Brokerage and Brokering:

An Integrative Review and Organizing Framework for Third Party Influence

Nir Halevy[1], Eliran Halali[2], & Julian Zlatev[3]

[1]Stanford University

[2]Bar-Ilan University

[3]Harvard University

Nir Halevy: nhalevy@stanford.edu

Eliran Halali: eliran.halali@biu.ac.il

Julian Zlatev: jzlatev@hbs.edu

Abstract

Brokerage and brokering are pervasive and consequential organizational phenomena. Prevailing models underscore social structure and focus on the consequences that come from *brokerage* — occupying a bridging position between disconnected others in a network. In contrast, emerging models underscore social interactions and focus on *brokering* — the behavioral processes through which organizational actors shape others' relationships. Our review led us to develop a novel framework as a means to integrate and organize a wide range of theoretical insights and empirical findings on brokerage and brokering. The COR (Changing Others' Relationships) framework captures the following ideas that emerged from our review: (a) different triadic configurations enable different forms of brokering, which in turn, produce distinct effects on others' relationships; (b) brokering is a multifaceted social influence process that can take the form of intermediation (connecting disconnected others) or modification (changing others' preexisting relationships); (c) comparing social relations pre-brokering versus post-brokering reveals a broker's impact; (d) brokering can influence others' relationships positively or negatively; and (e) information and incentives are two principal means through which individuals change others' relationships. Overall, the current review integrates multiple streams of research relevant to brokerage and brokering — including those on structural holes, organizational innovation, boundary spanning, social and political skill, workplace gossip, third-party conflict managers, and labor relations — and links each of the emergent themes identified in the current review to promising directions for future research on brokerage and brokering.

Navigating social interdependence is one of the greatest challenges of the human existence (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Markus & Kitayama, 2010; Rand & Nowak, 2013). Social relations are crucial for our survival, functioning, well-being, and success (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Coleman, 1988; Eisenberger, Lieberman, & Williams, 2003). Hence, much of our affective, cognitive, and behavioral repertoire as humans is geared toward initiating, regulating, and managing social interactions and relationships (Mercier & Sperber, 2011; Schilbach et al., 2008). Critically, as members of an ultra-social species we habitually manage and regulate not only our own interactions and relationships, but also other people's interactions and relationships. Influencing others' interactions and relationships does not require occupying a particular social role, formal position, or specific relation to others (such as parent, teacher, or manager). Rather, merely being connected to, and interdependent with, other people provides opportunities, the motivation, and at least some capacity to influence others' interactions and relationships.

Attempts to influence other people's interactions and relationships in organizational contexts are both ubiquitous and diverse. Making face-to-face and e-mail introductions, engaging in benevolent and malevolent workplace gossip, and intervening as mediators or arbitrators in coworkers' disputes are just some of the means through which we routinely influence others' relationships in organizational contexts. The social influence that people exert over others' relationships is the essence of *brokering* and the primary focus of this article.[1]

The pervasiveness and significance of brokerage positions and brokering processes in organizations stimulated a substantial body of scholarly work on these consequential phenomena. Researchers studying social structure have introduced multiple constructs to address the richness of social network phenomena at the node level (e.g., centrality, constraint), the dyadic level (e.g.,

tie strength, multiplexity) and the network level (e.g., density, cohesion) (e.g., Burt, 1992; Clifton & Webster, 2017; Freeman, 1978; Krackhardt, 1999; Uzzi & Spiro, 2005; Zhelyazkov, 2018). Indeed, several author teams before us have undertaken the admirable endeavor to review and summarize the voluminous and dynamic literature on the consequences of brokerage — that is, the outcomes associated with occupying a bridging position between disconnected others in a network (e.g., Burt, Kilduff, & Tasselli, 2013; Carpenter, Li, Jiang, 2012; Kilduff & Brass, 2010; Landis, 2016; Stovel & Shaw, 2012).

Here we aim to review and integrate the thriving literature on brokerage with emerging insights and findings on brokering processes. Multiple research teams have made important strides in recent years toward a deeper understanding of how brokering happens (e.g., Kaplan, Milde, & Cowan, 2017; Lingo & O'Mahony, 2010; Obstfeld, 2017; Quintane & Carnabuci, 2016). To integrate research on brokerage and brokering, we followed recent recommendations (Aguinis, Ramani, & Alabduljader, 2018), and engaged in an iterative process to define the scope of the current review and identify relevant content by searching relevant databases, seeking advice from scholars with pertinent expertise, and conducting back searches for referenced work. We intentionally took an inclusive approach and chose to cast a wide net in reviewing the relevant literatures. This conscious decision was based on our goal to advance an integrative conceptualization of brokerage and brokering processes in organizations. This conscious effort to integrate and synthesize a broad body of work in the social and organizational sciences responds to recent calls to better integrate structural network phenomena and social psychological phenomena in organizational research (Casciaro et al., 2015; Clifton & Webstrer, 2017) and is manifested in the diversity of the works we review.

Conceptualizing Brokerage and Brokering

Throughout this review we will use the term brokerage to denote a particular structural position in a social network, and the term brokering to denote the behaviors that individuals pursue when acting as brokers.[2] Conceptualizations of both brokerage and brokering vary in scope. Whereas inclusive conceptualizations endeavor to reflect the inherent breadth and complexity of these phenomena, exclusive definitions focus more narrowly on a particular aspect. We find it useful to begin our exploration of the landscape of conceptualizations of brokerage and brokering in Simmel's (1950) classic work on triads as it provides an early and thought-provoking analysis of the varieties of triadic phenomena. We then present more recent definitions that echo Simmel's inclusive perspective and contrast them with more exclusive definitions that focus on a subset of the functional forms that brokerage and brokering take.

Simmel's conceptualization of brokering (albeit using other terms) is based on his analysis of social influence processes in triads. Simmel (1950, p.149) noted that "social life is constantly determined in its course by the presence of the third person", and stipulated a number of distinct ways in which the "third element" fundamentally transforms dyadic interactions and relationships. These distinct forms of third party influence include acting as an impartial mediator or arbitrator "to save the group unity from the danger of splitting up" (p. 154); the 'tertius gaudens'—the third who benefits from utilizing others' preexisting quarrel or separation; and the social divider ('divide et impera')—the third who "intentionally produces the conflict in order to gain a dominating position" (p. 162).

Simmel explicitly acknowledged that third parties may bolster or undermine dyadic relations, noting "…among three elements, each one operates as an intermediary between the other two, exhibiting the twofold function…to unite and separate. …the indirect relation does not only strengthen the direct relation. It may also disturb it" (p. 135). Simmel proposed further that

brokering may also result in "the intensification of relation by a third element" (p. 136). That is, a broker can reinforce a pre-existing relationship between two alters. Brokers may enhance a positive relationship by using their influence to promote dyadic intimacy, trust and cooperation, thereby making a weak tie stronger. In contrast, brokers can aggravate a pre-existing negative relationship between two alters by using their influence to intensify suspicion, hostility and competition.[3] Following Simmel, we subscribe to the view that both brokerage and brokering are multifaceted constructs. Thus, similar to the idea that "qualitatively different roles [can] have equal claim to the term *brokerage*" (Gould & Fernandez, 1989, p. 123, italics in source), we contend that different behavioral processes have equal claim to the term *brokering*.

Our reading of Simmel's analysis leads us to highlight five aspects that we see as particularly noteworthy and that we suggest can serve as a conceptual yardstick when exploring other definitions of brokerage and brokering. First, Simmel's analysis focuses on *small groups*.[4] Second, it defines brokering as a social influence *process*. Third, it proposes that brokering does not require the absence of preexisting ties between alters. Thus, it may occur in a closed triad — when alters have preexisting positive or negative relations, as well as in an open triad — when the two alters are connected only through the broker. Accordingly, it conceptualizes brokering *both as intermediation* (instances in which ego functions as an intermediary who connects two disconnected alters, either directly or indirectly: Soda, Tortoriello, & Iorio, 2018) *and as modification* (instances in which ego modifies the nature of the preexisting relationship between two alters: Obstfeld, Borgatti, & Davis, 2014). Fourth, it explicitly acknowledges that third parties can be *helpful as well as harmful* in their impact on others' relationships. Lastly, Simmel discusses both how brokers influence *others' outcomes* and how they shape their *own outcomes*.

Several other conceptualizations of brokerage and brokering share the first and second elements noted above, and similarly emphasize the importance of studying interpersonal processes in small groups (Gould & Fernandez, 1989; Krackhardt & Kilduff, 1999). For example, Grannovetter (1973, p. 1360) called attention to the significance of small scale social interactions and the value of learning "what transpires within the confines of the small group", and Stovel and Shaw (2012, p. 139) asserted that "because brokering is built from informal, personal relationships, understanding it requires close attention to micro-level relations and social psychological processes". Other definitions of brokering similarly focus on the "behavior by which an actor influences, manages, or facilitates interactions between other actors" (Obstfeld et al., 2014, p.141).

Definitions of brokerage and brokering diverge with regards to the third aspect noted above. Specifically, definitions of brokering assert that brokering may occur in both closed and open triads (i.e., when the two alters have preexisting ties, or do not have pre-existing ties, respectively; Obstfeld et al., 2014; Simmel, 1950). In contrast, definitions of brokerage typically view the absence of a preexisting tie as a prerequisite to brokerage, and consequently, tend to conceptualize brokerage as occurring only in open triads. Consistent with the idea that brokerage only occurs in open triads, Gould and Fernandez (1989) proposed that "the whole point of brokering is to create an indirect relation *where no direct relation exists*" (p. 95, italics added), and further emphasized the importance of intermediation in brokering by asserting that "brokering in general involves the flow or exchange of resources from one actor to another via an intermediary" (p. 123). Similarly, Burt (2000, p. 356) wrote that "brokering is explicitly about action that cuts *across structural holes* in the current social structure" (italics added), and in a recent review of the literature with colleagues reiterated that "brokering is the action of

coordinating across the hole with bridge connections between people on opposite sides of the hole" (Burt et al., 2013; p. 531). A similar emphasis on the importance of structural holes in brokerage comes from other definitions (e.g., Fleming, Mingo, & Chen, 2007, p. 443; Stovel, Golub, & Meyersson Milgrom, 2011, p. 21326).

The aforementioned bifurcation with regards to the third aspect we derived from Simmel's analysis spills over also to the fourth element identified above. Definitions of brokerage as the occupation of a structural position that enables bridging gaps in the social structure tend to focus on the facilitation of social exchange and consider primarily the positive effects of brokers. For example, Marsden (1982, p. 202) defined brokers as "intermediary actors [who] facilitate transactions between other actors lacking access to or trust in one another". Likewise, Stovel & Shaw (2012, p. 141) emphasized brokers' ability "to facilitate access to valued resources". Whereas third parties can often be helpful, we share Simmel's (1950), Obstfeld et al.'s (2014) and others' (e.g., Posner, Spier, & Vermeule, 2010) views that third parties can also impact others' relationships negatively, for example, by spreading accurate as well as inaccurate negative reputational information about others (i.e., gossip: Burt & Knez, 1995; Feinberg, Willer, Stellar, & Kletner, 2012; Wu, Balliet, & Van Lange, 2016).

Integrating structural definitions and process-oriented definitions of brokerage and brokering, we propose that brokering can take the form of *intermediation*, whereby the broker connects (either directly or indirectly) two disconnected alters in their network, as well as the form of *modification*, whereby the broker changes the nature of preexisting relationships between alters, for better or worse. Figure 1 presents this integrative view of brokering processes.

Figure 1. An integrative view of brokering as intermediation and/or modification.
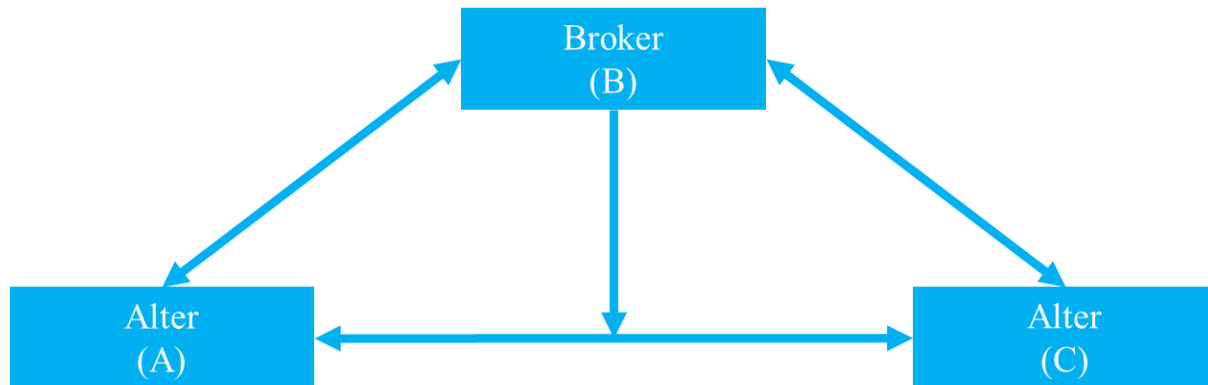
Finally, with regards to the fifth element we derived from Simmel's analysis, many treatments of brokerage and brokering acknowledge their multiple consequences for the focal actor (i.e., the broker, or ego), the targets of brokering (i.e., the alters), and the organizational unit(s) in which the relevant actors are embedded. However, different treatments of brokerage and brokering vary considerably in the extent to which they emphasize the consequences for ego versus the consequences for alters. The social capital branch of the networks literature, in particular, tends to focus on "how ego gains advantage from the network around her" (Burt et al., 2013, p. 529), and highlight that "relations with contacts in otherwise disconnected groups provide a competitive advantage in detecting and developing rewarding opportunities" (Burt et al., 2013, p. 531). As noted by Stovel & Shaw (2012, p. 140), "many contemporary scholars valorize the economic and control benefits that accrue to brokers as a result of their position", which include more positive evaluations of their ideas, higher pay, greater recognition, and faster promotions relative to their peers (Burt et al., 2013; Stovel & Shaw, 2012). The focus on brokerage's consequences for ego has led some authors to assert that, "although much is known about how brokering positions in social networks help individuals improve their own performance, we know little about the impact of brokers on those around them" (Clement, Shipilov, & Galunic, 2017, p. 1; cf. Galunic, Ertug, & Gargiulo, 2012).

Whereas the social capital branch emphasizes the extrinsic rewards to brokers, other perspectives suggest that brokering may be an intrinsically rewarding activity. For instance, recent research suggested that individuals may engage in some forms of brokerage, such as matchmaking, because doing so is intrinsically rewarding and promotes the broker's happiness (Anik & Norton, 2014). Additionally, Gould and Fernandez (1989, p. 91) noted that "an actor who facilitates transactions or resource flows" is considered a broker "whether or not the actor attempts to extract direct reward" and suggested that brokerage's consequences for others may vary with the functional role that the broker fulfills, which in turn, depends on the sub-group memberships of the three actors in a triad. For instance, when all three parties share a common group membership the broker is viewed as a *coordinator*; when each of the three parties in the triad belongs to a distinct sub-group the broker is viewed as a *liaison;* and when one party seeks access to a sub-group that the other two parties share, the broker is viewed as a *gatekeeper* (Gould & Fernandez, 1989). Coordinators, liaisons and gatekeepers influence others' interactions and relationships in qualitatively different ways.

Summary

Though conceptualizations of brokerage and brokering vary, researchers commonly agree that network structure sets the stage for brokering activity (Obstfeld, 2017; Landis, Kilduff, Menges, & Kilduff, 2018). Our review of the research on brokerage and brokering identified the need for greater integration between social structure and social process as a key theme. To facilitate such integration across the different literatures we reviewed, we introduce in the next section an organizing framework that builds on interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003) to delineate distinct brokerage contexts and brokering processes in

organizations. We then utilize this novel framework to integrate the insights that emerged from our review.

An Organizing Framework for Brokering

The premise of the COR (Changing Others' Relationships) framework is that brokering activities target others' relationships. The raw material for brokering is alters' preexisting relationship, or lack thereof, and the outcome of brokering is alters' relationship post-brokering.[5] Thus, the effect of brokering is evident from the change to alters' relationship, and it can be gauged by comparing alters' relationship pre-intervention versus post-intervention (i.e., before versus after the brokering activity has taken place). This conceptualization of brokering activity allows us to derive different functional forms that brokering in organizations may take from a consideration of the different ways in which a third party might influence dyadic relationships (which can then be scaled up beyond the triad). The COR framework's focus on changing interpersonal relationships builds on Interdependence Theory (IT), a classic social psychological account of interpersonal and group phenomena that is uniquely positioned to bridge social structure (i.e., occupying bridging positions) and social processes (i.e., acts of intermediation or modification that shape others' relationships). Hence, we begin by briefly introducing IT.

Interdependence Theory

IT focuses on *outcome interdependence*, the extent to which individuals' interests are aligned versus misaligned, and the extent to which individuals can influence each other's outcomes, for better or worse, through their actions. This notion of interdependence should be distinguished from *procedural interdependence*, the extent to which individuals' work procedures are interwoven and hence require communication and coordination for effective team performance.

IT epitomizes the view that there is something both primary and unique about dyadic interactions and relationships (Balliet, Tybur, & Van Lange, 2016; Halevy, Chou, & Murnighan, 2012; Kelley et al., 2003; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). IT describes and analyzes interpersonal situations in which two individuals are linked in ways that enable them to influence their own and each other's outcomes and behavior. These interpersonal situations create both the need for coordination and the possibility of conflict (Kelley et al., 2003; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). IT uses multiple dimensions to analyze dyadic interdependence situations (Balliet et al., 2016; Reis, 2008). The current analysis builds on two essential aspects of IT: the degree of interdependence and the correspondence of interests between parties (Kelley et al., 2003, p. 46).

The degree of interdependence dimension ranges from no interdependence (i.e., independence) to complete dependence, and captures the degree to which each person is dependent on the other (and consequently how much power each person has to control the other's outcomes and influence their behavior). The correspondence of interests dimension ranges from perfectly corresponding interests (correlation of 1) to perfectly conflicting interests (correlation of -1), and is considered "the single most important property" of any interdependence situation (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978, p. 117). Variation along this goal compatibility/incompatibility dimension shapes the extent to which individuals see each other as partners versus adversaries and behave cooperatively versus competitively (Halevy & Katz, 2013; Halevy & Phillips, 2015).

Although interdependence theory focuses on dyadic interactions and relationships, it explicitly acknowledges the manifold ways in which a third party can either help or harm dyadic interactions and relationships. Kelley and his colleagues (2003) noted that "the large number of possible dyadic situations…is dwarfed by the great variety of possible triadic situations" (p.

394), a proliferation of interdependence patterns that interdependence theorists solved by focusing on a subset of uniquely important triadic patterns. These patterns include, for instance, the formation of coalitions in which two individuals exclude the third; third party intervention in dyadic conflict; and situations in which the third party's "presence may threaten the unique intimacy that a dyad has developed and thus result in feelings of jealousy on the part of one member of the pair" (p. 402).

Changing Others' Relationships (COR)

Building on IT's focus on dyadic interactions and relationships, we propose that brokering captures social influence processes whereby third parties use information (e.g., advice, feedback, gossip) and/or incentives (e.g., praise and condemnation, monetary rewards and punishments, social inclusion and ostracism) to shape dyadic interactions and relationships. We propose that third parties can influence, through their brokering activities, both of the foundational dimensions noted above (degree of interdependence and correspondence of interests). Put differently, we propose that two essential aspects of brokering involve: (a) third parties' ability to create or terminate relationships between alters (i.e., change the degree of interdependence); and (b) third parties' ability to change the sign of the relationship between alters (from positive to negative or vice versa, i.e., change the correspondence of interests). Figure 2 provides a schematic presentation of our COR organizing framework based on these two aspects.[6]

The rows in Figure 2 capture alters' relationship *before* the third party has pursued brokering activity. The columns in Figure 2 denote the nature of interdependence between alters *after* the third party has pursued brokering activity. Consistent with IT's focus on degree of interdependence and correspondence of interests, the COR framework classifies alters'

relationship pre-brokering and post-brokering as either negative, neutral/none, or positive. Crossing the rows and columns in Figure 2 delineates distinct functional forms of brokering.

Figure 2. The COR organizing framework: Identifying distinct functional forms of brokering based on alters' relationships pre-brokering versus post-brokering and corresponding literatures.

Pre-Intervention \ Post-Intervention	Negative Relationship	Neutral / None	Positive Relationship
Negative Relationship		**Helpful Brokers** *Literatures on Cooperation Catalysts & Third Party Conflict Managers*	
Neutral / None	**Harmful Brokers** *Literatures on Workplace Gossip, Labor Relations, & Divide and Conquer Behavior*	**Reinforcers**	
Positive Relationship			

Alters' pre-existing relationship, or lack thereof, provides the structural-relational context for brokering. When two alters have no preexisting relationship pre-brokering, the context for brokering is one of an open triad. In contrast, when the two alters have a preexisting relationship pre-brokering, the context for brokering is one of a closed triad. These structural-relational conditions delineate the range of possible brokering processes. For instance, a third party has an opportunity to introduce disconnected alters to each other in an open triad but not in a closed triad. A third party may nonetheless pursue brokering activity in a closed triad to transform a weak tie into a strong tie or vice versa. As another example, a third party has an opportunity to act as a conflict manager when the two alters have a negative pre-brokering relationship, but not

when the two alters have a positive pre-brokering relationship. Thus, the nature of alters'

relationship prior to the brokering activity determines the range of possible effects of brokering.

We label third parties in the three cells in the top right corner of the matrix (marked in

green) helpful brokers as they transform negative relationships into neutral or positive

relationships (as well as neutral relationships into positive relationships). In all three cells alters'

relationships benefit from the brokering activity relative to their state before it took place. We

label third parties in the three red cells in the bottom left corner of the matrix (marked in red)

harmful brokers as they transform positive or neutral relationships into negative relationships (as

well as positive relationships into neutral relationships). In all three cells alters' relationships

suffer from the brokering activity relative to their state before it took place. Finally, we label

third parties in the three cells on the diagonal in the matrix (marked in yellow) reinforcers as they

modify the intensity of alters' relationships (i.e., along the degree of interdependence dimension)

rather than change its sign. These cells represent the possibility of brokering processes to

intensify or galvanize pre-existing relations between alters noted by Simmel (1950, pp.135-136;

cf. Krackhardt, 1999), for instance, by turning weak ties into strong ties, or by turning

unidimensional ties into multiplex ties (e.g., from task-related ties only, to task-related and social

ties). Brokering activities can make either positive or negative relationships more intense using

information or incentives that reinforce sentiments and behaviors that preceded the brokering

activity.

As Figure 2 shows, several streams of research that focus on third party influence on

interpersonal interactions and relationships can be integrated using the COR framework. The

social networks literature that focuses on brokers as cooperation catalysts (e.g., Ahuja, 2000;

Burt, 2004; Walker, Kogut, & Shan, 1997) fits in the green cell in which brokering activity

transforms no relationship (or neutral relationship) pre-intervention into positive relationship post-brokering. The third party conflict management literature that focuses on arbitration, mediation, and other forms of third party intervention in disputes (e.g., Ross & Conlon, 2000; Rubin, 1980; Sheppard, 1984) fits the green cells in which brokering transforms negative relationships pre-intervention into neutral or positive relationships post-intervention.

The literature on 'tertius gaudens' and 'divide and rule' phenomena (e.g., Case & Maner, 2014; Logan, 2006; Posner et al., 2010) fits in the red cells in which a third party pursues brokering actions aimed at transforming neutral or positive relationships into negative relationships. As our review of these literatures in the following sections reveals, some cells in the matrix are populated by numerous empirical investigations whereas other cells attracted considerably less scholarly attention. Specifically, entrepreneurial functional forms of brokering received considerably more attention than the 'dark side' of brokering (e.g., malicious workplace gossip). These gaps in what we currently know about the less-studied functional forms of brokering in organizations represent opportunities for future research on this topic. Table 1 provides concrete examples from previous research to illustrate helpful, harmful, and reinforcing brokering processes as conceptualized in Figure 2.

In sum, the COR framework[7] elucidates behavioral, process-oriented definitions of brokering by integrating concepts from social networks scholarship (e.g., open/close triad; weak/strong ties) with psychological work emanating from interdependence theory (e.g., degree of interdependence, correspondence of outcomes). It also facilitates the identification of distinct functional forms of brokering in organizations, and provides a straightforward operationalization of the effects of brokering activities.

Table 1. Examples of different functional forms of brokering explored in previous research.

Function	Brokering Behavior	Illustrating source
Helpful Brokers	Integrating knowledge dispersed across many employees and connecting disconnected employees in the knowledge network to promote inventive output.	Grigoriou, & Rothaermel (2014)
	Facilitating interactions between different role holders (e.g., performers, personal managers, songwriters, musicians, and studio executives) to produce music.	Lingo & O'Mahony (2010)
	Using incentives to motivate cooperative behavior, thereby cultivating enduring norms of cooperation that outlast the intervention period.	Nakashima, Halali, & Halevy (2017)
	Acting as hostile mediators, who mistreat disputants with rudeness and hostility, to facilitate a sense of common fate and consequently collaboration among disputants.	Zhang, Gino, & Norton (2017)
Harmful Brokers	Engaging in negative gossip to promote ostracism and compel a particular individual who does not follow group norms to leave the group.	Kniffin & Wilson (2005)
	Creating a work environment that undercuts a highly skilled subordinate's opportunities to communicate and cooperate with other group members.	Case & Maner (2014)
	Mixing employees with incompatible interests in the same work unit to promote friction and sub-grouping and avoid unionization.	Posner, Spier & Vermeule (2010)
	Promoting fear and distrust within a workforce and using threats of targeted layoffs or general downsizing to undermine collective efforts to unionize.	Dundon (2002)
Reinforcers	Transferring information between alters as a conduit without attempting to change alters' relationship.	Obstfeld (2017)
	Supporting ongoing interdisciplinary scientific collaborations using methodological expertise that is sought by diverse partners.	Kaplan, Milde & Cowan (2017)

As Table 1 illustrates, here we utilize the COR framework primarily as a means to conceptually integrate disparate literatures and organize our review of various programs of research that are currently scattered across the social sciences, thereby enriching our understanding of brokerage and brokering processes and promoting cross-fertilization between different streams of research.

Cooperation Catalysts: Creating and Supporting Positive Relationships

The vast majority of empirical studies we identified have focused on brokerage positions rather than on brokering processes. However, there is a growing interest in how brokers broker (e.g., Lingo & O'Mahony, 2010; Obstfeld, 2005; Quintane & Carnabuci, 2016), which fuels increased attention to the behavioral strategies involved in brokering. Obstfeld (2017) distinguished between the brokering activities of formal and routinized brokers—such as those involved in the buying and selling of stocks and real-estate—who operate in well-structured markets and are commonly recognized as scaffold for these interactions, and informal brokers whose continuous 'invisible labor' over coordinating interactions and exchanges among unacquainted parties is often overlooked or downplayed. He noted that "brokering relationships connect the supply chain, in which each firm in the chain brokers between its suppliers and downstream buyers by transforming inputs into outputs, and thereby adding value. In this sense, all commerce is inherently triadic, from Wal-Mart to the hot dog vendor. Mergers and acquisitions may appear to be dyadic pairings of the acquiring and the acquired, but in fact they do not proceed without the intercession of brokers before the deal…during the deal…and after it" (p. 21). Both formal and informal brokers engage in activities that transform non-existing (in open triads) or neutral (in closed triads) relationships into positive relationships and therefore fit together in the current section.

Brokering activities aimed at facilitating coordination and cooperation take many different forms. For instance, they may entail promoting direct contact between the two alters or serving as the only bridge between two alters without connecting them directly to each other (Soda et al., 2018). Promoting coordination and cooperation sometimes require considerable effort and even ingenuity by third parties who need to identify opportunities for transferring information or resources from one context to another; selectively choose which ideas are worth pursuing and which relationships can potentially be fruitfully cultivated; translate, frame, or otherwise transform the information that has particular meaning and value in context A into useful information in context B; choose whether or not to facilitate direct contact between the alters; consider how to present the collaborative pursuit to each of the parties; decide whether to charge the brokered parties for their helpful brokerage; determine whether they need to continuously monitor and take actions to sustain the relationship; and more (Burt, 1992; Podolny & Baron, 1997).

Recent research by Quintane and Carnabuci (2016) integrated actors' structural position in the network with their information exchange patterns to enhance understanding of how brokering processes unfold. These authors analyzed e-mail communications between employees of two organizations—a project-based, digital advertising agency in the Netherlands and an information technology recruitment firm in Australia. In both contexts, the extent to which employees' structural position in the network involved dense ties versus opportunities to bridge across structural holes shaped their brokering activities. Relative to densely embedded employees, actors in brokerage positions were significantly more likely to engage in unembedded brokering (i.e., in short-term interactions with weak ties). Additionally, when engaging in unembedded brokering, these individuals were more likely to act as intermediaries

between alters (i.e., pursue a *tertius gaudens* strategy) than to facilitate direct contact between alters (i.e., pursue a *tertius iungens* strategy). However, when engaging in embedded brokering involving alters with whom they had long-term ties, these individuals were more likely to facilitate direct contact between alters (*tertius iungens)* rather than act as intermediaries (*tertius gaudens)*. These findings highlight the importance of taking a comprehensive approach that considers both structural positions (brokerage) and interactive processes (brokering) when studying how actors create or reinforce positive relationships in organizations.

Additional evidence for the importance of a *tertius iungens* strategy, which facilitates direct contact between alters as a means to create or reinforce positive relationships, comes from Obstfeld's (2005) multi-method study of innovation in the automotive industry. Using surveys, interviews, and ethnographic observations, Obstfled (2005) explored the role of third parties who connect alters in driving organizational innovation as assessed with self-reports, expert reports, and managers in the firm. The innovations explored included both product innovations (e.g., clutch interlock defeat) and process innovations (e.g., creation of a prototype parts management group and process) and spanned engineers, designers, and managers across seven units within a large engineering division. Individuals who scored higher on a self-report measure of *tertius iungens* orientation (which included items such as "I introduce people to each other who might have a common strategic work interest" and "I see opportunities for collaboration between people") showed significantly higher contributions to organizational innovation controlling for a host of variables (e.g., social network density / constraint, education and organizational rank, technical knowledge). Additionally, social knowledge in the firm, conceptualized as access to informal information about activities and processes in various units, but not technical knowledge,

emerged as a significant predictor of contributions to innovations. This highlights the importance

of gaining access to informal knowledge as a precursor to effective brokering.

Research on brokering in the context of open innovation communities illustrates

important distinctions between bridging activities that occur within work units versus across

work units. Fleming and Waguespack (2007) analyzed the role that human capital (technical

contributions) and social capital (brokering and boundary spanning activities) play in ascendance

to leadership positions in an open technical innovation community. Using published proceedings

of the Internet Engineering Task Force, requests for comments publications, and interviews with

community leaders, these authors found that, although different intermediary activities increase

the likelihood that brokers ascend to leadership positions, they follow different patterns.

Specifically, brokering had a positive effect on leadership ascendance *within* technological

boundaries, and when accompanied by frequent physical contact (operationalized as increased

conference participation). Boundary spanning, conceptualized as facilitating integration *across*

cohesive technological communities (operationalized as contributing to technical publications by

multiple work groups), was a stronger predictor of leadership ascendance; was not contingent on

face-to-face contact in conferences; and had a negative interaction with intra-unit brokering in

shaping leadership ascendance. These findings suggest that the information and control

advantages that come from occupying brokerage positions are contingent on the particular forms

that brokering activities take as well as on the extent to which these activities occur within versus

across group boundaries (cf. Gould & Fernandez, 1989).

Whereas some brokering activities that transform non-existing or neutral relationships

into positive relationships generalize across organizational contexts, other brokering activities

are context-specific. A recent field study of boundary spanning activities in an interdisciplinary

nanotechnology research center exemplifies such context-specific bridging activities (Kaplan et al., 2017). In this university-based organizational environment, PhD students and postdoctoral fellows from multiple departments (including chemistry, physics, materials science, mechanical engineering, medicine, etc.) served as boundary spanners who facilitated interdisciplinary research collaborations in the face of cognitive and political/economic barriers to such research projects. They did so by developing symbiosis with novel instruments—atomic force microscopes and scanning tunneling microscopes—and their expertise in operating these instruments created new affordances for research collaborations among alters who were disciplinary actors (e.g., faculty in specific departments) that lacked these students' specialization with the novel instruments (Kaplan et al., 2017).

An interesting effect that emerged from the Kaplan et al. (2017, p. 1397) study is that interdisciplinary publications were likely to get fewer citations than intra-disciplinary publications. This finding mirrors findings by Fleming et al. (2007) in the context of collaborative inventions of utility patents. These authors found that brokering facilitated access to knowledge and ideas and thus created opportunities for novel and useful re-combinations of ideas, thereby promoting collaborative creativity. However, consistent with the view that cohesion in networks promotes trust and mobilization, these authors found that "ideas that arise from brokered collaboration are less likely to be used in the future" (p. 464). Although brokered collaborations increase generative creativity (operationalized as patents that use technologies from previously uncombined pairs of subclasses of technologies), "conditional on generating a new idea…brokered collaborations decrease the use of that creativity by other inventors" (p. 464). These findings by Kaplan et al. (2017) and Fleming et al. (2007) emphasize the need to consider not only the effects of brokering on idea generation, but also the longer-term

consequences of brokering for the utilization and adoption of the products that result from brokered collaborations (i.e., the transition from creativity to innovation; cf. Kaupilla, Bizzi, & Obstfeld, 2018).

A common thread that runs through the literature on brokering concerns the tendency of alters to respond to brokering activities with distrust (e.g., Fleming & Waguespack, 2007; Podolny & Baron, 1997). Stovel et al. (2011) noted that brokering is an inherently fragile process due to three of its essential characteristics. First, alters that rely on brokering to facilitate their exchange typically have social gaps between them, which means that they lack the structural support system that a dense network of strong ties to the same actors provides. In the absence of such shared ties to others who can reinforce the relationship, attest to the broker's trustworthiness, and potentially also monitor and sanction the broker's behavior, trust is bound to be lower. Second, as boundary spanners who exist and operate between different social or organizational worlds, brokers are trusted less because of the dual nature of their loyalty and commitment to more than one group. Generalized trust is typically extended within group boundaries (Yamagishi & Kiyonari, 2000) yet brokering activities often take place outside of such boundaries. Third, brokering activities provide intermediaries with opportunities to exploit alters (e.g., by withholding some information, providing misinformation, or charging increasingly more for their services), especially when their exclusive access to alters gives them a monopolist brokerage status. The possibility of exploitation through the brokerage position undermines confidence in the broker (Stovel et al., 2011).

In addition to the distrust by the very alters that ego seeks to connect, it is important to note that brokering activities that promote contact and coordination among certain alters (e.g., A_1 and A_2) simultaneously reinforce the separation between these alters and others in the

organization who were excluded from the interaction (e.g., between A_1 and A_2 on the one hand and A_3 and A_4 on the other hand). As Obstfeld (2017) notes, any effort to coordinate the actions of a subset of the potentially relevant organizational actors is inclusive for those invited to take part (in the dinner party, the group meeting, or the recruiting committee), and exclusive for all others, suggesting that one can conceptualize brokering activities by intermediaries as a form of coalition building. Although the COR framework distinguishes different functional forms of brokering activities for analytical purposes, we heed Obstfeld's (2017) argument that any act of selective inclusion is by definition also an act of selective exclusion, and explicitly acknowledge that different brokering activities are interrelated, coexist in organizations, and can simultaneously impact different actors' relationships in different ways.

The merging of divergent, yet complementary, brokering activities is illustrated in Lingo and O'Mahony's (2010) ethnographic field study of independent country music producers in Nashville. These producers behaved as strategic actors who used a wide repertoire of specific brokering tactics to manage others' interactions and relationships: They kept some parties apart and brought others together, simultaneously facilitating coordination and cooperation between some alters and cultivating competition among others. Producers facilitated interactions between performers, their personal managers, songwriters, musicians, production studio staff (e.g., engineers), and labels; coordinated expectations and managed ambiguities concerning the scope of projects, the production process, and parties' role responsibilities and jurisdictions; and were responsible for gathering resources, mobilizing concerted action, and synthesizing inputs from disconnected others. For example, when working with new and unfamiliar performers, producers adopted a *tertius iungens* orientation and facilitated direct contact with songwriters, in the hopes that a personal connection will increase the likelihood that songwriters would give their best

material to the new artist. To attract resources for such new artists, producers created competitions between labels, for instance, by bringing "together several label heads at a showcase concert" by their performer (p. 62). Lingo and O'Mahony's (2010) analysis underscores the critical role that independent producers play in shaping every stage of the social organizing process that leads to the final product, from making introductions among disconnected parties, to making sure that different alters do not challenge each other's expertise at the studio, to using their unique expertise and position to help production engineers share their own and others' vision and interpretations during mixing sessions, and working with artists, managers, and label executives to curate the final product.

Whereas Lingo and O'Mahony (2010) focused on producers' brokering activities, Clement and his colleagues (2017) explored the externalities that brokering activities by other actors create for producers of creative projects. These authors theorized that brokering activities by hubs—defined as individuals who connect distinct communities within an industry—can create positive as well as negative externalities for executives who manage creative projects. They proposed further that the extent to which hubs' brokering activities create a public good (i.e., improving others' outcomes by contributing to creative projects' success) or a public liability (i.e., hurting others' outcomes by undermining creative projects' success) depends on the functional role of the hub's "neighbors". Clement et al. (2017) found support for these hypotheses using archival data from the French TV game show production industry. Specifically, whereas hubs positively influenced *creative directors*' contributions to the success of TV shows, they negatively influenced *producers*' contributions to the success of TV shows (operationalized as viewership scores).

Hubs' brokering activities positively influenced creative directors' contributions via two processes: (1) They utilized their cross-community contacts to benefit the focal project when they were team members working alongside the creative director, and (2) they facilitated knowledge spillovers through cross-community brokering (e.g., contributing novel ideas) when they were not team members on the focal creative project. Hubs' brokering activities harmed producers' contributions to the success of creative projects primarily by undermining producers' ability to effectively coordinate the contributions of different members. Given hubs' involvement with multiple projects across community boundaries, they often showed lower commitment to any given project, causing delays, friction, and conflict. Additionally, Hubs' brokering activities also harmed producers' contributions to the success of TV shows through a secondary process: Even when hubs were not employed on the focal creative project, the overlap in personnel and high interdependence between different production teams meant that the delays and conflicts they created on certain projects had a ripple effect on other creative projects in the same community. These findings by Clement and his colleagues (2017) illustrate the benefits of considering brokerage positions and brokering activities together, and highlight that the effects of brokering activities on the collaborative pursuit of creative projects are complex, and depend in part on the nature of others' jobs.

Third-Party Conflict Managers:

Turning Negative Relationships into Neutral or Positive Relationships

Conflict in organizations is pervasive, diverse, and destructive (Anicich et al., 2015; Halevy et al., 2014). Although organizational conflicts take different forms, all forms of organizational conflict entail elements of incompatibility among interdependent parties—discordant interests, claims, perspectives, or values—that require management or resolution. The

use of third party help to manage and resolve interpersonal conflicts at work has been

conceptualized as a distinct conflict management style (i.e., alongside the dominating,

compromising, accommodating, integrating, and avoiding conflict management styles: Ting-

Toomey, Oetzel, & Yee-Jung, 2001), and linked to various potential benefits for disputants. For

example, a study in healthcare organizations in the Netherlands found that high levels of third

party help during workplace conflict reduced the harmful consequences of conflict-induced

stress, including employees' emotional exhaustion, absenteeism, and turnover intentions. These

positive effects of third party help held controlling for social support from coworkers and

supervisors (Giebels & Janssen, 2005). These important benefits notwithstanding, the key

question of interest here concerns third parties' propensity and ability to take actions that

transform alters' negative relationship into neutral or positive relationships.

Third party conflict managers vary on multiple dimensions such as whether they have

stakes in the conflict; whether they have preexisting relationships with the disputants; whether

they are supervisors or peers of the disputants, and more (Karambayya, Brett, & Lytle, 1992;

Pinkley, Brittain, Neale, & Northcraft, 1995; Sheppard, 1984). Two cardinal distinctions that run

through the third party conflict management literature are between formal and informal third

parties (Lewicki et al., 1992), and between third parties who possess process-control versus

outcome-control (Thibaut & Walker, 1975). These fundamental distinctions underlie the kinds of

brokering activities that third parties pursue to change others' relationships.

Formal third party conflict managers include mediators, arbitrators, ombudspersons, and

other organizational actors whose role specifically identifies them as responsible for (and having

authority over) dispute resolution processes in the organization (Morrill & Rudes, 2010).

Informal third party conflict managers include supervisors, peers, and others who do not have

legal or organizational authority over conflict management processes (or extensive training and experience in doing so), and are typically free to choose whether, when, and how they wish to intervene in others' disputes. Informal third parties can intervene in others' conflicts without being invited to do so by the disputants; are not required to be neutral or external to the conflict; do not have to follow predefined procedures; and may use the process to advance their own personal interests, the disputants' interests, and/or organizational interests (Conlon, Carnevale, & Murnighan, 1994; Pinkley et al., 1995).

Third party conflict managers who possess process-control influence the mechanisms through which disputants manage their disagreement, with mediation being the quintessential process-control mode of third party conflict management (Lewicki & Sheppard, 1985; Shapiro & Brett, 1993). In contrast, third party conflict managers who possess outcome-control have the power to determine how the dispute will be resolved, with arbitration representing the archetypal outcome-control mode of third party conflict management (Lind, Walker, Kurtz, Musante, & Thibaut, 1980; Ross & Conlon, 2000).

Extant research on third party intervention in others' conflicts tends to focus on the factors that shape either how a third party intervenes or how disputants react to the third party's intervention. Examples of the first line of research include studies that explored when and why third parties show retributive tendencies (Skarlicki & Rupp, 2010), adopt an autocratic style (Karambayya et al., 1992), balance power by siding with the weaker party in a dispute (Laskewitz, van de Vliert, & De Dreu, 1994), as well as how organizational characteristics and conflict characteristics influence managers' choices of intervention strategies (Kozan, Eegin, & Varoglu, 2007). Examples of the second line of research include studies that explored how the kind of third party (e.g., peers, bosses, ombudspersons) and the mode of third party intervention

(e.g., mediation, arbitration, hybrid strategy) influence disputants' behavior and their judgments of fairness and justice. For instance, Arnold and O'Connor (1999) found that expert third parties' recommendations, but not peers' recommendations, influenced disputants' offers, and Shapiro and Brett (1993) found that US coal miners whose grievances were assigned to mediation experienced higher levels of outcome control, process control, and third party fairness, than coal miners whose grievances were assigned to arbitration.

Helpful Brokering Processes by Third-Party Conflict Managers

Research by Karambayya and Brett (1989) found that MBA students who role-played managers intervening in subordinates' disputes were more effective in facilitating cooperative solutions when they asked questions, requested the parties to submit proposals, and tried to integrate their ideas with disputants' ideas, relative to when they "used threats and incentives, predicted probable outcomes if the dispute could not be settled at the meeting, and exerted pressure on one or both disputants to encourage a timely settlement" (p. 686). Whereas these findings by Karambayya and Brett (1989) seem to suggest that brokering activities that utilize information may outperform brokering activities that utilize incentives in transforming others' relationships, subsequent research highlighted the benefits of using hybrid processes, which utilize both information and incentives, in the conflict management process (Conlon, Moon, & Ng, 2002).

Recently, researchers suggested that third parties can effectively transform negative relationships into positive relationships by adding hostility and rudeness to an already contentious conflict situation (Zhang, Gino, & Norton, 2017). In a series of online and in-lab experiments, using both deal-making and dispute simulations, the researchers compared the effectiveness of hostile mediators —who use rude and offensive communications (e.g., "…you

have sufficiently wasted my time…", "…let's see what kind of annoying complaints are on the table today")—to the effectiveness of nice mediators (as well as neutral mediators, in a subset of the studies)—who communicated understanding and displayed interpersonal warmth. This research consistently found that hostile mediators significantly increased disputants' willingness to reach agreement relative to nice mediators. The positive effect of hostile mediators on disputants' willingness to reach agreement was mediated by a sense of common fate among the disputants, who shared the experience of facing a common enemy and hence experienced reduced social distance with each other. The researchers showed further that only mediators who are hostile to both disputants transformed competition to cooperation. Mediators who were hostile to just one of the disputants were not perceived as a common enemy, and therefore did not promote cooperative behavior among disputants (Zhang et al., 2017).

Our own research has examined both third parties' willingness to use the resources they control to incentivize cooperative behavior in conflict situations, and disputants' reactions to the possibility of such third party intervention (Halevy & Halali, 2015; Nakashima, Halali, & Halevy, 2017). To experimentally study triadic interactions, we created a group decision-making task called the *Peacemaker Game*, in which two disputants choose whether to cooperate or compete, and a third party chooses whether or not to introduce side-payments that reward cooperative behavior and punish competitive behavior. From disputants' perspective, these side-payments (i.e., incentives) effectively transform the situation they face from a competitive situation (a one-shot Prisoner's Dilemma game, in which each party's profit-maximizing strategy is to compete regardless of what they expect the other party to do) to a cooperative situation (a one-shot Maximizing Difference game, in which each party's profit-maximizing strategy is to cooperate regardless of what they expect the other party to do). From the third party's

perspective, the option to intervene in the dispute presents a risky prospect. Withholding intervention is a safe strategy that allows the third party to keep their resources (the time, effort, money, or reputation they could invest in the conflict resolution process). In contrast, intervening in the conflict can result either in gains or losses relative to the small fixed payoff associated with nonintervention. Third parties in the Peacemaker Game get a positive return on their investment if they intervene and both disputants choose to cooperate, yet they lose the resources invested in the intervention if they intervene and both disputants choose to compete.

In a series of experiments, the mere possibility of third-party intervention significantly increased cooperation rates in both interpersonal conflicts (between two individuals) and intergroup conflicts (between two three-person groups); moreover, the higher the likelihood of third party intervention, the greater was disputants' propensity to cooperate. These experiments showed further that self-interest plays an important role in motivating helpful brokering. In one of the experiments, we systematically manipulated the possible consequences of third party intervention for the broker. Third party intervention rates were: below 8% when third party intervention could not produce a gain for the broker (i.e., when it was altruistic); at 35% when non-intervention and intervention resulted in the same fixed payoffs for the broker; at 39% when the intervention could result in either gains or losses to the broker relative to non-intervention; and exceeded 80% when the intervention could not produce a loss to the broker. The role of self-interest in third party intervention decisions received further support from two surveys that examined third parties' motives in real-world interactions involving friends and coworkers (Halevy & Halali, 2015). These findings highlight the fact that helpful brokering does not necessitate altruistic motives. Rather, consistent with research showing that self-interest can sometime promote prosocial behavior (Zlatev & Miller, 2016), self-interested observers of

conflict in organizations may choose to intervene to the extent that they believe that doing so will benefit them. By using the resources they control to reward cooperative behavior and punish competitive behavior they can transform interactions and facilitate win-win-win outcomes for all parties involved.

Reasoning that conflict often spans an extended period of time and repeated interactions between disputants and third parties, we subsequently used a multi-round version of the Peacemaker Game to test three hypotheses. The first hypothesis postulated that third parties who observed a history of competition between adversaries would be less likely to intervene in a dispute as compared with third parties who have not observed such a history of competition. The second hypothesis asserted that third party intervention that changes the nature of outcome interdependence between parties will be successful in promoting cooperation even when it is introduced late in the repeated interaction, i.e., following a history of competition (cf., Halevy, Weisel, & Bornstein, 2012). Finally, the third hypothesis proposed that third parties who intervene early in the course of the repeated interaction would promote the development of sustainable cooperative norms that would outlast the intervention period. That is, it predicted that even after the third party can no longer incentivize cooperation, the disputants would continue to cooperate at high levels (Nakashima et al., 2017).

To test these hypotheses, we assigned three-person groups to one of two conditions. In the late intervention condition, participants assigned to play the role of the third party observed disputants' decisions in rounds 1-30 of the repeated game, and could only intervene in rounds 31-60 of the repeated game (disputants and third parties only learned about the possibility of third party intervention after round 30). In the early intervention condition, participants assigned to play the role of the third party could intervene in rounds 1-30 of the repeated game, and could

no longer do so in rounds 31-60 (disputants and third parties only learned this after round 30). Lending support to the first of the three aforementioned hypotheses, third parties' intervention rates were significantly higher in the early intervention condition, in which they had not observed a history of conflict between the two participants assigned to play the role of disputants, than in the late intervention condition. Lending support to the second hypothesis, introducing the possibility of third party intervention following thirty rounds of conflict immediately and powerfully increased cooperation rates from around 40% to around 80%. Lending support to the third hypothesis, cooperation rates in the early intervention condition did not decrease in rounds 31-60, compared to the first 30 rounds, despite the fact that third parties could no longer introduce side-payments to reward cooperative behavior and punish competitive behavior. These findings show that early third party intervention can set in motion mutually beneficial behavioral norms that go beyond mere compliance and persist over time. Whereas previous research suggested that removing exogenous cooperation-promoting mechanisms, such as contracts, can undermine interpersonal trust (because the parties attribute past cooperation to the presence of the contract: Malhotra & Murnighan, 2002; cf. Chou, Halevy, Galinsky, & Murnighan, 2017), the fact that cooperation persisted in the repeated Peacemaker Game after the third party had exited the relationship shows that early-stage helpful brokering can facilitate trust development that endures in time (Nakashima et al., 2017).

Additional evidence for the endurance of collaborative norms introduced by helpful brokers comes from a unique archival study by Samila, Oettl, and Hasan (2016). These authors reasoned that helpful brokering can strengthen collaborative ties via both active third party conflict resolution and the encouragement of cooperative norms. Using data on dyadic research collaborations by immunologists who lost a third coauthor to unexpected death, this research

showed that dyadic scientific collaborations who lost a helpful third (assessed via acknowledgments of the departed third party in other papers) were more durable than those who lost a less helpful third. These findings lend further support to the idea that early-stage helpful brokering by a third party can set in motion longstanding cooperative norms between alters.

Divide and Conquer: Undermining Others' Relationships

The previous two sections focused on intermediaries and conciliators, whose brokering activities spur positive relationships among alters. However, brokers can also serve as "dividers"—actors who engage in harmful third party intervention intended to undermine cooperation and promote friction and conflict between others. We review here empirical evidence on such harmful brokering from the workplace gossip and labor relations literatures.

Workplace Gossip

Gossip, the communication of "evaluative comments about someone who is not present in the conversation" (Foster, 2004, p. 78), is an extremely common everyday social behavior (Giardini, 2012), with some empirical work estimating that up to two thirds of conversations include references to absent parties (Dunbar, 2004; Emler, 1994). Workplace gossip, defined as "informal and evaluative talk in an organization, usually among no more than a few individuals, about another member of that organization who is not present" (Kurland & Pelled, 2000, p. 429), features prominently in social network research, which has considered workplace gossip both as an antecedent and as an outcome of social network phenomena. For example, a longitudinal study of gossip and friendship networks in a Dutch non-profit organization (Ellwardt, Steglich, & Wittek, 2012) found that gossiping was reciprocated by friendship nominations (rather than the other way around), but also that excessive gossiping decreased friendship nominations over time, suggesting that the social capital account of gossip has merit but also bounds. As another

example, a study in a US manufacturing company (Grosser, Lopez-Kidwell & Labianca, 2010) found that the more an employee engages in gossip the more informal influence they have in the eyes of coworkers, but the less positively their work performance is evaluated by their supervisor. Thus, engaging in gossip influences not only the reputation of the object of gossip; rather, it also has consequences for the sender and receiver of gossip.

Workplace gossip takes different forms and serves different functions. For example, workplace gossip can be positive (e.g., praising someone as creative and hardworking, which functions as a form of indirect social support) or negative (e.g., condemning someone as a free-rider and cheater, which functions as a form of social undermining). Gossip can serve to strengthen the tie between the sender and the receiver of the gossip (i.e., an affiliative function), as well as between the receiver of the gossip and the object of the gossip (e.g., recommending a new colleague as reliable), or weaken the tie between the receiver of the gossip and the object of the gossip (i.e., a social undermining function from the sender's perspective; Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002). In line with our focus in this section on divisive behavior by third parties, we focus here on negative workplace gossip[8], defined as the communication of unfavorable information about an organizational member in their absence, which serves to hinder relationships between the receiver and the object of gossip (Ellwardt, Labianca, & Wittek, 2012).

Negative workplace gossip is well-documented in the social networks literature. For instance, Burt and Knez (1995, pp. 275-276) noted: "These are third parties close to ego and distant from alter; contacts more exclusive to ego, confidants on ego's side viewing alter as a distant contact…these exclusive third parties…are a more willing conduit for negative stories about alter…negative stories accumulate with them...". Hence, consistent with Heider's cognitive balance theory (1946), exclusive third parties who possess strong positive ties with the

receiver of the gossip and weak ties, negative ties, or no ties with the object of the gossip, communicate information that serves to amplify distrust between the receiver and the object of gossip. Negative workplace gossip can thus function to reduce cooperation between the receiver and object of gossip, and even facilitate turnover by employees who develop particularly negative reputations (Burt, 2005; Kniffin & Wilson, 2005).

Negative workplace gossip can serve to warn the receiver about the object's untrustworthiness or exploitative behavior (Feinberg, Willer, Stellar, & Keltner, 2012), and promote group goals by curbing opportunistic behavior (e.g., free-riding, cheating) by group members who worry about negative reputations, social exclusion, and ostracism (Feinberg, Willer, Schultz, 2014; Kniffin & Wilson, 2010; Wu et al., 2016). Consistent with this norm reinforcement function, there is converging evidence that negative gossip tends to take a scapegoating pattern by targeting a relatively small number of low-status group members. For instance, a study of gossip among the employees of a Dutch non-profit organization found that "in the negative gossip network, centralization was almost twice as large…as in the positive gossip network…suggesting that negative gossip was centrally structured around star-like objects ("scapegoats")" (Ellwart et al., 2012, p. 200). Similarly, a study of gossip in rowing teams in a US university by Kniffin and Wilson (2005) found that negative gossip tended to focus on a single target, labeled "the slacker", who left the team following a semester in which they were the primary target of negative gossip.

Consistent with the COR framework's focus on outcome interdependence between organizational actors, research on workplace gossip suggests that outcome interdependence plays a critical role in shaping patterns of gossip. The aforementioned study by Ellwart et al. (2012) postulated that high levels of task and outcome interdependence within formal organizational

units (e.g., work teams) increase the tendency to gossip about in-group members (i.e., members of the same work unit) relative to out-group members (i.e., members of other work units in the organization). Indeed, employees tended to gossip more (both positively and negatively) about coworkers from the same work unit than about coworkers from other units, even after controlling for the higher contact frequency and higher rates of friendships within work units. These authors concluded that "interdependence between employees is a predictor of *any* type of gossip about group members" (p. 203, italics in source). This assertion is in line with Kniffin and Wilson's (2005, p. 279) suggestion that "the degree of common fate shared by a group's members influences the degree to which gossip is used as an instrument of social control".

In sum, negative workplace gossip can have self-serving, social influence, and group-serving functions. These functions are not mutually exclusive; rather, they often go hand-in-hand. Specifically, negative gossip can simultaneously strengthen ties between the sender and receiver of gossip; undermine the ties between the receiver and object of gossip; and enforce group norms.

Labor Relations

Harmful brokering recurs also in the field of labor relations, in which labor consultants and other third parties sometimes act to exacerbate tensions between management and the workforce or promote internal friction among the employees who seek to unionize. The explicit aim of these efforts is to supplant unity with discord in the hopes of thwarting collective action toward unionization. Union busting practices were pervasive throughout most of the second half of the 20th century in the US, despite the illegal status of some of them under the National Labor Relations Act. Union avoidance companies' list of clients during that time period spanned multiple sectors, industries, and geographical regions in the US (e.g., Logan, 2006, p. 655).

An insider's perspective on the practices employed in the so-called 'union busting' business comes from Levitt (1993) who shared his firsthand experiences in a memoire: "The only way to bust a union is to lie, distort, manipulate, threaten, and always, always attack… a combined strategy of disinformation and personal assaults. …the consultants' attacks are intensely personal…they invade people's lives, demolish their friendships, crush their will, and shatter their families. …the enemy was the collective spirit…I poisoned it, choked it, bludgeoned it… I taught the supervisors to despise and fear the union. I persuaded them that a union-organizing drive was a personal attack on them. …Although I took on the supervisors face to face, my war on the union activists was covert" (pp. 1-2). Levitt explicitly considers the tactics that he and his colleagues employed to fall within the realm of divide-and-conquer. Recalling an instance of harmful third party intervention in coal mines in the US Midwest, he writes: "Two months had gone by since a handful of well-dressed strangers had walked into the…Company, bearing poison and promises…Men who had worked like brothers for years—some were brothers…had started to take blows at each other's heads and saying nasty things about each other's wives. Some had stopped talking altogether. …The workers were so divided, some could not stand next to each other in the pit without starting a fight" (p. 7).

Scholarly research on the union avoidance industry lends credence to Levitt's first-person experiences, and reinforces the notion that many of the harmful brokering activities that third parties sometimes pursue in this context are covert rather than overt (Dundon, 2002; Godard, 2009; Hurd & Uehlein, 1994; Logan, 2006; O'Sullivan & Gunnigle, 2009; Posner et al., 2010). Importantly, this literature also corroborates the view that these actors are in fact third party actors rather than merely an extension of one of the parties (i.e., management) in a labor dispute. For example, Logan (2006, p. 652) noted: "…the union avoidance industry had developed into a

multimillion-dollar concern that profited from promoting adversarial labor—management

relations, and consultants had become important industrial relations *actors in their own right*.

They were no longer simply responding to employer demands for their services, but were

actively and aggressively creating that demand by encouraging management to fear the allegedly

catastrophic consequences of unionization…". In line with our conceptualization of this form of

harmful brokering as divide-and-conquer, Logan (2006, p. 659) noted that union avoidance is

"an industry that *profits from promoting conflict* in labor–management relations" (italics added).

The tactics labor consultants employ utilize both information and incentives as means to

transform positive or neutral relationships into negative relationships (Posner et al., 2010). For

instance, sabotaging communication channels and spreading rumors involve manipulating

information whereas paying bribes and administering penalties involves the use of incentives. It

is important to note that, whereas some incentives are designed to suppress unionization (e.g.,

disciplining pro-union employees), other incentives are designed to substitute unionization (e.g.,

creating intra-organizational employee committees as bargaining units; Dundon, 2002). Some

negative brokering processes in the context of labor relations utilize both information and

incentives. Most notably, promises of future rewards (e.g., bonuses) and threats of future

penalties (e.g., layoff) involve information about the intention to utilize incentives in the future.

Another example entails spreading rumors or releasing personal information about union

activists, which uses information that may trigger social sanctions. Finally, some context-specific

brokering activities that are unique to the domain of labor relations involve pursuing legal

delays, appealing to the National Labor Relations Board, hiring new employees to dilute the

proportion of union supporters in the voting unit before the election, or "intermixing players with

dissimilar interests and stakes…in the hope that racial antagonisms among subgroups would

prevent workers as a whole from concerting their efforts…" (Posner et al., 2010, p. 434).

Collectively, these tactics are designed to change targets' relationships from positive (or neutral) to negative, thereby thwarting unionization (Hurd & Uhelein, 1994).

The negative brokering tactics employed in 'union busting' resemble in many ways the actions of dominant leaders. Dominant leaders tend to be selfish, aggressive, and unethical (Cheng et al., 2013; Halevy, Chou, Cohen, & Livingston, 2012; Kakkar & Sivanathan, 2017). In a series of experimental studies, Case and Maner (2014) showed that conditions of an unstable hierarchy create the 'perfect storm' for dominant leaders, whose selfish, aggressive, and unethical tendencies converge to produce divisive behavior. When their power position was unstable, group leaders who were motivated by dominance chose to limit communication opportunities between a highly skilled subordinate and other members of the group; create spatial working arrangements that physically isolated the highly skilled subordinate from other group members; minimized opportunities for a highly skilled subordinate to socially bond (and thereby potentially coalesce) with another group member by choosing a task-oriented over an interpersonally-oriented work style; and assigned the highly skilled subordinate to work with a partner with whom they were unlikely to get along. These tactics, which were intentionally designed to reduce the likelihood of cooperation among others, closely resemble those employed by alpha-males in groups of primates (de Waal & de Waal, 2007), and constitute a manifestation of negative brokering by a third party.

Taking Stock: Emergent Themes and Promising Future Directions

Our review of a diverse set of literatures relevant to brokerage and brokering has resulted in the identification of six emergent themes: (a) network structure versus brokering processes; (b) consequences for brokers versus alters; (c) helpful versus harmful forms of brokering; (d)

information versus incentives as instruments of third party influence; (e) situational versus personal antecedents of brokering processes; and (f) brokering processes as interpersonal versus intergroup phenomena. Table 2 summarizes these emergent themes together with illustrating sources and future directions that emerge directly from each theme.

Network Structure versus Brokering Processes

The first theme from our review concerns the emerging understanding that network structure often provides both the social and organizational context for brokering processes and the impetus for brokering activities. Network structure affords and constrains different functional forms of brokering activities, as captured in the COR framework, yet social influence processes are the active ingredient that modify alters' relationships (Obstfeld et al., 2014; Quintane & Carbanuci, 2016). Our review highlights the value of considering the interplay between social structure and social processes. Whereas social structure creates opportunities and boundaries for social behavior, failing to consider what people actually do once they occupy a particular position or find themselves in a particular social context amounts to telling just part of the story. Occupying a bridge position between two disconnected alters in one's networks can give rise to distinct processes such as tertius gaudens (keeping alters apart and serving as an intermediary) or tertius iungens (introducing and supporting direct collaboration between alters). Similarly, individuals who observe coworkers in conflict can react in different ways: They may choose to do nothing, attempt to act as mediators in the conflict, or seek to escalate it. Considering brokerage and brokering in tandem can illuminate a wide range of important organizational phenomena, from creativity and innovation to coalition formation and dispute resolution. Future research is required to explore how both network structure and social relations in organizations change over time as a result of brokering behavior across both open and closed triads.

Consequences for Brokers versus Alters

The second theme from our review is that distinct literatures currently focus on the consequences that occupying brokerage positions and engaging in brokering behaviors produce for brokers versus alters. Whereas the established social capital branch of the networks literature emphasizes rewards to brokers (e.g., Burt, 2004), researchers increasingly pay more attention to the effects of brokering processes on others' interactions and relationships (e.g., Lingo & O'Mahony, 2010). We encourage researchers to consider how different functional forms of brokering shape the outcomes of brokers, alters, and work units as a whole. Importantly, future research may consider the possibility that brokering processes may produce asymmetric consequences for those involved. Specifically, whereas some brokering processes may benefit the broker as well as both alters in the triad (Halevy & Halali, 2015), there are contexts in which brokering may benefit some alters while at the same time harming others (Clement et al., 2017; Laskewitz et al., 1994). Additionally, future research may explore the possibility that brokers who engage in different brokering activities receive different returns on their investments (of time, effort, and other resources expended in the process of brokering).

Helpful versus Harmful Forms of Brokering

As captured in Figure 2 and Table 1, a third theme that emerged from our review concerns the distinction between helpful (e.g., Obstfeld, 2005) and harmful (e.g., Case & Maner, 2014) brokering processes. We found it extremely useful to borrow tools from Interdependence Theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003) as means to identify distinct functional forms of brokering. Our review revealed that brokering can involve *creating* relationships (e.g., via social introductions), *reinforcing* relationships (e.g., via gossip), *changing* the sign of relationships (from negative to positive or from positive to negative), as well as

terminating relationships. Thus, brokers impact social and organizational relationships by modifying both the degree of outcome interdependence and the correspondence of interests between alters. Delineating different brokering processes can potentially enhance our ability to explain variance in important social and organizational phenomena (e.g., innovation, merger failures, and turnover).

Our review identified many more studies of helpful brokering as compared with harmful brokering (though we provide a similar number of example to illustrate these in Table 1). Future research is required to enhance our understanding of when and why individuals engage in harmful brokering, as well as the effects of harmful brokering on the functioning of performance groups (e.g., sport teams, theatre groups) and other organizational units. Notably, because helpful and harmful brokering processes may co-occur across different parts of the same social or organizational network, future research may benefit from exploring multiple kinds of brokering processes simultaneously to determine their combined effects.

Information versus Incentives as Instruments of Third Party Influence

A fourth theme that emerged from our review concerns the levers that brokers use to influence others' interactions and relationships. These tools typically fall into one of two categories: Incentives (that follow from control over valuable resources) and information (that results from privileged access to knowledge). Although both incentives and information can be effective as a means of influence, at least some of the research we reviewed suggests alters respond more favorably to information than to incentives (e.g., disputants perceive the process of mediation as fairer than arbitration: Shapiro & Brett, 1993). Future research may explore the trade-offs associated with the use of different instruments to change others' interactions and relationships. For instance, some modes of third party intervention that produce strong and

immediate effects in the short term may be costly and hence unsustainable longer-term, whereas other modes of third party intervention may take longer to materialize yet produce enduring effects (e.g., compliance versus internalization: Kelman, 1961, 2006).

Situational versus Personal Antecedents of Brokering Processes

A fifth theme that emerged from our review concerns the extent to which powerful situations versus individual differences (e.g., in needs, abilities, and personality traits) shape brokering processes in organizations. The strong situation hypothesis asserts that strong situations mute the impact of personality and result in largely uniform behavior across individuals (Cooper & Withey, 2009; Mischel, 1977). Hence, to the extent that structural properties of networks produce strong psychological situations, individual difference should be uncorrelated with brokering behavior and outcomes. The research we reviewed, however, suggests that personality traits, such as self-monitoring, play an important role in shaping brokering processes in organizations (Kilduff & Brass, 2010; Kilduff & Day, 1994; Mehra, Kilduff, & Brass, 2001; Oh & Kilduff, 2008; Sasovova et al., 2010). Related research has considered how individual differences in sense of power (Landis et al., 2018); traits such as openness to experience (Baer, 2010); and the ability and motivation to share information (Reinholt, Pedersen, & Foss, 2011) influence brokering processes and outcomes. Recent research has also considered interactions between different individual characteristics, documenting for example that self-reported differences in self-monitoring interact with perceived empathy (as reported by peers) in shaping changes in MBA students' networks (Kleinbaum, Jordan, & Audia, 2015).

Table 2. Emergent themes from the review and future directions for research on brokerage and brokering

Emergent Themes	Illustrating Sources	Future Directions
Structure versus Process Occupying brokerage positions in open triads versus brokering in open and closed triads (changing others' relationships or lack thereof).	Grigoriou & Rothaermel (2014) Obstfeld, Borgatti & Davis (2014) Quintane & Carnabuci (2016) Simmel (1950)	Understanding how network structure and social relations change over time by studying brokering behavior in both open and closed triads longitudinally.
Consequences for Brokers versus Alters Emphasizing consequences of brokerage and brokering for brokers' success versus alters' and work units' success.	Burt (2004) Clement, Shipilov & Galunic (2017) Lingo and O'Mahony (2010) Soda, Tortoriello, & Iorio (2018)	Considering multiple functional forms of brokering simultaneously when exploring brokering's consequences for brokers, alters, and work units.
Helpful versus Harmful Forms of Brokering Focusing on the positive versus negative effects of occupying brokerage positions and engaging in brokering behaviors.	Case & Maner (2014) Halevy & Halali (2015) Obstfeld (2005) Posner, Spier & Vermeule (2010)	Focusing greater attention on harmful brokering to advance knowledge on how divisive behaviors undermine cooperation and innovation.
Information versus Incentives as Instruments Using privileged access to information versus control over valued resources to influence others' interactions and relationships.	Conlon, Carnevale & Murnighan (1994) Feinberg et al. (2012) Fleming, Mingo & Chen (2007) Shapiro & Brett (1993)	Exploring alters' reactions to brokering behaviors that use information (e.g., advice), incentives (e.g., promises of rewards) or both as means of influence.
Situational versus Personal Antecedents Brokerage positions as 'strong situations' that uniformly shape outcomes versus individual differences in motivation and ability to broker.	Kleinbaum, Jordan & Audia (2015) Landis et al. (2018) Sasovova et al. (2010) Ward, Stovel, & Sacks (2011)	Understanding which situational and personal characteristics matter most, as well as when and why individual differences matter more versus less.
Interpersonal versus Intergroup Phenomena Brokering as an interpersonal process within groups versus a social influence process that cuts across group boundaries.	Fleming & Waguespack (2007) Stovel et al. (2011) Hogg, Van Knippenberg & Rast (2012) Kaplan, Milde & Cowan (2017)	Exploring the extent to which the intragroup versus intergroup context of brokering moderates brokering's consequences for brokers and alters.

Future research may integrate the study of situational characteristics and individual characteristics to explain organizational phenomena (e.g., Goldberg et al., 2016). For example future research may explore how different aspects of psychological situations (e.g., adversity, sociality, power: Gerpott et al., 2017; Parrigon et al., 2017; Rauthmann et al., 2014) interact with social skill (defined as "the ability to induce cooperation": Obstfeld, 2017, p. 49, cf. Fligstein & McAdam, 2012), and political skill (defined as "the ability to effectively understand others at work, and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one's personal and/or organizational objectives": Ferris et al., 2007, p. 291; cf. Pfeffer, 1992) to shape brokering behavior in organizational contexts.

Brokering Processes as Interpersonal versus Intergroup Phenomena

The sixth theme that emerged from our review is that brokerage and brokering can be conceptualized as interpersonal phenomena (e.g., Obstfeld, 2017; Simmel, 1950) as well as intergroup phenomena (e.g., Gould & Fernandez, 1989; Hogg et al., 2012; Mehra, Kilduff, & Brass, 1998). Future research may integrate concepts from the intergroup relations literature, such as in-group bias (Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002) and the contact hypothesis (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) to explore the extent to which brokering within group boundaries and across group boundaries have similar versus distinct antecedents and consequences. Addressing these questions would enhance our understanding of both brokering processes and intergroup relations in organizational contexts.

<div align="center">

Conclusion

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Brokerage and brokering play pivotal roles in shaping important social and organizational phenomena, including patterns of cooperation and competition, trust and suspicion, status conferral and the accumulation of power. The current review employed an inclusive approach to

brokerage and brokering, casting a wide net in search of literatures pertinent to third party influence. Such an inclusive approach enables different ideas to have conceptual playdates with their theoretical siblings, cousins, and classmates, a necessary process in the healthy development of novel theories and frameworks (Higgins, 2017). In the current paper, this effort led us to develop the integrative COR framework as a means to map distinct social influence processes through which organizational actors shape others' relationships, for better or worse. Following Granovetter (1973) and others, we subscribe to the view that "the analysis of *processes* in interpersonal networks provides the most fruitful micro-macro bridge" (p. 1360). Thus, we see the greatest potential for future research in this field in studies that will deepen our understanding of the behavioral processes through which organizational actors shape others' relationships. We hope that the current review will disrupt (in the most positive, Silicon Valley sense) the current conversation about brokerage and brokering in organizations, by making it theoretically richer, more inclusive (i.e., broader), and more process-oriented.

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Notes

1. Whereas some social influence processes in organizational contexts target others' identities, motivations, and goals, brokering processes—our focus here—specifically target others' relationships.

2. Some of the published work we cite has either used the two terms interchangeably or utilized one of the two terms as a broad umbrella-concept to denote both structural characteristics and behavioral processes in networks. When directly quoting others' work, we naturally maintain the original authors' choice of terms. In all other instances, we use brokerage to denote a structural position and brokering to denote a social process.

3. Interestingly, Simmel subscribed to the view that "it is usually much easier for the average person to inspire another individual with distrust and suspicion toward a third… than with confidence and sympathy" (1955, p. 30).

4. Simmel justified the focus on triads by noting that the relational configurations that exist in triads "are impossible if there are only two elements; and, on the other hand, if there are more than three, they are either equally impossible or only expand in quantity but do not change their formal type." (1950, p. 145).

5. Brokering processes can produce multiple outcomes (effects) on alters' relationships, ego's relationship with each alter, ego's social and material success, and more. As a first step, we focus here on how brokering by ego influences alters' relationship.

6. We acknowledge that additional dimensions may be added to Figure 2. For instance, the two-dimensional table can reasonably be transformed into a three-dimensional space that considers also how brokering activity influences the relationship between ego and each of the two alters (an influence that may be symmetric or asymmetric). However, for the sake of simplicity, we focus on a third party's

influence on alters' relationship, recognizing that various extensions can be deduced from our general framework.

7. Although we make simplified and categorical distinctions between negative, neutral, and positive relationships in Figure 2 for the purposes of illustrating the COR framework, we acknowledge that most interactions and relationships are mixed-motive in nature (i.e., include both cooperative and competitive elements: Halevy et al., 2012; Schelling, 1980). Additionally, correspondence of outcomes is in fact a continuous variable that can be operationalized as the correlation between parties' outcomes across the different cell in a payoff matrix (Kelley et al., 2003; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978), rather than as a categorical variable. Future work may build on these observations to further develop the COR framework (cf. Gerpott et al., 2017).

8. Positive workplace gossip (i.e., communicating favorable information about others) is often used by cooperation catalysts as a means to build relationships, reinforce positive relationships, or facilitate constructive conflict management.