

Structural Holes and Good Ideas¹

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This article outlines the mechanism by which brokerage provides social capital. Opinion and behavior are more homogeneous within than between groups, so people connected across groups are more familiar with alternative ways of thinking and behaving. Brokerage across the structural holes between groups provides a vision of options otherwise unseen, which is the mechanism by which brokerage becomes social capital. I review evidence consistent with the hypothesis, then look at the networks around managers in a large American electronics company. The organization is rife with structural holes, and brokerage has its expected correlates. Compensation, positive performance evaluations, promotions, and good ideas are disproportionately in the hands of people whose networks span structural holes. The between-group brokers are more likely to express ideas, less likely to have ideas dismissed, and more likely to have ideas evaluated as valuable. I close with implications for creativity and structural change.