context may not have similar success in another context’. We therefore argue that in addition to the main effect of an alter’s social skills on provision of social support to an entrepreneur, the effectiveness of those skills depends on the strength of the relationship between the alter and the entrepreneur.

Adding to Granovetter’s (1983) argument that people are more motivated to provide social support in strong relationships (Anderson et al. 2005; Arregle et al. 2015; Davidsson and Honig 2003; Evald, Klyver, and Svendsen 2006), we propose that this increased motivation depends on the level of social skills. Accordingly, the influence of social skills is enhanced in stronger relationships compared to weak relationships. This moderation happens through two mechanisms, both of which relate to the mutual expectations and obligations that often characterize strong relationships. One relates to the entrepreneurs’ expectations of social support; the other relates to alters feeling obliged to provide the social support.

First, when individuals are closely connected to each other and their interests are closely embedded in each other, mutual obligations emerge (Agneessens, Waege, and Lievins 2006; Biddle 1986; Evald, Klyver, and Svendsen 2006; Freeman and Ruan 1997). These obligations consequently increase entrepreneurs’ expectations of social support (Kim, Lonest, and Aldrich 2013), especially from those with the social skills to provide such support effectively (Burleson, 2003a, 2003b). Thus, in strong relationships, entrepreneurs expect greater support from those capable of delivering it; that is, entrepreneurs will, at least to some degree, expect to be supported by those people close to them (Evald, Klyver, and Svendsen 2006; Kim, Longest, and Aldrich 2013) who can deliver such support because of social skills (Burleson, 2003a, 2003b). In weak relationships, on the other hand, such expectations of those with social skills is lower. Entrepreneurs do not expect social support from socially skilled weak ties to the same degree.
Second, the mutual obligations characterizing strong relationships (Agneessens, Waege, and Lievens 2006; Biddle 1986; Evald, Klyver, and Svendsen 2006; Freeman and Ruan 1997) not only increase entrepreneurs’ expectations of social support, but also make alters feel obliged to give the support. That is, the mutual obligations and expectations for support that emerge in strong relationships pressures the alters to meet the entrepreneurs’ expectation of support, especially if the alters are socially skilled (Burleson 2003a, 2003b). Accordingly, in strong relationships, alters with higher social skills feel stronger pressure to provide support to entrepreneurs than do alters with lower social skills. The higher skilled alters are capable and qualified to deliver such support in a way that will benefit the entrepreneur effectively and celebrate and honour their mutual and strong relationship.

Thus, alters with high social skills in strong relationships are more likely to provide high levels of social support to entrepreneurs than are alters in weak relationships because, in such strong situations or circumstances, entrepreneurs expect more social support and alters feel more obliged to provide it. In that way, mutual expectations and obligations that often characterize strong relationships explain the influence of social skills on the provision of social support. We therefore hypothesize that associations between alters’ social skills and their provision of emotional and instrumental support to entrepreneurs are stronger when they are strongly connected.

_Hypothesis 3a: The positive association between individuals’ social skills and the emotional support they provide to a nascent entrepreneur is stronger in strong relationships; that is, we expect social skills and strength of relationship to have a positive interaction with emotional support._

_Hypothesis 3b: The positive association between individuals’ social skills and the instrumental support they provide to a nascent entrepreneur is stronger in strong relationships; that is, we_
expect social skills and strength of relationship to have a positive interaction with instrumental support.

Methodology

Data

Entrepreneurship research has been changing how firm emergence is studied. It is moving from retrospective studies of already-established entrepreneurs toward studying entrepreneurs in the actual process of firm emergence – that is, nascent entrepreneurship. In doing so, the risk of retrospective bias is minimized because events are studied as they take place and therefore are present in the respondents’ minds. Three of the most well-known studies on firm emergence include two longitudinal studies tracking entrepreneurs’ development over time; that is, the Panel Study of Entrepreneurial Dynamics (PSED I and II) and the Comprehensive Australian Study of Entrepreneurial Emergence, as well as the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, which is a cross-sectional study of nascent entrepreneurs carried out in more than 100 countries each year. However, these three studies all focus on the nascent entrepreneur as the unit of analysis. Instead, the purpose of this current study is to investigate the antecedents of the social support nascent entrepreneurs receive; that is, to identify what influences the support individuals provide to nascent entrepreneurs. We do this through the Danish Alter Study of Entrepreneurs (DASE), a representative sample of individuals in Denmark who know ‘someone in the process of starting a business or who recently started a business’, which is the screening question. To ensure a representative sample, randomly stratified calls were made to both landline and mobile phones. Of the 16,394 individuals contacted, 1,742 answered the initial screening questions (resulting in a response rate of 9.4%). In all, 508 respondents identified as knowing a nascent entrepreneur and thereby could be classified as an alter. Of them, 458 had no missing values and were used for the current study.
**Measures**

**Dependent variables**

We operated with two dependent variables. We measured the first dependent variable, *provided emotional support*, as a reflective measure based on a four-item scale inspired by prior research (Neergaard, Shaw, and Carter 2005). The items concern whether the respondent (i.e. the alter) showed encouragement, excitement, understanding and sympathy and interest (Neergaard et al. 2005) in the nascent entrepreneur’s activities. Table 1 lists the exact questions and response categories. To calculate our dependent variable, we averaged the scores of the four items to give a continuous variable ranging between 0 and 1; the range of the variable is 0 to 1 with a mean of 0.813 and a standard deviation of 0.315. All four items are dichotomous with consequently lower levels of variation compared to items based on a Likert scale. Therefore, the construct was not optimal for scale reliability analysis but still provided a satisfying Cronbach’s alpha (0.82).

[Table 1 near here]

Following a similar procedure, we measured the second dependent variable, *provided instrumental support*, as a reflective measure based on five items inspired by prior research (Kim, Longest, and Aldrich 2013; Klyver, Honig, and Steffens 2018). The items concern whether the respondent provided information, offered assistance, provided advice, did something, or referred a contact to the entrepreneurs in relation to the start-up activities. To calculate our dependent variable, again we averaged the scores of the five dichotomous items, giving us a continuous variable ranging between 0 and 1 with a satisfying Cronbach’s alpha (0.76). The range of the variable is 0 to 1 with a mean of 0.336 and a standard deviation of 0.325.

**Independent and moderator variables**

Prior research revealed that a composite measure of social skills is more powerful than a decomposed measure with various subconstructs (Lans, Blok, and Gulikers 2015). Therefore, for
our independent variable measuring *social skills*, we applied Ferris, Witt, and Hochwarter’s (2001) composite seven-item scale. This scale was developed for a working context, is short and practical, and is well established and validated in the literature (Hochwarter et al., 2006; Witt and Ferris 2003). A rotated factor solution revealed that two items, numbers 3 and 5, should be removed to ensure a better measure (see Table 1 for the exact questions and response categories). The *social skills* scale has a Cronbach’s alpha at 0.78.

To measure the independent and moderating variable, *strength of relationship*, we adapted Obstfeld’s (2005) single item, in which respondents were asked to indicate their relationship to the nascent entrepreneur (Table 1).

*Control variables*

For the control variables, we have paid attention to certain variables that might affect the influence of social skills on providing social support. Men and women receive and provide social support differently (Klyver 2011); therefore, we included the gender of both the respondent and the nascent entrepreneur (0 = male; 1 = female). Because studies have shown that social support becomes more important with age, we also controlled for the age of the respondents and of the nascent entrepreneurs. We did this by recoding the indicated age between 16 and 64 years into five age categories with 16-to-25 years as the reference group. Finally, because one of the independent variables was ‘strength of relationship’, we found it necessary to control for whether or not the relationship between the respondent and the nascent entrepreneur was a family relationship, as family is often a close relationship (Anderson et al. 2005; Klyver 2007). We defined ‘family’ as a partner, mother, father or sibling.

*Findings*

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of the variables. It reveals that the highest correlation among the variables was between two age categories for nascent entrepreneurs; particularly,
between 16-to-25 and 26-to-35 years \( (r = -.463) \). All correlations were therefore well below the level of 0.7 (Knoke, Bohrnsted, and Mee 2002) and showed no indication of multicollinearity.

Working with survey data implies the usual risk of common method bias because all measures are self-reported by the same respondent. To rule out common method bias, we included all items in a Harman (1976) single-factor test. An eight-factor solution accounting for 61.5% of the total explained variance was obtained, with the first factor explained 10.9% of the total variance. This result, combined with our efforts to fulfil the criteria Podsakoff et al. (2003) set out, indicated that the risk of common method was at a minimum.

[Table 2 near here]

The three proposed hypotheses were tested using linear regression. Results are reported in Table 3 for emotional support and in Table 4 for instrumental support. For both dependent variables, we ran four linear regressions, all predicting support provided to entrepreneurs. Model 1 included only the control variables; Models 2 and 3 subsequently added *social skills* and *strength of relationship*; and Model 4 added the interaction of *social skills* and *strength of relationship*. For provided emotional support, Table 3 reveals positive associations with alter age of 26-to-35 years \( (\beta = .099, p < .05) \), alter age 36-to 45-years old \( (\beta = .097, p < .10) \), and family relationship \( (\beta = .112, p < .01) \). For instrumental support, Table 4 reveals negative associations for ego age of 36-to-45 years \( (\beta = -.094, p < .10) \) and alter gender female \( (\beta = .079, p < .05) \), and positive associations with alter age 26 to 35 years \( (\beta = .192, p < .01) \), alter age 36-to-45 years \( (\beta = .194, p < .01) \), and family relationship \( (\beta = .161, p < .01) \).

Model 2 in Tables 3 and 4 respectively tested Hypotheses 1a and 1b. As expected, it revealed positive associations of *social skills* and provision of *emotional support* \( (\beta = .049, p < .05) \) and *instrumental support* \( (\beta = .057, p < .01) \) to nascent entrepreneurs. Thus, both hypotheses are supported. In both tests, there were significant increases in the \( R^2 \) from Models 1 to 2 \( (p < .05) \). In
Hypotheses 2a and 2b, respectively, we expected the strength of relationship to be associated with provision of emotional and instrumental support. Supporting both hypotheses, Model 3 in Tables 3 and 4 revealed that strength of relationship is positively associated with the provision of emotional support ($\beta = .105, p < .01$) and instrumental support ($\beta = .101, p < .01$), respectively. By adding strength of relationship in both tables, we observed significant increases in $R^2$ ($p < .01$) going from Model 2 to Model 3. Finally, for Hypotheses 3a and 3b, we expected to find an interaction effect of social skills and strength of the relationship on the provision of emotional support and instrumental support, respectively. This was tested in Model 4 in the two tables. For both emotional ($\beta = .072, p < .05$) and instrumental support ($\beta = .057, p < .05$), we found support with significant increases in $R^2$ ($p < .05$ for emotional support; $p > .10$ for instrumental support), indicating that interactions are more powerful predictors than are the independent variables considered individually. The interaction effects are plotted in Figures 2 and 3. Figure 2 shows that increased social skills were associated with higher levels of provided emotional support conditioned on the strength of relationship; particularly, it shows that social skills were associated with higher emotional support in strong relationships only, whereas in weak relationships, the association disappeared. Similar patterns were found for instrumental support. Figure 3 shows that increased social skills were associated with higher levels of provided instrumental support conditioned on the strength of relationship; particularly, social skills were associated with higher instrumental support in strong relationship only, whereas in weak relationships, the association disappeared. Together, this supports Hypotheses 3a and 3b.

[Table 3 near here]

[Table 4 near here]

[Figure 2 near here]

[Figure 3 near here]
Our effect sizes were small to medium. Cohen (1988) considered an effect size $\hat{f}^2$ of 0.02 to be a small effect, 0.15 a medium effect, and 0.35 a large effect. For our full models predicting emotional support, the effect size was 0.12, and predicting instrumental support, the effect size was 0.17, which may be considered small and medium effects, respectively. Our independent variables and their interaction increased the explained variance from 4% to 11% for emotional support and from 9% to 15% for instrumental support – increases of 175% and 66%, respectively. In addition, the results fall into a situation Abelson (1985) characterized as ‘when a little is a lot’ and Funder and Ozer (2019) lately emphasized. This idea involves circumstances in which consequences accumulate; that is, when seemingly small effect sizes can matter because they accumulate but, as single events, are not very consequential. Funder et al. argued that even small effect sizes can be important if repeated over time or by many individuals. In our case, we are investigating support to entrepreneurs from a single person. However, people’s (including entrepreneurs’) networks are significantly larger, estimated to average 125 persons (Hill and Dunbar 2003). Semrau and Werner (2014) found that among those 125, entrepreneurs consider an average of 14 people (with large variations) relevant for their start-up project at a given point. The consequences of the provided social support for the entrepreneur therefore must be considered with the fact that entrepreneurs have on average 14 people – and not only the single one we investigated – providing the support. As such, even though the effect sizes for each alter in the network is small or medium, the cumulative effect of the social support provided to the entrepreneurs is much larger. Thus, in conclusion, we achieved sufficient effect sizes in our study.

Robustness tests

We completed several robustness tests to check the reliability of our results. First, because we were measuring social skills as a perceived construct, it was possible that individuals’ self-efficacy influenced their perception of social skills – and thereby the measurement – in such a way
that those with high self-efficacy were more likely to overestimate their social skills. To control for this, we ran robustness tests to determine if our results were consistent when controlling for alters’ self-efficacy, measured following Chen et al. (2001). Overall, the results were robust with only the main effect of social skills on provided emotional support being insignificant but in similar direction; the other results remained consistent. Thus, altogether, self-efficacy only marginally biased our results.

Second, because strength of relationship and family often have been associated theoretically (Evald, Klyver, and Svendsen 2006) and were moderately correlated in our study ($r = 0.323$), we tested whether our results were robust when excluding family as a control variable. This robustness test confirmed that the results were stable with and without family as a control variable.

**Discussion and conclusion**

**Summary and discussion**

The purpose of this study was to investigate how individuals’ social skills is associated with social support provided to entrepreneurs in the forms of both emotional and instrumental support, and to what extent this support depends on the mutual obligations embedded in the strength of relationship between the support provider and the nascent entrepreneur. We tested our ideas on data from the Danish Alter Study of Entrepreneurship (DASE) consisting of a representative sample of 458 individuals who knew a nascent entrepreneur.

With our point of departure in the need to focus on the social skills of not only entrepreneurs but also their support providers, we argue that social skills are necessary to provide the support. The argument builds on social skills’ two-fold influence on support provision. Because social support is a sensitive resource compared to, for instance, financial resources, there is a constant risk of discrepancy between its intended and perceived meanings. Social skills are needed to reduce this discrepancy. Furthermore, people with high social skills are better at perceiving the sensitive
situations (Ferris, Witt, and Hochwarter 2001) in which social support is most needed. Our empirical results support our arguments and show that social skills are associated with the social support provided to nascent entrepreneurs, in cases of both emotional and instrumental support. More specifically, our results reveal that individuals with high social skills are more likely to provide high levels of both emotional and instrumental support.

We also argued and empirically supported that the mutual expectations and obligations characterizing strong relationships are associated with both more emotional support and instrumental support being provided in those relationships and, in particular, to the nascent entrepreneur. This verifies previous results showing that strong relationships are important for the provision of social support (Gudmunson et al. 2009; Menzies et al. 2004; Van Auken and Werbel 2006). Social support is essentially about helping each other, and those who are closest help most.

Finally, we argued that the relationship between social skills and social support is not universal but instead depends on how closely the support provider is connected to the nascent entrepreneur. In other words, the usefulness of social skills is contextually dependent and varies across social circumstances (Rose-Krasnor 1997), especially the tie strength.

We proposed that the association of social skills with the social support provided is moderated by tie strength and happens through two mechanisms, both related to the mutual obligations that often characterizes strong relationships. First, entrepreneurs with strong relationships to their highly socially skilled alters expect more from those alters because of their high social skills (Agneessens, Waeghe, and Lievens 2006; Biddle 1986; Freeman and Ruan 1997; Kim, Longest, and Aldrich 2013). Second, because of their social skills, those highly socially skilled alters feel more obliged to provide support than do less socially skilled alters, especially in strong relationships (Burleson 2003a, 2003b).
Empirically, our study shows that social skills matter more for providing social support in strong relationships than in weak relationships, in which the importance of social skills vanishes. Accommodating mutual obligations tied to strong relations is easier for individuals with high social skills because they know how to socially interact with, and are better at perceiving the needs of, others. This is an interesting result because it first shows how the importance of social skills on the provision of social support is not universal but instead contextual (Rose-Krasnor 1997). It is also interesting because it shows that even in strong relationships, social skills are necessary. This indicates that although we often tend to regard strong relationships as consisting of unconditional support, expectations are still attached to those relationships, and where such expectations prevail, pressure emerges to meet those expectations and requires social skills.

Theoretical contributions and implications

Overall, this study contributes to understanding the functioning of social networks in entrepreneurship (e.g. Gedajlovic et al. 2013; Stam, Arzlanian, and Elfring 2014) by challenging the dominating assumption in the structural perspective that people in entrepreneurs’ social networks are homogenous. By changing the unit of analysis from the ego (i.e. the entrepreneur) to the alter (i.e. people in entrepreneurs’ networks), we show how uniqueness in form of the resource provider’s social skills matters to the amount of social support exchanged. Our overall contribution includes two elements related to current discussions on social skills in entrepreneurship (Baron and Markman 2003; Baron and Tang 2009; Semrau and Sigmund 2012; Zhao, Frese, and Giardini 2010).

First, we show how social skills are needed when providing social support, regardless of whether the support is emotional or instrumental. This is distinct from prior studies on social skills in entrepreneurship because we change the focus from the entrepreneur to the support provider (i.e. the alter). We therefore add to the existing research on social skills in entrepreneurship by
demonstrating how differences in the social support an entrepreneur receives are a function not just of that entrepreneur’s personal social skills, but also of the social skills of those providing the support. This is an important contribution to existing research because it urges us to expand our view of entrepreneurs’ resource-acquisition process (Li et al. 2018; Lim et al. 2019) from a narrow focus on the entrepreneur to one that also includes actors in the network. It emphasizes the entrepreneurial process as a social co-creation process (Fletcher and Watson 2007; Sarasvathy 2009) in which entrepreneurs depend on their distant and proximate contacts, their support (Klyver, Honig, and Steffens 2018) and their ability to provide such support (Baron and Markman 2003; Witt and Ferris 2003).

A network perspective in itself is not new; however, prior studies of entrepreneurs’ social networks have looked at the network’s structural composition (Brüderl and Preisendörfer 1998; Ehrlich et al. 1994; Zimmer and Aldrich 1987). In our study, in contrast, the actors in the network are more than just nodes connected to the entrepreneur. Instead, they are regarded as unique individuals with their own set of characteristics, particularly their social skills, that influence their actions. Therefore, we add another perspective to the discussion in entrepreneurship research with its focus on agency as a microfoundational explanation of the social network (Ahuja, Soda, and Zaheer 2012). We argue that although entrepreneurs, through agency, might activate and influence the social network surrounding them, they also depend on the agency of the actors in the network. An entrepreneur can be very affluent in social skills; however, if the network actors are without social skills, then there is a limit to how much support the entrepreneur can receive from that network. This means that when studying entrepreneurs’ social networks and characterizing the network actors according to their resources, social skills also need to be considered as an important resource because such social skills enable the flow of other resources.
Second, our study shows how the effectiveness of social skills is contingent on the strength of the relationship between people and thus does not function universally (Rose-Krasnor 1997). This opens an interesting discussion and avenue for future research about how tie strength influences how social skills matter not only for providing social support but also for receiving it. It could be argued that when receiving social support in strong relationships, the cultural expectations and mutual obligations tied thereto mean social skills are less important — that is, an effect opposite that demonstrated by our results. In strong relationships, where one part expects the other part to provide support due their mutual obligations, pressure is put on the support provider to meet this mutual expectation. Therefore, it could be argued that receiving support from strong relationships does not require social skills because this is an implicit expectation attached to the relationship, whereas providing support is about meeting this expectation. This distinction is for future research to explore.

**Practical implications for entrepreneurs and regional development actors**

In terms of practical implications, our results show that it is important for entrepreneurs to surround themselves with the right people if they want social support. This finding underlines that differences in entrepreneurs’ social support is not just a function of individual differences among entrepreneurs but also, most certainly, a function of those providing the support – in this case, a function of how well those providing support interact with others. Actors in the regional development support system aiming to help entrepreneurs can use our results to reflect on the recruitment of the consultants who interact with entrepreneurs. The results clearly show that social skills are needed to provide support – both emotional and instrumental – and social skills therefore should be part of the job description and qualifications. It also strengthens the importance of helping entrepreneurs build their social skills because such skills benefit not only them and their businesses,
but also other entrepreneurs surrounding them. In entrepreneurial eco-systems where most entrepreneurs are socially skilled, those entrepreneurs are better able to help and support each other.

**Limitations and future research**

For the current study, focus was on those who provide support to nascent entrepreneurs as a reaction to prior studies in which the entrepreneur was the unit of analysis. However, it would be interesting to include both support providers and recipients in the same study to form a deeper understanding of the mechanisms at play in social support exchange. Future research could focus on the discrepancy between the intended and perceived meanings of the support and study how social skills help reduce this discrepancy. Furthermore, the current study argues that expectations and mutual obligations are part of the mechanism explaining why social skills are more important in strong relationships. Future research could study how this mechanism plays out by uncovering the expectations attached to the roles characterizing the support provider and the entrepreneur.

Although we investigated the contingent nature of social skills, particularly related to tie strength, other relevant contingencies, such as individual (e.g. personality), task (e.g. complexity of tasks), venture (e.g. stage of development) and context (e.g. industry culture) differences should be explored in future research.

**References**


Figure 1:

Theoretical model

Alter’s social skills → H1 + → Provided emotional support

Strength of relationship (between alter & entrepreneur) → H3 +

H2 +
Figure 2:

Interaction effect of social skills and strength of relationship on provision of emotional support
Figure 3:

Interaction effect of social skills and strength of relationship on provision of instrumental support
Table 1

Overview of measures: Respondents (alters) = people in entrepreneurs’ network

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent variable:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Provided emotional support</em></td>
<td>1) Have you encouraged or backed up this person in relation to the start-up?</td>
<td>0 = No, 1 = Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Have you explicitly expressed your excitement for the start-up?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3) Have you explicitly expressed your understanding and sympathy for the start-up?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4) Have you explicitly expressed your interest in how the start-up is progressing?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Provided instrumental support</em></td>
<td>1) Have you provided the person with information regarding the start-up?</td>
<td>0 = No, 1 = Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Have you expressed your willingness to help the person regarding the start-up?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3) Have you provided advice to the person regarding the start-up?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4) Have you done anything to help the person regarding the start-up?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5) Have you referred the person to a relevant contact related to the start-up?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independent variables:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Social skills</em></td>
<td>1) I find it easy to put myself in the position of others</td>
<td>1 = Completely disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) I am keenly aware of how I am perceived by others</td>
<td>2 = Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3) In social situations, it is always clear to me exactly what to say and do</td>
<td>3 = Neither agree or disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4) I am particularly good at sensing the motivations and hidden agendas of others</td>
<td>4 = Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5) I am good at making myself visible with influential people in my organization</td>
<td>5 = Completely agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6) I am good at reading others’ body language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7) I am able to adjust my behavior and become the type of person dictated by any situation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Strength of relationship</em></td>
<td>1) Would you describe your personal relationship as close, distanced or somewhere in between?</td>
<td>1 = Distanced, 2 = Somewhere in between, 3 = Close</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 2

Means ($M$), standard deviations ($SD$) and Pearson correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
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<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Provided emotional support</td>
<td>0.813</td>
<td>0.315</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Provided instrumental support</td>
<td>0.336</td>
<td>0.125</td>
<td>0.427**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Social skills</td>
<td>3.995</td>
<td>0.646</td>
<td>0.091</td>
<td>0.087</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Strength of relationship</td>
<td>2.259</td>
<td>0.709</td>
<td>0.262**</td>
<td>0.256**</td>
<td>0.171**</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Ego gender</td>
<td>1.235</td>
<td>0.425</td>
<td>0.081</td>
<td>-0.022</td>
<td>0.031</td>
<td>0.051</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Ego age (26–35 years)</td>
<td>0.364</td>
<td>0.482</td>
<td>-0.021</td>
<td>0.058</td>
<td>-0.055</td>
<td>-0.053</td>
<td>-0.024</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Ego age (36–45 years)</td>
<td>0.272</td>
<td>0.446</td>
<td>-0.025</td>
<td>-0.062</td>
<td>0.017</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>-0.463**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Ego age (46–55 years)</td>
<td>0.155</td>
<td>0.362</td>
<td>0.082</td>
<td>0.039</td>
<td>0.048</td>
<td>0.031</td>
<td>0.118*</td>
<td>-0.324**</td>
<td>-0.262**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Ego age (56–64 years)</td>
<td>0.057</td>
<td>0.231</td>
<td>-0.004</td>
<td>0.031</td>
<td>0.013</td>
<td>0.123**</td>
<td>0.042</td>
<td>-0.185**</td>
<td>-0.150**</td>
<td>-0.105*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Alter gender</td>
<td>1.497</td>
<td>0.501</td>
<td>-0.018</td>
<td>-0.087</td>
<td>0.222**</td>
<td>0.042</td>
<td>0.199**</td>
<td>-0.054</td>
<td>0.058</td>
<td>0.069</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Alter age (26–35 years)</td>
<td>0.288</td>
<td>0.453</td>
<td>0.057</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td>-0.064</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.033</td>
<td>0.396**</td>
<td>-0.151**</td>
<td>-0.219**</td>
<td>-0.031</td>
<td>-0.360**</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Alter age (36–45 years)</td>
<td>0.229</td>
<td>0.420</td>
<td>0.028</td>
<td>0.095*</td>
<td>-0.023</td>
<td>-0.031</td>
<td>0.016</td>
<td>-0.175**</td>
<td>0.401**</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td>-0.089</td>
<td>0.081</td>
<td>-0.346**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Alter age (46–55 years)</td>
<td>0.139</td>
<td>0.347</td>
<td>0.035</td>
<td>0.081</td>
<td>0.071</td>
<td>0.021</td>
<td>0.103*</td>
<td>-0.108*</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>0.263**</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.366**</td>
<td>-0.256**</td>
<td>-0.219**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Alter age (56–64 years)</td>
<td>0.124</td>
<td>0.330</td>
<td>-0.038</td>
<td>-0.061</td>
<td>0.087</td>
<td>0.077</td>
<td>-0.038</td>
<td>-0.065</td>
<td>-0.082</td>
<td>0.131**</td>
<td>0.251**</td>
<td>-0.004</td>
<td>-0.239**</td>
<td>-0.205**</td>
<td>-0.152**</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Family relationship</td>
<td>0.176</td>
<td>0.382</td>
<td>0.139**</td>
<td>0.162**</td>
<td>0.032</td>
<td>0.323**</td>
<td>0.094*</td>
<td>-0.160**</td>
<td>-0.014</td>
<td>0.105**</td>
<td>0.183**</td>
<td>0.066</td>
<td>0.009</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>-0.005</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .10. **p < .05 (two-tailed).
Table 3

Linear regression predicting emotional support provided to nascent entrepreneurs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ego gender</td>
<td>.046</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>.044</td>
<td>.046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ego age (reference is 16–25 years)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26–35</td>
<td>-.044</td>
<td>-.040</td>
<td>-.037</td>
<td>-.031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36–45</td>
<td>-.061</td>
<td>-.059</td>
<td>-.056</td>
<td>-.051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46–55</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56–64</td>
<td>-.074</td>
<td>-.069</td>
<td>-.076</td>
<td>-.068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alter gender</td>
<td>-.027</td>
<td>-.040</td>
<td>-.038</td>
<td>-.039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alter age (reference is 16–25 years)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26–35</td>
<td>.099 **</td>
<td>.097 **</td>
<td>.087 *</td>
<td>.081 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36–45</td>
<td>.097 *</td>
<td>.097 *</td>
<td>.090 *</td>
<td>.083 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46–55</td>
<td>.092</td>
<td>.087</td>
<td>.072</td>
<td>.069</td>
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<tr>
<td>56–64</td>
<td>.049</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>.011</td>
<td>.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family relationship</td>
<td>.112 ***</td>
<td>.110 ***</td>
<td>.046</td>
<td>.043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social skills</td>
<td>.049 **</td>
<td>.031 *</td>
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<td>-.128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength of relationship</td>
<td>.105 ***</td>
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<td>-.185</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction effect</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social skills * Strength</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.072 **</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.742 ***</td>
<td>.567 ***</td>
<td>.420 ***</td>
<td>1.050 ***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| $\hat{R}^2$ | 0.042 | 0.051 | 0.099 | 0.109 |
| $\hat{R}^2$ change | 0.009 ** | 0.048 *** | 0.081 ** |

Note. $N = 458$.

*p < .10. **p < .05. ***p < .01. Significance levels are reported as two-tailed test for control variables and as one-tailed tests for independent variables.
Table 4

Linear regression predicting provided instrumental support to nascent entrepreneurs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ego gender</td>
<td>-0.026</td>
<td>-0.025</td>
<td>-0.028</td>
<td>-0.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>26-35</td>
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<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.035</td>
<td>0.040</td>
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<tr>
<td>36-45</td>
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<td>*</td>
<td>-0.090</td>
<td>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>46-55</td>
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<td>-0.036</td>
<td>-0.024</td>
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<tr>
<td>56-64</td>
<td>-0.013</td>
<td>-0.007</td>
<td>-0.014</td>
<td>-0.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alter gender</td>
<td>-0.079</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>-0.092</td>
<td>**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alter age (reference is 16-25 years old)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.050</td>
<td>0.045</td>
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<tr>
<td>36-45</td>
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<td>***</td>
<td>0.185</td>
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<tr>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>0.194</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>0.174</td>
<td>**</td>
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<tr>
<td>56-64</td>
<td>0.053</td>
<td>0.041</td>
<td>0.015</td>
<td>0.014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family relationship</td>
<td>0.161</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>0.098</td>
<td>**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social skills</td>
<td>0.057</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>0.040</td>
<td>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strength of relationship</td>
<td>0.101</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>-1.127</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interaction effect

Social skills * Strength: 0.57 **

Constant: 0.384 *** 0.178 * 0.036 0.531 *

R²: 0.088 0.100 0.141 0.147

R² change: 0.012 ** 0.041 *** 0.006 *

Note. N = 458.

*p < .10. **p < .05. ***p < .01. Significance levels are reported as two-tailed test for control variables and as one-tailed tests for independent variables.