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Connecting, Mediating, or Dividing? How Brokers Navigate Networks

Public
Lecture

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How is collaboration achieved in projects and networks? Under what circumstances is it essential to join forces? And when is it imperative to de-couple third parties? This talk deals with these questions by attending to the particular role and action of the broker. The idea of the broker – an individual that stands between two other parties – is central to the idea of coordination in general and especially to the increase in networking and collaboration we currently see globally. While brokerage has always been a central idea in social network theory, brokerage traditionally has been viewed as a particular structural pattern in which two otherwise disconnected people are connected through a third party. This talk argues for a broadened approach to brokerage by attending to the actual social behavior of third parties. We explore this process-based view by examining three fundamental strategic orientations toward brokerage behavior: conduit (where the broker transfers information from person to another), tertius iungens (where the broker connects two formerly unrelated people) and tertius gaudens (where the broker plays two other people against one another or keeps them apart to his own advantage). We use this process-based view to provide new insights into a wide range of social phenomena.



David Obstfeld is Associate Professor of Management at California State University, Fullerton. His research examines how the knowledge-intensive, network-based social processes that result in organizational change and innovation unfold at the local and firm levels. David has published in the leading journals *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Organization Science*, *Research in the Sociology of Organizations*, and *Industrial and Corporate Change*.

http://business.fullerton.edu/Management/Professor_Pages/bio/obstdavi/

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