Selective permeability of boundaries in a boundary spanning team

ROMAN KISLOV
ALLIANCE MANCHESTER BUSINESS SCHOOL
THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

@RomanKislov
Boundaries

- Frontiers or demarcations
- Delimit the perimeter and scope of a given domain
- Reflect the sociocultural differences between groups
- Potentially lead to discontinuities in action or interaction

- Contestable
- Have dual nature:
  - Barriers v Junctures
  - ‘Thick’ v ‘Thin’
  - ‘Open’ v ‘Closed’ teams
Boundary spanning teams

- Heavily rely on boundary spanning activities to accomplish their tasks
- Boundary spanning is a core part of their formal remit
- Increase the permeability of ‘sticky’ boundaries
- Promote integration, coordination and joint working between different organisations and/or professions
- Seen as preferential over individual boundary spanners
- May be part of broader ‘boundary organisations’
Boundary work

- Strategies used to establish, obscure or dissolve distinctions between groups of actors
  - Strategies of engagement – boundary spanning – boundaries as ‘junctures’
  - Strategies of disengagement – boundary maintenance – boundaries as ‘barriers’:
    - Boundary buffering – an outward-facing strategy of disengagement, whereby a team closes itself off from exposure to the environment to protect itself against external uncertainties and disturbances
    - Boundary reinforcement - an inward-facing strategy of disengagement, whereby a team internally sets and reclaims its boundaries and sharpens team identity
Paradox of boundary spanning teams

- Teams participate in all types of boundary work
- Boundary spanning *increases* the permeability of the team boundary
- Boundary buffering and boundary reinforcement *reduce* the permeability of the team boundary
- Boundary spanning teams require a permeable boundary

- What is the interplay between different types of boundary work in boundary spanning teams?
- How does this interplay influence the permeability of the team boundary?
- How do these phenomena change over time?
Qualitative longitudinal single case study
Interplay between different types of boundary work

- Strategies of engagement and disengagement can co-exist at the same team boundary without cancelling each other out.
- They are directed at different out-groups.
- Strategies of disengagement exercise both negative and, rather unexpectedly, positive influences on boundary spanning:
  - Adaptation
  - Prioritisation
  - Identity formation

![Diagram showing interplay between different types of boundary work](image-url)
Selective permeability

- Team boundary is not *either* ‘thin’ *or* ‘thick’
- It’s **selectively permeable** in relation to different *out-groups* with which the team interacts
- Selectivity is shaped by:
  - perceived characteristics of the *out-groups*;
  - the *out-group*’s modes of participation; and
  - the individual boundary spanner(s) deployed
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Dimensions</th>
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| Perceived characteristics of the out-group      | - Relevance of the out-group’s knowledge and/or skills to the boundary spanning project  
- Authority and legitimacy of the out-group in its respective social field  
- Alignment of interests between the out-group and the boundary spanning team  
- Degree of difference between the out-group and the boundary-spanning team  
- Competition for recognition and resources between the out-group and the boundary spanning team |
| The out-group’s mode of participation            | - Full participation in shared practices  
- Knowledge exchange without participation in shared practices  
- Non-participation |
| Characteristics of individual boundary spanner(s) operating between the team and the out-group | - Complementarity between the designated boundary spanner and the representatives of the out-group involved in the boundary spanning project  
- The degree to which the designated boundary spanners are involved in the development of the cross-boundary practices  
- Position of the individual boundary spanner in relation to the core/periphery of the boundary spanning team and the out-group involved |
Temporal dynamics of boundary phenomena

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘Exploration’ stages:</th>
<th>‘Exploitation’ stages:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Combination of boundary spanning and boundary reinforcement</td>
<td>Combination of boundary spanning and boundary buffering</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boundary spanning is broad and shallow, mainly targeting multiple extra-organisational groups</td>
<td>Boundary spanning is more narrow but deeper in focus, targeting several extra-organisational groups</td>
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<td>Boundary reinforcement unfolds mainly in response to intra-organisational groups:</td>
<td>Intra-organisational boundary reinforcement can be counterbalanced by an organisational intervention:</td>
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<td>- Intra-organisational competition</td>
<td>- Boundaries are amenable to change under pressure</td>
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<td>- Exaggeration of differences between similar teams (‘othering’) as part of team identity formation</td>
<td>- Shared cross-team work practices</td>
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