

Networking and Promotability across Management Levels: A Case from Thailand

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Abstract

This study addresses gaps in the literature on networking and managerial careers by examining the differential effects of networking across managerial levels in Thailand, an emerging market with distinct cultural characteristics. A questionnaire survey was conducted with Thai managers, yielding 324 usable responses for analysis (165 first-line managers and 159 middle managers). The results support a moderated mediation model in which networking partially mediates the relationship between extraversion and promotability, with the strength of this mediation varying across managerial levels. Specifically, the career benefits of networking diminish as managers advance in their careers, with stronger effects observed among first-line managers. These findings are interpreted through Role Theory, together with Thailand's high-context, collectivist, and high power-distance cultural environment, which shapes the effectiveness of networking in managerial careers. Overall, the study extends the networking and managerial career literature by showing that the career value of networking is contingent on both role-based behavioral expectations and culturally embedded cues that influence trait expression. The findings further suggest that organizations should support networking as a strategic career development tool while addressing the distinct needs of managers at different career stages.

Keywords: Networking; Managerial Career; Career Development; Culture; Thailand

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Introduction

Managers across hierarchical levels operate within distinct role expectations, social cues, and behavioral norms that shape how they interact, mobilize relationships, and navigate their careers. Yet, despite extensive research recognizing networking as a critical component of managerial effectiveness and career advancement since Mintzberg's (1973) seminal work (Gibson et al., 2014; Horak et al., 2020; Michael & Yukl, 1993; Porter et al., 2023), existing studies have largely treated networking as a uniformly beneficial behavior, paying limited attention to how its career value may differ across managerial roles. This oversight is particularly consequential in emerging-market contexts, where informal networks often substitute for weak or inconsistently enforced formal institutions. Horak and Paik (2023) have called for greater research attention to underrepresented regions such as Thailand, where informal networks often play a pivotal role in navigating institutional uncertainty and supporting organizational functioning.

In emerging economies, managers frequently rely on informal networks to mitigate institutional uncertainty. For instance, Luo (2003) demonstrates that managerial networking intensifies under conditions of regulatory uncertainty and competitive pressure in China. Similarly, in Thailand—where hierarchical norms, relational obligations, and high-context communication prevail—networking functions as a critical mechanism for accessing information, legitimacy, sponsorship, and influence (Forret & Dougherty, 2004; Selvarajah et al., 2013; Udomkit & Schreier, 2017; Wang & Hasan, 2024). Consistent with Resource Dependence Theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), Thai managers strategically cultivate relationships to secure resources that are otherwise constrained in resource-scarce environments. However, the assumption that networking yields comparable career benefits across all managerial levels remains questionable.

Role theory suggests that managerial roles differ systematically in their behavioral expectations, scope of influence, and exposure to social cues (Biddle, 1986; Katz & Kahn, 1978). First-line managers, middle managers, and senior managers occupy structurally distinct positions, which shape not only their networking opportunities but also how networking is evaluated and rewarded. Yet, existing networking research has paid limited attention to how these role-based differences condition the effectiveness of networking for career advancement, particularly promotability. In addition to the role-based differences, individual personality traits shape how managers engage in and benefit from networking. Among the Big Five traits, extraversion—characterized by sociability, assertiveness, and enthusiasm—has been consistently linked to networking behavior (Bendella & Wolff, 2020; Wolff & Kim, 2012) and career success (Ng et al., 2005; Rasdi et al., 2012). According to Trait Activation Theory (Tett et al., 2021), personality traits are expressed more strongly when situational cues signal that such behaviors are appropriate or rewarded. In high-context, high-power distance cultures such as Thailand, where social harmony, hierarchy, and indirect communication guide interpersonal interactions, extraverted individuals may be particularly adept at interpreting social cues and mobilizing networks effectively. However, whether and how extraversion translates into promotability through networking is likely contingent on managerial level, because trait-relevant cues could differ across roles.

Despite extensive research on managerial networking, three important gaps remain. First, prior studies have largely treated networking as uniformly beneficial, offering limited insight into when and for whom networking translates into promotability across different managerial roles. Second, although extraversion is known to facilitate networking, the

mechanism through which extraversion influences promotability—particularly in non-Western, high-context cultures—remains underexplored. Third, existing research has rarely integrated personality traits, networking behavior, and managerial role expectations within a single explanatory framework, leaving the conditional nature of networking outcomes insufficiently theorized. Addressing these gaps, this study examines how extraversion influences promotability through networking and how this mediating process is moderated by managerial level in the Thai context (Figure 1). This integrative approach is theoretically necessary because it combines trait activation mechanisms with role-based expectations, moving beyond linear and uniform explanations of networking outcomes.

In sum, this research aims to answer the question of when and for whom networking translates into promotability, and how individual traits and managerial roles jointly shape this process. The study contributes to networking and managerial career literature in several ways. First, it advances theory by shifting from a uniform, trait-based view of networking benefits to a role-contingent perspective that accounts for structural and contextual variation. Second, by integrating Trait Activation Theory, Role Theory, and Resource Dependence Theory, the study clarifies the causal mechanism linking extraversion to promotability via networking under specific role conditions. Third, it responds to calls for research in underrepresented contexts by providing evidence from Thailand, an emerging economy where informal networks play a central organizational role (Horak & Paik, 2023). Fourth and last, by explicating the conditional value of networking across managerial levels, this study addresses a longstanding but underexplored issue in the networking literature (cf. Michael & Yukl, 1993) and offers actionable insights for organizations seeking to design role-sensitive career development systems.

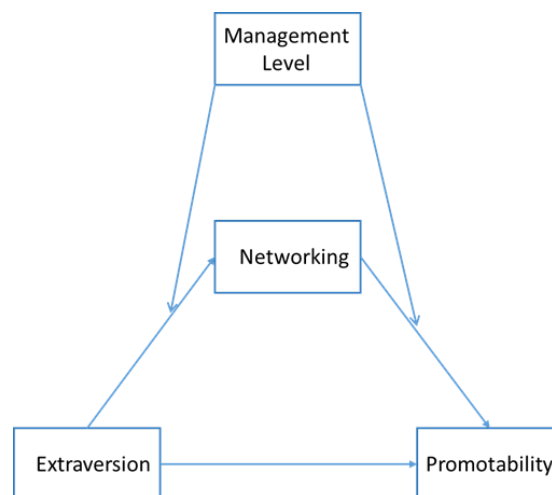


Figure 1: The Conceptual Framework

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Managerial career, networking and personality traits

Career advancement is a critical aspect of work-related outcomes reflecting on both objective outcomes, such as promotions or salary increases, and subjective outcomes, including personal satisfaction, increased job responsibilities, and perceived progress (Ng et al., 2005; Spurk et al., 2019). These studies reveal that objective career success is often driven by

individual competencies and demographic factors such as age and gender, whereas subjective career success is more likely influenced by personality, work environment and supervisor support. For instance, Barnett and Bradley (2007) found that managerial support and mentorship can facilitate employees' access to a wider network of industry contacts. This expanded network can enhance career satisfaction by fostering perceived work meaningfulness (Hirschi et al., 2018). Supporting this view, Bendella and Wolff (2020) conducted a meta-analysis of 41 independent samples and found that social inclination supported extraverted managers to build stronger social connections and extend their professional networks. This, in turn, directly benefited their career opportunities (Wolff & Kim, 2012). These findings suggest that while individual competence and demographic factors partly explain career success, research increasingly highlights the role of personality traits and networking in shaping managerial trajectories.

Promotability refers to an individual's perceived or evaluated readiness for advancement to higher-level roles, reflecting assessments of future leadership potential rather than current job performance alone (De Pater et al., 2009). Unlike actual promotion, which is contingent on structural opportunities and timing, promotability captures a forward-looking judgment made by decision-makers regarding an employee's capacity to assume broader responsibilities, exercise influence, and manage increased complexity. Prior research suggests that promotability assessments are shaped not only by task performance but also by signals of visibility, influence, and access to organizationally relevant information (Ng et al., 2005; Spurk et al., 2019). Consequently, behaviors that enhance exposure to decision-makers and convey strategic awareness—such as networking—are particularly salient in shaping promotability perceptions. From a Resource Dependence Theory perspective, individuals who secure access to valuable informational and relational resources through networking are more likely to be viewed as capable of navigating interdependencies and uncertainty, thereby increasing their promotability (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978).

Extraversion, a core dimension of the Big Five personality framework, is associated with sociability, assertiveness, and enthusiasm (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Studies have shown that extraverts are more likely to engage in networking behaviors such as initiating interactions, maintaining professional relationships, and seeking to expand their access to resources and opportunities (Judge et al., 2002; Wolff & Kim, 2012). According to Trait Activation Theory (TAT), personality traits are activated when situational cues signal their relevance and legitimacy (Tett et al., 2021). For extraverts, social contexts such as team interactions, professional events, and relationship-oriented work environments provide such cues, thereby facilitating the behavioral expression of sociability conducive to effective networking. Under these conditions, extraversion is more likely to translate into observable networking behavior.

This mechanism is especially relevant in Thailand, where organizational life is shaped by high-context communication, high power distance, and strong collectivist norms (Hofstede, 2001; Selvarajah et al., 2013). In such cultural environments, informal communication, relational sensitivity, hierarchical relationships, and trust-based reciprocity are central to coordination and influence. Extraverted managers may thrive in these settings because their social agility enables them to interpret implicit cues, build in-group alliances, and navigate complex relational structures (Bendella & Wolff, 2020; Hall, 1976; Ng et al., 2005). Empirical evidence from Thailand further supports the career relevance of networking, showing that managers who actively cultivate professional ties gain access to industry knowledge and strategic opportunities, underscoring the career-enhancing value of networking in high-context societies (Udomkit & Schreier, 2017).

Hypothesis 1: Extraversion is positively associated with networking.

Networking as a strategic resource

Networking involves purposeful efforts to build, maintain, and leverage social relationships that provide access to valuable career resources (Gibson et al., 2014). It includes both internal connections—such as colleagues and supervisors—and external contacts, including mentors, clients, and industry peers (McCallum et al., 2014). These relationships serve as channels for information, visibility, sponsorship, and influence, all of which are critical to promotability. From a theoretical perspective, Resource Dependence Theory provides a robust explanation for why networking enhances promotability. RDT posits that organizations and individuals are not self-sufficient but depend on external resources and therefore seek to manage uncertainty by forming strategic interdependencies (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Networking enables managers to access scarce and valuable resources—such as market intelligence, political support, and reputational legitimacy—that are not evenly distributed within formal structures.

Empirical evidence across emerging economies reinforces this argument. Studies show that managers with extensive networks outperform peers due to superior information access and influence (Li, 2005; Majumdar & Chandra, 2025; Rasdi et al., 2012). For instance, Li (2005) demonstrates how networking enables managers in foreign enterprises operating in China to advance their careers and expand their influence, while Majumdar and Chandra (2025) show that fund managers with strong networks benefit from informational advantages that translate into superior performance. In Thailand, where formal governance mechanisms may be less predictable and relational norms remain influential (IMD, 2024), networking becomes particularly important for navigating informal power structures and gaining legitimacy (Horak et al., 2020; Horak & Paik, 2023). Cultural norms of collectivism further reinforce the expectation that access to opportunity is embedded in social ties rather than formal processes (Singh & Basri, 2024). Accordingly, networking can be understood as a key mechanism through which managers reduce uncertainty and secure access to scarce or constrained resources, thereby enhancing their autonomy and effectiveness in complex environments.

Hypothesis 2: Networking is positively associated with promotability.

Drawing on both TAT and RDT, networking is positioned as the behavioral mechanism through which trait-based tendencies translate into career outcomes. Extraverts are naturally predisposed to seek social interactions; when placed in conducive environments—such as Thailand's relationally oriented organizations, they are more likely to engage in proactive networking. In turn, these efforts provide access to career-enhancing resources and legitimacy.

Hypothesis 3: Networking mediates the relationship between extraversion and promotability.

Managerial level as a boundary condition

Role Theory conceptualizes organizational roles as socially constructed systems of expectations that prescribe not only task responsibilities, but also appropriate patterns of interaction, influence, and boundary spanning associated with hierarchical position (Biddle, 1986; Katz & Kahn, 1978). These expectations evolve as managers progress through organizational hierarchies. Building on this perspective, scholars of managerial work have long emphasized that managerial roles differ qualitatively across hierarchical levels, particularly with respect to relational scope, exposure to external environments, and the legitimacy of

engaging in networking behaviors (Forret & Dougherty, 2001; Michael & Yukl, 1993). These role-based differences suggest that networking is neither uniformly expected nor equally rewarded across managerial levels. However, despite recognizing networking as broadly beneficial, much of the existing research implicitly assumes a uniform effect across hierarchical positions, thereby overlooking how variation in role expectations may condition the value and consequences of networking.

First-line managers are primarily responsible for supervising frontline employees, coordinating workflows, and resolving day-to-day operational issues (Michael & Yukl, 1993). Networking at this level tends to be informal and technical focus aiming to solve daily issues. As managers move into middle management, the literature highlights a marked shift in role expectations. Middle managers are commonly described as boundary spanners who must interpret strategic directives from senior leadership while coordinating implementation across units and functions (Anzengruber et al., 2017). This intermediary role increases the importance of relational activities beyond the immediate work unit, including selective engagement with external stakeholders, vendors, and professional peers. Forret and Dougherty (2001) show that at this level, networking becomes more instrumental, serving as a means of accessing information, aligning stakeholders, and mobilizing resources to support cross-functional initiative. Studies adopting a job demands–resources perspective further suggest that while external networking may increase job demands, managers who are able to cultivate such ties benefit from enhanced resource access and perceived support, which can translate into improved performance and career outcomes (Schönherr & Thaler, 2022).

At the senior management level, roles are strategic and outward-oriented. They are expected to build strategic alliances, represent the organization in inter-organizational settings, and engage in high-level industry and market-facing networking (Anzengruber et al., 2017; Michael & Yukl, 1993). Networking at this level is not discretionary but institutionalized as a core role requirement. Consistent with this view, research on promotions and leadership transitions shows that traits associated with social dominance, assertiveness, and proactive influence—central facets of extraversion—are more strongly linked to advancement into higher-level managerial roles, where relational visibility and external engagement are central to performance evaluation (Furnham & Crump, 2015; Judge et al., 2002; Kordsmeyer et al., 2024).

In Thai collectivist and power-distance cultures, where maintaining harmonious relationships, loyalty, and respect for hierarchy are deeply embedded values (Hofstede, 2001). The boundary between in-group and out-group membership plays a critical role in shaping access to information and support, especially in establishing connections with influential figures (Selvarajah et al., 2013). In-groups function as closed networks where trust and relational reciprocity dominate resulting in mutual support such as sharing insight knowledge, tips and techniques, informal job opportunities, and reputational endorsements among members. As a result, being an in-group member could enhance one's professional career success in relationally governed environments such as Thailand (Singh & Basri, 2024). However, entry into these in-groups often requires social networks and skills to establish and maintain relationships, especially in privileged social groups (Udomkit & Schreier, 2017). These authors found that seeking inclusion in influential professional circles may require leveraging network brokers, that is, existing in-group members who serve as gatekeepers, to earn trust and legitimacy. Managers who proactively build such external networks, particularly beyond the confines of their formal roles, are therefore better positioned to access valuable,

scarce resources, such as market intelligence and inter-organizational influence. This is consistent with RDT (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), which posits that actors seek to reduce uncertainty and enhance autonomy by strategically acquiring access to controlled resources through interdependence. Those who invest in such relationships are not only better equipped to navigate organizational challenges but are also more likely to be seen as capable of handling broader, strategic responsibilities.

Recognizing how role-based expectations, individual traits of extraversion, and cultural dynamics interact is essential to understanding how external networking contributes to career development across managerial strata. From a trait activation perspective, extraversion is more likely to be expressed through networking when such behavior is role-congruent and socially acceptable. As managerial roles become more relational and externally oriented, situational cues increasingly activate extraverted tendencies.

Hypothesis 4: Managerial level moderates the relationship between extraversion and networking, with the relationship being stronger among managers at higher hierarchical levels.

Hypothesis 5: Managerial level moderates the relationship between networking and promotability, with the relationship being stronger among managers at higher hierarchical levels.

Hypothesis 6: Managerial level moderates the mediating effect of networking between extraversion and promotability relationship, with the relationship being stronger among managers at higher hierarchical levels.

Research Methodology

Sample, informed consent and ethics

This study aims to examine how networking influences career outcomes across different management levels. Data were collected through a questionnaire survey targeting individuals currently holding managerial positions. We employed purposive sampling, targeting professional managers to ensure that participants possessed relevant experience consistent with the study's objectives. Participants were recruited from executive training programs organized by the university, where we were granted time at the conclusion of each session to invite attendees to take part in the study. Participation was entirely voluntary, and individuals could freely decide whether to complete the survey. Prior to distributing the questionnaire, we provided a verbal explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, and assurances of confidentiality and anonymity. We also explained participants' rights, including the ability to withdraw at any time without consequence. Verbal informed consent was obtained by asking participants to affirm their willingness to proceed with the survey. To further support informed participation, the study objective and detailed instructions were also presented on the first page of the questionnaire. The study was carefully designed to minimize any potential risks, protect participant rights, and ensure data confidentiality. Because it did not involve the collection of personally identifiable information, the inclusion of vulnerable populations, or the investigation of sensitive or high-risk topics, it was classified as involving minimal risk. In line with Section 3(3) of the *Guidelines for Conducting Human Subjects Research in Behavioral Sciences, Social Sciences, and Humanities* issued by the Thailand National Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation Policy Council, the study was deemed exempt from formal ethics review.

We initially received a total of 332 survey responses. After screening for completeness and removing incomplete or invalid responses, 324 usable responses remained and were included in the final analysis. The participants included 51% first-line managers and 49% middle managers. About 65% of the participants had 1-5 years of experience in current position and 86% work in large organization. Our respondents were 56% female, 53% at their 30s and 36% at their 40s and 61% were postgraduate (Table 1).

Table 1: Profile of the Sample.

Characteristics	n	Percentage
Gender		
Male	143	44
Female	181	56
Age		
20-29	35	11
30-39	172	53
40-49	117	36
Education		
Vocational	3	1
Bachelor	123	38
Master	178	55
PhD	20	6
Organization size		
Medium (51-250 employees)	45	14
Large (more than 251 employees)	279	86
Management level		
First-line manager	165	51
Middle manager	159	49
Years in Position		
1-5 years	211	65
6-10 years	91	28
More than 10 years	22	7

Measures

All study measures were established measures previously used in the literature. We followed Brislin's (1990) pedagogy of language translation to maintain the content validity of the Thai translated version. We followed Podsakoff et al.'s (2003) recommendation by applying the alternative scale technique to methodologically minimise common method variance that could have resulted from the covariation among the constructs of consistency in scale properties. Extraversion was measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) whereas promotability, the outcome variable was measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). Networking behaviour was measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = least used, 5 = most used). For the moderator, we asked participants to identify their managerial level using two management categories: first-line managers and middle managers. We also conducted the Harman's single factor test; results revealed that common method bias was not an issue for the analysis (Podsakoff et al., 2003). All measures were acceptable in terms of validity and reliability (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Nunnally, 1978).

Extraversion. We adopted the four-item short measure of extraversion validated by Donnellan et al. (2006). Participants rated themselves on the five-point scale ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree.’ Sample items were ‘I do not talk a lot (R)’ and ‘I am the life of the party.’ The Cronbach’s alpha for the measure is 0.73.

Networking. We followed Mintzberg’s (1973) concept of networking whereby managers’ external networks can provide a more holistic view of business and could have substantial effects on internal activities. We interviewed eight Thai executives regarding their external networking activities for social exchange and business insights. We found that accessing people in both the same and across industries were the common networking approaches they adopted. These were carried out through various social activities such as alumni gatherings, professional associations, and social functions. Such practices are consistent with those reported in Southeast Asian context, where external networking has been shown to enhance managers’ career success (Rasdi et al., 2012).

Accordingly, for networking behaviour, respondents were asked to rate 2 items on a 5-point scale ranging from ‘Most used’ to ‘Least used.’ These items were ‘I engage in networking within the same industry to exchange information that supports internal company activities’ and ‘I engage in cross-industry networking to exchange information that supports internal company activities.’ For two-item scales, prior methodological research suggests that the Spearman–Brown reliability coefficient provides a more robust estimate of internal consistency (Eisinga et al., 2013). Accordingly, we computed the Spearman–Brown reliability for the networking scale and found that it was consistent with the Cronbach’s alpha at 0.74, indicating satisfactory reliability of the measure.

Promotability. Managers participating in this study working in numerous organizations, each presumed to be evaluated on a unique performance appraisal system, precluded the use of organizational data as a measure of promotability. Supervisor-assessed career advancement of managers was extremely sensitive and highly confidential. This restricted the exploration of the managers’ current estimated potential in accelerating career advancement (Chong, 2013). Accordingly, we adopted the 3-item scale developed by Thacker and Wayne (1995) for managers to assess their promotability using a 7-point scale ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree.’ Sample items were ‘If my supervisor had to select a successor for his position, it would be me’ and ‘My supervisor believe that I have high potential’. The reliability coefficient of this measure is 0.80.

Management level. There are 2 levels of management included in this study. We asked participants to assess their management level according to the hierarchical structure of their current employer (coded 1 = first line manager and 2 = middle manager).

Controls. Individual characteristics were included as control variables because demographic factors—gender (female = 0, male = 1), education level (vocational = 1, bachelor’s = 2, master’s = 3, doctoral = 4), years in position (1–5 years = 1, 6–10 years = 2, more than 10 years = 3), and age (20–29 = 1, 30–39 = 2, 40–49 = 3, over 50 = 4)—may influence the study variables (Forret & Dougherty, 2004; Michael & Yukl, 1993; Ng et al., 2005). Organizational size, measured by the number of employees (fewer than 50 = 1, 50–249 = 2, more than 250 = 3), was also controlled for, as it may affect the career opportunities available within an employing organization (Judge et al., 1995). These control variables were included to rule out alternative explanations for the study’s findings.

Analytical methods

The analytical methods section outlines the procedures employed to ensure the validity of the study's results and conclusions. First, the constructs were validated through exploratory factor analysis, and the reliability of the scales was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha. Descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlations were then used to examine the preliminary relationships among the study variables. Subsequently, a moderated mediation model was specified, in which networking was hypothesized to mediate the relationship between extraversion and promotability, while management level was hypothesized to moderate the mediating effect of networking. The proposed model was tested using PROCESS version 4.1, with bootstrapped confidence intervals employed to assess the significance of the effects.

Research Findings

Validity and reliability measures

An exploratory factor analysis with principal component extraction and varimax rotation was conducted. Results identified with most items loading reliably on their predicted factors. All measures attained acceptability for reliability and convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Nunnally, 1978). Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.73 to 0.80 and the average variance extracted (AVE) values exceeded 0.5, indicating satisfactory internal consistency and adequate convergent validity (Table 2). Moreover, all square roots of AVEs were greater than all correlations of each pair of study variables, suggesting all measures attained acceptability for discriminant validity (Table 3).

Table 2: Validity and Reliability of Measures.

Measures	Factor loadings	AVE	Cronbach's α
Extraversion		0.51	0.73
I am the life of the party	0.80		
I don't talk a lot (R)	0.75		
I talk to a lot of different people at parties	0.76		
I keep in the background (R)	0.74		
Networking		0.60	0.74
I engage in networking within the same industry to exchange information that supports internal company activities.	0.89		
I engage in cross-industry networking to exchange information that supports internal company activities.	0.87		
Promotability		0.58	0.80
I believe that I will have a successful career.	0.75		
If my supervisor had to select a successor for his position, it would be me.	0.84		
My supervisor believe that I have high potential.	0.88		

The means, standard deviations and zero-order correlations of the study variables are presented in Table 3. These preliminary relationships of study variables indicated that all variables performed consistently with their related concepts and theories and, hence, were robustly valid for further testing.

Table 3: Correlations and Descriptive Statistics.

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1)Extraversion	3.47	0.77								
2)Networking	3.49	0.90	.16**							
3)Promotability	5.42	0.83	.35**	.22**						
4)Gender	0.46	0.50	.03	-.04	.03					
5)Education	2.66	0.63	-.21**	.09*	-.11*	-.11*				
6)Management level	1.49	0.50	.01	-.02	.13*	-.04	.16**			
7)Organization size	1.86	0.36	.03	-.07	.04	.07	-.08	-.03		
8)Position tenure	1.42	0.86	-.06	-.10*	-.04	.15**	.09	.27**	-.01	
9)Age	2.25	0.86	-.15**	-.05	-.15**	.10*	.18**	.26**	-.06	.55**

Notes: *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level., **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

Hypotheses testing

The moderated mediation model is specified whereby networking behavior is hypothesized to mediate the relationship between extraversion and career advancement and management level is hypothesized to moderate the networking mediating effect. We tested the study model using PROCESS v.4.1 and bootstrap confidence interval was used for the moderated mediation analysis (Hayes, 2015; 2018). If the confidence interval includes zero, it suggests no definitive evidence of moderation of the mediation of extraversion on promotability through networking by management levels. But, if the confidence interval does not include zero, this leads to the inference that the moderated mediation relationship between the indirect effect and the moderator is not zero. Following established methodological guidelines (Aiken & West, 1991; Hayes, 2018), variables used to construct interaction terms were mean-centered prior to the creation of product terms to facilitate the interpretation of the corresponding regression coefficients reported in Tables 4–6.

Table 4 presents the estimated regression coefficients. As can be seen, extraversion is positively related with networking ($B = 0.26$, 95% CI = 0.13 to 0.40, $p < .001$) and networking is positively related with promotability ($B = 0.20$, 95% CI = 0.11 to 0.29, $p < .001$) supporting H1 and H2. H4 and H5 hypothesized the moderation effects of management levels on the link of extraversion with networking (H4), and that of networking with promotability (H5). The interaction effects shown in Table 4 imply the relationships defined by different values of the moderator are statistically different. Further probing on the conditional effects is reported in Table 5. Our results indicated that there is a significantly stronger association between extraversion and networking for first-line managers ($B = 0.43$, 95% CI = 0.24 to 0.62, $p < .001$), but not for middle manager ($B = 0.10$, 95% CI = -0.08 to 0.27, $p > .05$); thus, H4 is partially supported. Regarding the effects of networking and promotability, we found support for both groups, but the moderating effect for middle managers ($B = 0.13$, 95% CI = 0.00 to 0.25, $p < .05$) is half the size of that for first-line managers ($B = 0.28$, 95% CI = 0.15 to 0.48, $p < .001$). This suggests that networking is more strongly linked to promotability for the first-line managers. Thus, H5 is partially supported. Figure 2 depicts the interaction effects on both relationships.

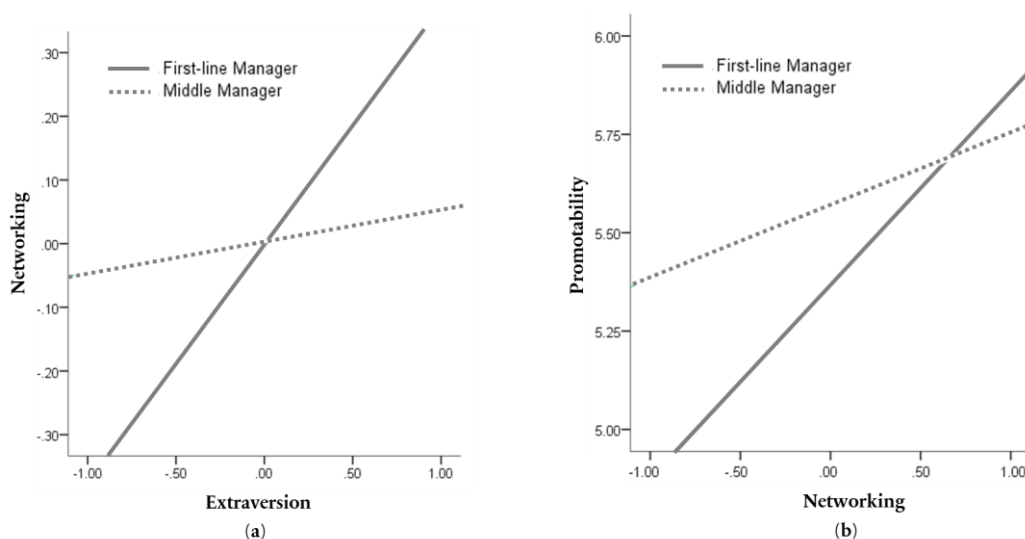


Figure 2: The Moderating Effect at Different Levels of Management on
(a) extraversion and networking; and (b) networking and promotability

Table 4: The Moderated Mediation Relations of Management Level, Extraversion and Networking with Promotability.

Variables	Networking (Mediator)		Promotability	
	Coeff.	95% CI	Coeff.	95% CI
Control variables				
Gender	-.05	-.24, .15	.04	-.12, .20
Education	.18*	.14, .35	-.07	-.21, .07
Organization size	-.29*	-.58, .00	-.05	-.29, .19
Position tenure	-.06	-.22, .10	.07	-.07, .20
Age	.23*	.06, .40	-.19**	-.34, .05
Direct effect				
Extraversion	.26***	.13, .40	.27***	.16, .38
Mediator				
Networking			.20***	.11, .29
Moderator variable				
Management level	-.12	-.32, .09	.27*	.10, .44
Interaction effect				
Extraversion x Management level	-.33*	-.59, -.08	.15 [†]	-.33, .03
Networking x Management level				

Notes: [†] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 5: Probing Conditional Effects of the Focal Predictors at Different Levels of Management

	Networking (Mediator)		Promotability	
	Coeff.	95% CI	Coeff.	95% CI
Focal predictor - Extraversion				
First-line manager	.43***	.24, .62		
Middle manager	.10	-.08, .27		
Focal predictor - Networking				
First-line manager			.28***	.15, .40
Middle manager			.13*	.00, .25

Notes: [†] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

With regards to the mediating role of networking on extraversion and promotability, we found the indirect effect of extraversion on promotability was conditional on management level (Table 6). The indirect effect was significant for the first-line manager ($B = 0.12$, 95% CI = 0.04 to 0.21) and not significant for the middle manager ($B = 0.01$, 95% CI = -0.00 to 0.04). This suggests a partial mediation effect of networking, thus H3 is partially supported.

We also tested the moderating effect of management levels on the mediating role of networking on extraversion and promotability. The index of moderated mediation is -0.11 with the 95% CI of -0.20 to -0.27 suggesting that the mediating is significantly different between the two groups, i.e. first-line and middle managers. Thus, H6 is supported.

Table 6: Conditional Indirect Effect of Extraversion on Promotability through Networking.

	Indirect Effect		95% Confidence Interval	
	Estimate ^a	S.E.	Lower	Upper
First-line manager	.12	.04	.04	.21
Middle manager	.01	.01	-.00	.04

Note: ^a Estimated coefficient using bootstrapping with 5,000 samples.

In sum, our results supported the moderated mediation model that networking partially mediated the relations of extraversion with promotability and that this mediation was moderated by management levels. Those extroverts who are in the early stage of managerial career tend to benefit more from networking on career promotability than their senior counterparts.

Discussion

Theoretical contributions

This study advances research on managerial networking and career advancement by developing and testing a theoretically grounded, role-contingent explanation of when and for whom networking translates into promotability in an emerging-market context. Responding to calls for more context-sensitive networking research in underrepresented regions (Horak et al., 2020; Horak & Paik, 2023), we integrate Trait Activation Theory (Tett et al., 2021), Role Theory (Biddle, 1986; Katz & Kahn, 1978), and Resource Dependence Theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) to specify a moderated mediation mechanism linking extraversion to promotability through networking, contingent on managerial level. Our findings refine prevailing assumptions about the uniform benefits of networking by identifying theoretically meaningful boundary conditions and by offering a role- and context-embedded interpretation of networking's career value. In addition, this research adds on managerial networking literature by explicitly demonstrating career benefits of networking across two levels of management, which is an under researched area (cf. Michael & Yukl, 1993).

Specifically, our study contributes to the networking and managerial career literature by challenging the prevailing assumption that networking provides uniform career benefits across hierarchical levels and by demonstrating that its effects are role contingent. Although networking is widely theorized as a career-enhancing behavior (Gibson et al., 2014; Horak et al., 2020; Wolff & Kim, 2012), prior research has implicitly treated its returns as stable across managerial strata, with limited attention to how role expectations and evaluation criteria change across hierarchical levels (Li, 2005; Rasdi et al., 2012). Moreover, our results show that the relationship between networking and promotability is stronger for first-line managers than for

middle managers, and that the indirect effect of extraversion on promotability through networking is evident only at the first-line level. Our findings support a role-contingent view of networking grounded in Role Theory, which suggests that organizational roles involve different expectations, scopes of influence, and legitimate behaviors as individuals move up the hierarchy (Biddle, 1986; Katz & Kahn, 1978). Put differently, while our results align with prior research on the mediating role of networking in the relationship between extraversion and career outcomes (Bendella & Wolff, 2020; Hirschi et al., 2018; Wolff & Kim, 2012), we observe a diminishing effect of networking on career benefits as managers progress in their careers. This pattern motivates a more detailed examination of how personality, role expectations, and contextual factors jointly shape the career returns to networking.

Second, by integrating TAT with Role Theory, we extend trait-based explanations of career advancement by clarifying that extraversion becomes promotable to the extent that the role context provides cues and opportunity structures that enable extraversion to be expressed through effective networking and recognized as valuable. Our findings show that extraversion is strongly related to networking among first-line managers, but not among middle managers. This suggests that the extent to which personality traits are expressed through behavior depends on managerial role requirements and the opportunities those roles provide. In line with TAT, this pattern indicates that extraversion leads to networking only when the role context encourages such behavior. More broadly, our results suggest that the relationship between personality and career-related behavior varies across hierarchical levels, as different roles involve different expectations and evaluation criteria (Anzengruber et al., 2017).

Third, this study refines resource-based explanations of networking in managerial careers by showing that the career value of networking varies across hierarchical levels. RDT suggests that individuals use networks to access career-relevant resources that are often controlled by powerful actors (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). While prior research generally treats networking as an effective career strategy (Li, 2005; Majumdar & Chandra, 2025; Rasdi et al., 2012), our findings indicate that networking is more strongly associated with promotability among first-line managers than among middle managers. This pattern suggests that as managers move up the hierarchy, access to critical career resources—such as sponsorship, strategic visibility, and influence—becomes more restricted and less easily obtained through general networking activities. Consistent with research on managerial roles and networking behavior, higher-level managers operate in contexts where networking opportunities are more selective and advancement increasingly depends on endorsement from senior actors (Chong, 2013; Hirschi et al., 2018). Accordingly, our study extends prior research by identifying managerial level as an important condition that shapes when networking functions as an effective career resource.

Fourth, this study provides a culturally embedded explanation for the role-based differences observed in the career value of networking. In collectivist and high power-distance contexts such as Thailand, networking serves not only to maintain social relationships but also to support early managerial career development through visibility, information exchange, and informal support (Gibson et al., 2014; Hofstede, 2001; Porter et al., 2023). However, as managers advance, career progression increasingly depends on access to selective and closed networks, where entry is shaped by trust, reputation, and organizational sponsorship rather than general social activity (Chong, 2013; Pearson & Chatterjee, 2003). Prior research on informal networks in Asia suggests that access to such high-stakes networks is strongly influenced by relational legitimacy and existing social capital (Horak et al., 2019). As a result, while networking and extraversion are beneficial at early managerial stages, they are less sufficient

for middle managers seeking advancement to senior leadership roles. This finding highlights the joint influence of hierarchical position and cultural context in shaping the career returns to networking.

In sum, this study contributes to the networking and managerial career literature by providing (a) empirical validation of networking as a key mechanism linking extraversion to promotability, (b) contextual enrichment by demonstrating how this mechanism operates in Thailand, where informal ties play a central role in career navigation, and (c) theoretical refinement by identifying managerial level as a boundary condition that qualifies when networking functions as a promotability-relevant resource. By showing that the career payoffs of networking are both role- and context-dependent, this study advances a more differentiated framework for understanding networking as a career mechanism in emerging-market environments (Horak & Paik, 2023).

Managerial implications

The insights from this research offer valuable guidance for both individual managers and organizations operating in Thailand and in similar cultural contexts with broader implications for talent development and organizational effectiveness. For individual managers, particularly those in the early career stages, investing in social networking is crucial for accessing career resources such as recognition and support from key sponsors within professional social groups. Early career managers should focus on building and strengthening professional network ties through social exchange relationships, aligned with the collectivist and high-power distance culture prevalent in Thailand. To support these efforts, organizations can implement mentorship programs that pair first-line managers with senior leaders, facilitating knowledge transfer and providing networking opportunities that help early career managers establish connections with influential figures in and across industries.

Organizations, especially multinational corporations (MNCs) operating in Thailand, can enhance networking skills across managerial levels by offering targeted development programs. Networking skill development workshops should be designed to improve competencies such as effective communication, relationship building, and strategic networking, while also addressing the specific cultural nuances of Thai networking practices. In addition, providing cultural training to expatriate managers is essential. Such training should emphasize understanding and navigating high-context communication and high-power distance structures, enabling expatriates to effectively integrate into the local networking landscape and build meaningful professional relationships. Furthermore, strategic leadership development should be designed to go beyond general networking to more exclusive network groups for meaningful social exchange relations and effective outcomes. In doing so, organizations can cultivate a supportive environment that emphasizes the importance of networking as a key component of career development, while also addressing the varying needs of managers at different stages of their careers.

Additionally, this study also offers broader social relevance. By improving understanding of how networking behaviors operate across managerial levels in Thailand, the findings can support more effective talent development practices and strengthen leadership pipelines within organizations. At the organizational level, clearer recognition of the role of networking in career advancement can enhance coordination, knowledge sharing, and leadership effectiveness. At a broader level, developing managers who can navigate complex relational environments and building effective networks may contribute to organizational resilience and, in turn, support its competitiveness in emerging market contexts such as Thailand.

Directions of Future Research

Notwithstanding this evidence, our findings have certain limitations. Our study provides insights from the Thai context on the differing utility of networking for first-line and middle managers, offering a more comprehensive perspective to complement network theory in the study of managerial careers (Horak et al., 2020; Pearson & Chatterjee, 2003). As discussed, cultural values and key characteristics of Thai culture are likely to strengthen the pathways to promotability through proactive networking for extraverted managers, especially first-line managers. Therefore, we anticipate that the results will be applicable to contexts with similar characteristics, notably in other high-power distance and high context cultures. Future research could extend this study by sampling a more diverse range of societal contexts to reinforce our confidence in the generalizability of the findings.

Additionally, it is conceivable that different managerial levels may benefit from different networking foci and dimensions (Spurk et al., 2019). Future studies might benefit from exploring the effects of multi-dimensional networking, both internal and external, on managerial careers in senior positions. Moreover, a more in-depth exploration of how cultural dimensions and other social values in Thailand such as could influence network ties and the different properties of networks in the workplace could enrich our understanding of the cultural embeddedness of informal networks (Horak & Paik, 2023). Extending such analyses to comparative or cross-national contexts would offer a more global perspective on how cultural contingencies condition the effectiveness of networking in managerial careers.

Finally, future research should focus more explicitly on networking among senior managers, for whom career advancement may depend less on formal promotion and more on access to strategic influence, board-level opportunities, and inter-organizational mobility. Examining how senior managers cultivate and leverage externally oriented networks would deepen understanding of networking as a long-term career resource and clarify how networking functions across later career stages.

Conclusion

This study examines the effects of networking across management levels in Thailand, an emerging market country. Our findings support a moderated mediation model, in which networking partially mediates the relationship between extraversion and promotability, with a stronger effect for first-line managers. This study found that networking is a crucial mediator between extraversion and career advancement, especially for first-line managers in Thailand, and that its effectiveness decreases at higher managerial levels, indicating that middle managers may need additional traits or more exclusive network ties for advancement. These results highlight the importance of cultural context in studying networking behaviors and their career impacts. Organizations in Thailand and similar environments should consider tailored leadership development programs that address the varying importance of networking across managerial levels.

Research Ethics

This study was conducted in compliance with the university's ethics policy, Guidelines for Conducting Human Subjects Research in Behavioral Sciences, Social Sciences, and Humanities, in accordance with the standards of the Thailand National Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation Policy Council.

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Data Availability

The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Disclosure Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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