

CALL FOR PAPERS

Boundary Spanning in Global Organizations

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BACKGROUND TO SPECIAL ISSUE

Global organizations are inherently complex. Rapidly developing emerging markets and increasing spatial dispersion of innovative activities coupled with digital convergence create the need for continuously developing new ways of coordinating, organizing, and reconfiguring of organizational structures and routines across inter and intra-organizational boundaries.

Early studies discussed the roles of gatekeepers in the context of technology transfer between different departments or functional areas within organizations. In more recent research, one stream has explored the role of boundary objects as contextual aids for cross-boundary knowledge sharing. A complementary stream has begun to investigate individuals as boundary spanners and their roles in effectively operating across complex inter- and intra-organizational, socio-cultural and geographic boundaries. Individuals are the nested antecedent to organizational level actions and therefore deserve careful theoretical and empirical deliberation.

Existing research on boundary spanning is mainly conceptual or based on a limited number of case studies. The research suggests that a small number of managers with unique skill sets or personality traits have emerged as critical facilitators for cross-boundary coordination. Boundaries can be both explicit as between parents and subsidiaries of multinational enterprises, and also implicit as between line managers and top management. For example, middle managers have been argued to perform the role of boundary spanners between line managers and top management in a general organizational context. A delineation of explicit and implicit boundaries across organizational subunits as well as within organizational subunits is important to understand the boundary spanning function.

From a managerial perspective, little is known about the characteristics of boundary spanners and whether their capabilities are inherent or can be developed. Although the literature has provided some useful insights, most existing research treats the individual actors and the organizational environment as two discrete dimensions. Further, the boundary-spanning role is essentially associated with structural holes and bridging ties, so key questions arise as to how they affect organizations and organizational capabilities, and how organizational structures foster or hinder boundary spanning.

From an organizational architecture perspective little is known about the specificities of boundaries and how they manifest themselves other than those that are explicit in the form of hierarchies, functional domains, or geographic territories. In global organizations, organizational subunits often become

embedded in geographical contexts that differ in terms of culture, institutions, language, etc. These organizational realities create implicit boundaries in many dimensions, e.g., cultural and psychic distance, institutional incompatibilities as well as linguistic issues that may be labeled “lost in translation”. The boundary spanning function in such organizations includes a wide range of coordination mechanisms, which need to be explored in greater detail.

The boundary spanning phenomenon provides an opportunity for moving beyond emblematic borrowing of individual level theories and applying them to organizational level research. This will move the research agenda toward addressing both micro-macro linkage and macro-micro linkages systematically, thus substantially advancing theory.

With this special issue we seek to connect different, though loosely related research domains. The buoying microfoundations of strategy discussion, research on strategy as practice, and behavioral strategy could be particularly fertile areas for such an approach. In addition, this special issue seeks to foster cross-fertilization from and between different epistemological orientations. This includes research in the areas of industrial and organizational psychology and behavioral economics, among others.

TYPES OF SUBMISSION SOLICITED

Building on extant research, we seek contributions that either add empirical insights or/and advance theory building regarding the boundary spanning functions in global organizations as well as the characteristics, development and roles of boundary spanners, a special type of manager that allows organizations to manage more effectively across intra- and inter-organizational boundaries.

We are interested in theoretical, empirical and analytical submissions. We welcome submissions that address both, organizational and managerial based approaches to boundary spanning.

The submission to this special issue must go beyond anecdotal descriptions of the phenomenon and represent a substantial contribution to theory development. The topics that the special issue intends to cover include (but are not limited to):

Definition: What are explicit and implicit boundaries, how do they manifest themselves materially, contextually, intellectually, perceptually and from a structural and/or managerial coordination perspective?

Evolution of boundaries: How do boundaries arise, become entrenched in some circumstances and dissolve in others? To what extent do boundaries evolve dynamically over time and how do boundary-spanning roles emerge? How can analyses of boundaries improve our understanding of conflicts and conflict resolution in general?

Organizational versus managerial level of analysis: Is boundary spanning an organizational capability or a managerial skill or both? What is the role of management in either fostering or hindering boundary spanning? What are managerial or individual boundary spanning skills and how are they developed? How can our understanding of well-known organizational functions (middle managers, staff vs. line managers, etc.) be improved using an analysis of boundaries?

Boundary spanning, a cause or effect: Is the boundary spanning function a cause or an effect? In some contexts, the boundary spanning function could be an outcome of particular forms of organizational values or structures, while in others it could be a means of creating and reinforcing them.

Boundary spanning versus boundary setting: Is boundary spanning always a good thing? Are there situations in which boundary setting (and the associated specialization) is more important than boundary spanning?

Boundary spanners versus gatekeepers: What are the individual, functional and conceptual similarities that boundary spanners and gatekeepers share with each other? What are the differences that distinguish them from each other?

Organizational adaption: How do global organizations adapt over time to new boundary challenges and what are the organizational structures that make boundary spanners more or less effective?

Intra versus inter organizational perspective: Are there fundamental differences between “inter” and “intra” organizational boundary spanning activities? How does boundary spanning relate to the dialectical process of change implementation (theses) and resistance to change (antitheses) in complex/global organizations?

Role of external context in boundary spanning: In global organizations, organizational subunits often become embedded in geographical contexts that differ in terms of culture, institutions, language, etc. How do these differences affect the boundary spanning function as well as the effectiveness of boundary spanners?

SUBMISSION PROCESS AND DEADLINES

Papers will be reviewed following the JMS double-blind review process and should be prepared using the JMS Guidelines, which can be reviewed [here](#).

Papers should be submitted by **DECEMBER 1, 2014** via e-mail to the guest editors (globalboundaryspanner@gmail.com). The editors welcome informal enquiries related to proposed topics.

Manuscript Development Workshop:

The editors of the Special Issue anticipate holding a manuscript development workshop and conference from April 16 – 17, 2015 at the Ivey Business School in Canada. Authors of manuscripts who receive an invitation to revise and resubmit for a second round of review will be invited to attend this workshop. Presentation at the workshop does not guarantee acceptance of the paper for publication in JMS. Conversely, attendance is not prerequisite for publication in the special issue.