

# DISSERTATION PROPOSAL

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## INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCE AND ORGANIZATIONAL NETWORKS

A key question in the study of organizations is why some employees perform better than others. Understanding the drivers of individual performance is important because organizations rely heavily on their human resources to build value. Among the different perspectives that have been proposed to explain variance in individual performance, the social network approach has emerged as a widely accepted one. Informal relationships among individuals are seen as a source of both opportunities and constraints; as a consequence, employees' outcomes depend in part on their position in the network structure. Understanding how informal relationships affect performance requires a theory that explains both how individuals attain valuable network positions and how they take advantage of those positions.

In this dissertation, I propose to answer these questions and further our understanding of the link between individual performance and social networks by analyzing both the evolution of intraorganizational informal ties (Chapter 1) and the mechanisms underpinning the ability of individuals to extract rents from their structural positions (Chapter 2 and Chapter 3).

In the first chapter, adopting an organizational design perspective on social networks evolution, I design a quasi-experiment of the evolution of informal ties in the aftermath of a managerial intervention that spurs employees to become key network players. This study advances our understanding of how individuals move into valuable network positions by illustrating the role that organization design may play in affecting the evolution of social ties.

In the second and third chapter, focusing on brokerage, a key social network position, I explore two mechanisms that affect employees' ability to derive advantages from spanning structural holes. Specifically, in the second chapter, distinguishing *brokerage* as a structural property of individuals in a network from *brokering* as a behavioral strategic orientation toward interacting with others, I theorize and find evidence for the fact that brokers' behavior play an important role in explaining individual performance over and above structural positions. In the third chapter, disentangling actual and cognitive social structures with respect to brokerage positions, I propose that alters' perceptions of a focal actor's brokerage opportunities play a moderating role in the relationship between individual performance and network positions with higher returns accruing to brokers who are misperceived by their alters to occupy dense social networks.

Moving beyond a pure structuralist approach, which assumes that the major determinant of employees' performance rests in the social structure surrounding them, this dissertation proposal attempts to explain why some people perform better than others by focusing on processes and socio-cognitive mechanisms associated with attaining and taking advantage of specific network positions.