# Disrupting Human Algorithms

## Overcoming internal distortions to mobilize knowledge

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Knowledge brokers who partner with educators and policymakers may be aware of the echo chambers produced by social media algorithms, yet it can still be difficult for them to recognize how their own human work may fall into these same traps. Because of this, change efforts can become constrained when brokers' mission driven goals unintentionally shape their understanding of the people they interact with – or even their expectations of who they should be interacting with. These internalized "human algorithms" can shape worldviews as profoundly as the external digital ones with which we are all so familiar. This powerful combination of both digital and human algorithms can make it difficult for brokers to effectively break down silos, question assumptions, and build bridges across sectors of research, policy, and practice in education.

**SOSNetLab maps social networks and the content[1] that flows through them, providing knowledge brokers[2] with opportunities to surface and disrupt patterns that inadvertently limit their cross-sector work.**

## The conversations that occur without us

The mission-driven nature of knowledge mobilization[3] can lead to unintentional myopia, limiting brokers' opportunities to gain a full understanding of their partners' and audiences' contexts and actions beyond what brokers perceive to be immediately relevant.

### What is being talked about?

Given that brokers do not participate in the full breadth of conversations and challenges that occur in the fabric of their partners' work, they can oversimplify their partners and contexts in ways that distort the perception of the landscape. These distortions can lead to erroneous beliefs that the goals brokers work toward with educators, policymakers, and partners are central to these partners' and audiences' daily lived realities, when in fact they may be peripheral, transient, or even non-existent.

> Knowledge brokers' mission-driven focus may fall out of step with the challenges practitioners and policymakers face at that moment.

### Who is being listened to?

Similarly, by relying on conventional assumptions and preconceived mental maps about whose voice is influential on a given topic, brokers can unintentionally narrow perceptions of who might

make for an additional partner. Interacting with the *same* people and sectors in the *same* ways can limit their connection to the full breadth of the individuals and sectors working toward similar goals, sometimes in unexpected ways. The invisibility of other social ecosystems in which brokers exist may well stymie their efforts to meaningfully mobilize knowledge both within and across sectors.

*"This idea is really broadening our view of who are collaborators, who are partners, who our audience could be."*

*"What surprised me is that people who are highly influential, sometimes they are not part of the hierarchy. They are just a person that others know and respect."*

## Exploring unseen territory

SOSNetLab maps social networks and content flows providing knowledge brokers with opportunities to disrupt the patterns that reinforce internalized algorithms. Our knowledge broker partners note that the experience of seeing unexpected individuals and content in their networks adds depth and texture to their understanding of audiences in surprising ways. Surfacing and challenging assumptions provides brokers the opportunity to forge new paths to mobilize knowledge and give their work new life within the social landscape.

### Strategically leveraging a network approach to knowledge mobilization

A more expansive view of the exchange of knowledge supports brokers to see which individuals and organizations hold sway with groups talking about their target topics. With access to both social and content networks, brokers can form new knowledge mobilization strategies based on who is talking about what and with whom. For example, they can more strategically leverage their online and offline networks to connect with new audiences through influential others, thus setting up the potential for a much broader reach and more tailored mobilization.

*"It's the ties of your ties that are important. I feel like this is another unexplored territory for us. That's really intriguing. "*

*"I'm looking at this network and thinking Look at this beacon. We know people there. Why aren't we leveraging those relationships?"*

### Reshaping and reinvigorating knowledge

By discovering online conversations that they otherwise would have overlooked, our broker partners realize that their existing resources can be reframed for current challenges and new groups of people. This deeper understanding of the complex terrain in which they journey enables them to keep resources alive, iterate in response to needs, and engage in a more responsive and adaptive lifecycle of programming and support.

Stepping into previously unseen networks to glimpse the conversations they were missing helped brokers disrupt the patterns that had been limiting their interactions, relationships, and the flow of knowledge.
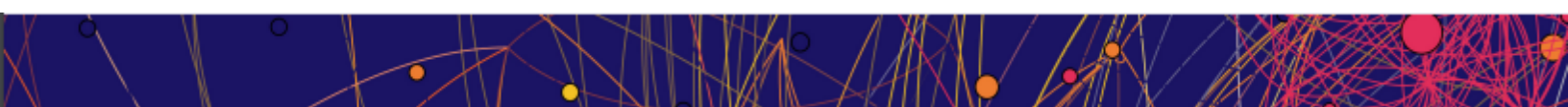
# Endnotes

1. Social network analysis is used to find and map patterns of interactions between actors, enabling the identification of individuals and groups who facilitate the flow of resources throughout the network. This project draws from X (formerly Twitter) data. AI analysis of these social media posts provides information on the content that flows through the network.

2. Knowledge brokers move resources between otherwise disconnected individuals. Our work involves partnering with six diverse knowledge brokering organizations working to broker equity-driven resources to different sectors of the education policy, practice, research, and funding landscape. Seventy hours of interviews and focus groups supported the development of and research using a toolkit to map social media social and content networks on topics relevant to their brokering work.

3. We take knowledge mobilization to mean the multidirectional movement of resources that supports the construction, reconstruction, and use of knowledge.

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