

Professor Brian Uzzi, Northwestern University

“Conditions Favoring the Recognition of Innovation in Science”

Description: The recognition of innovative science frequently depends on a researcher’s ability to effectively convey the merits of new ideas to others. This communication process is especially crucial for success in grant funding and publishing. Nevertheless, the scientific study of the importance of communicating the merits of good ideas is nascent. In the first part of the presentation, I report on linguistic analyses of grant applications, papers, and peer review with a focus on scientific promotional language—a linguistic vocabulary that purportedly conveys an innovative idea’s originality and significance. I find that that promotional language is strongly associated with receiving grants and being published. Further, I find that promotional language is associated with the convergence of agreement among reviewers, and that peer reviewers with and without expertise regarding the content of paper are more likely to agree with each other the more promotional language used in the paper, closing the evaluation gap found between reviewers with high and low expertise. In the second part of the presentation, I describe how recognition of innovativeness is associated with career trajectories based on a network analysis of thousands of science prizes worldwide over a 100-year history. The findings buck the well-known Mathew Effect and reveal a hierarchical structure among prizes that predicts a scientific researchers continued recognition and fame.



Brian Uzzi is the Richard L. Thomas Professor of Leadership at the Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University. He also is Co-Director of the Northwestern University Institute on Complex Systems (NICO) and The Ryan Institute on Complexity (RIC), and a professor in sociology and the McCormick School of Engineering. Brian’s work focuses on the link between social networks and human achievement and the role of AI in mind + machine partnerships. Brian has been awarded over 30 teaching and research prizes worldwide in sociology, management, ecology, and computer science, is a Network Science Society Fellow, a recipient of the Euler Award, and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He has been on the faculties of Harvard, INSEAD, University of Chicago, and Berkeley and his widely cited research has been funded by DARPA, NSF, and other foundations. He consults for companies and governments worldwide. Before entering science, Brian worked as a carpenter and a musician. His PhD is from Stony Brook University in sociology.

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