BOUNDARY SPANNING IN PRACTICE

BROADENING THE CONVERSATION

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Senior Fellows and Friends • Colorado Springs, Colorado

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Contents

To all who’ve been doing the work of their lives for the public good, thanks. Keep going!

A little about the process: I thought of walls and how they keep people out and keep people in. That made me think of jails, that made me think of cells, that made me think of worker bees and that made me think of honeycombs - each bee working on its own little cell. But bees and people are social animals aren't they? If you look one group breaks the cell and it opens up another, etc. This is rather the essence of what you are trying to communicate I thought.

—VALERIE QUARLES, GRAPHIC DESIGNER

FOREWORD

Once you reach cruising height in an airplane, you see no boundaries.

Isolation is a pathogen. The stagnant air in an organizational stovepipe slowly kills the great ideas, the passion, and the quest to do something for the greater good. When a leader exposes people to the bigger picture through boundary spanning, new options and inspired potential open up in ways that no other intervention can provide.

Command and control leadership delivers short-term compliance. Under this model, people and systems adapt with just enough energy to avoid the worst outcome. We must shift the mindset away from avoiding the worst towards pursuing the best.

And the best flows only from the well of deep commitment.

Commitment begins once the bigger picture becomes clear to many. Add to that an environment where human connections create networks for driving innovation and higher performance, and greatness will soon take hold.

Today's challenges demand this broader point of view. Wicked problems, complexity, inter-dependency, historical traditions, technological advances, and global implications all characterize modern public service. A silo is not sharp enough to cut through issues that matter. Boundary spanning is the ultimate leadership competency for inducing excellence by replacing old beliefs with a new sense of possibilities and mutual success.

Kriste Jordan Smith
Dallas, Texas
August 4th, 2017

CHAPTER ONE

Boundary Spanning as an Antidote for Boiling Frog Syndrome

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Kitty Wooley

Why this ebook project was initiated. This project sprang from the author's observation of cabinet department and independent agency work in Washington between 2004 and 2013, during which stark differences in behavior within two clusters were noted. One small cluster was comprised of executives and civil servants who were constantly enlisting others to work together to produce results that mattered; the other (much larger) cluster was comprised of executives and civil servants who weren't.

"Boiling frog" is a story about a frog slowly being boiled alive. The premise is that if a frog is placed in boiling water, it will jump right out, but if it is placed in cold water that is slowly heated, it will be cooked to death before it perceives the mounting danger. The story is sometimes used as a metaphor for the inability or unwillingness of people to respond to, or even be aware of, threats that occur gradually.

The agility represented by the small cluster mentioned above is becoming more important because we're living in a time in which descriptive terms like VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous),[1] once used primarily by military strategists, are now used by HR professionals around the world. Contrast this to the less-VUCA year I entered the workforce – when personal computers did not exist and there was no Internet – or to 1994 – the year I moved to government from the private sector, when the always-on mobile devices causing burnout were pagers. In 2017, colleagues in my circles have just begun discussing the potential impacts of artificial intelligence and robotics on jobs, self-driving cars are becoming a real thing, commercial uses of drones are proliferating, and so on. The point is, some aspects of the world are changing rapidly, complexity and unpredictability are on the rise, and we are behind the curve.

That this problem has been identified can be seen by the proposals that have emerged over the past few years to solve it. Written by accomplished developers of leaders, the documents can often be identified by the use of the phrase "21st Century." But the second cluster persists, as shown by perpetually low employee engagement scores year after year.[2] More leaders, with more relevant skills, must become part of the first cluster so that government is ready to:

- Avoid backlog, breakdown, or mission failure as the workforce turns over;
- Solve large, crosscutting problems that require both cooperation on the fly and institutionalized collaboration;
- Respond to Black Swans, such as mounting an effective, efficient, and humane response in the face of a Hurricane Katrina or other large, non-routine event.

One skill, in particular, is either missing or vastly misunderstood. We can characterize it as ***practiced ease in boundary spanning and the mindset that enables it.*** A few organizations in government, higher education, and the private sector have noticed this piece and have been delivering high quality, executive-level programs that incorporate it for a few years. However, it is unclear whether executives whose leadership ability has matured within silos, and who have been rewarded for performing in silos, will persevere through the discomfort that boundary spanning in the context of work will introduce.

The boundary spanning mindset should almost certainly be fostered earlier in careers, before employees have become habituated to the siloed organizations in which they work. That may not be as challenging as it sounds. In fact, the first few years' activity of Young Government Leaders demonstrated that inexperienced employees were fully capable of strategic planning, logistics, communication, and execution of interagency professional development events at government facilities after work – proof that they were able to remain aligned with agency human capital goals without supervision, gain the trust of executive office gatekeepers who controlled resources ranging from auditoriums to easels, and achieve results that mattered.[3]

This is an area in which much more work could be done. The people who pioneered and led that early activity with amazing energy, two of whom left government in order to have bigger impacts on design thinking at Stanford and nutrition in DC food deserts, would be worthwhile interview subjects. Two questions whose answers would move the ball forward are as follows: (1) What factors led to your departure from government? and (2) If you were tasked to establish similar professional development activity within the workplace, how would you navigate the inevitable challenges and pitfalls?

In the following chapters, each author addresses an aspect of the boundary spanning practice upon which effective government will increasingly depend.

How our project began

One of the things that keeps people from reaching out and trying something new, and potentially better, together is the thought that conditions must be perfect first or something bad will happen. This misconception withers the creative impulse and the desire to reach out to potential colleagues who could energize one's work. The result is lose/lose. In most workplace scenarios, though, the stakes are not very high. Those who need a patron saint can read up on USN Rear Admiral Grace Hopper, who once said,

> *The most important thing I've accomplished, other than building the compiler, is training young people. They come to me, you know, and say, 'Do you think we can do this?' I say, "Try it." And I back 'em up.*

> *They need that. I keep track of them as they get older and I stir 'em up at intervals so they don't forget to take chances.*[4]

Withered creativity and lack of relationship across silos is a problem in the context of government, when failing to try could become a lose/lose for millions of people. We are better than this. Sometimes, one must simply ignore the little voice in one's head.

So, in mid-2016, I created a draft to invite a new conversation and emailed it to about thirty people whose professional practice is characterized by openness, generosity, and the engagement of others across organizational boundaries with the intent to get better results for the public. A fellow co-creator and serial mentor of emerging leaders offered up his living room as a place to meet, and seven of us gathered in Reston, Virginia in January, 2017 to discuss possibilities over lunch. One drove over a hundred miles to participate. An eighth colleague contributed long-distance by shipping us a package of noisemaking rubber frogs, which endlessly amused the household cat and set the tone for a relaxed conversation among people who mostly had never met. That meeting resulted in an informal collaboration among current and retired government colleagues in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, Bethesda, Maryland, Dallas, Texas, and Colorado Springs, Colorado. The invitation that attracted them appears at the end of the chapter.

In what sense does this ebook broaden the conversation?

As you read each chapter, you will notice that:

We're not all professional writers or leader developers
We don't focus only on boundary spanning at the executive level
We don't all have PhDs
AND
We're sharing experience from different vantage points
We all recognize behavior associated with high performance
We've all crossed boundaries to get better results for the public.

The ebook includes perspectives at varying levels of resolution, from governmentwide to organizational to individual, and at varying stages of completeness. That's because it is *time for people to prioritize building relationships with others outside their silos,* to cooperate on the fly, and to work together over the long haul so that government becomes more responsive, capable, and nimble.

Adrian Wolfberg, a widely acknowledged expert in the science and art of information transfer to improve decision quality, takes a close look at the competencies that enable large organizations to create sustainable change. Those who work at managing change, transferring knowledge, or developing people will find themselves going back to this chapter again and again. Adrian has the gift of clarity, which made his participation in this project all the more thrilling. In fact, earlier this year, a senior editor at the University of Chicago Press wrote something that could have been describing his ability to illuminate high-stakes concepts:

> *Scholarly prose gets a bad rap. Is it deserved? Yes--and no. The academy is absolutely right to encourage the kinds of ideas that are most concisely expressed with a $12 word. But if those ideas can't also be explained in clear, accessible language, you have to wonder whether there is a clear idea there at all.*
>
> *—Elizabeth Branch Dyson, senior editor at the University of Chicago Press*[5]

Kriste Jordan Smith, who was known to federal colleagues and Project Management Professionals long before she joined the SES as a maker of simple, yet powerfully effective tools that ignited project team creativity and elicited discretionary effort, intentionally presents a rough draft of a "Boundary Spanning Opportunity Guide" to see whether it can lure potential co-creators from their silos and generate constructive joint activity that will accelerate employee development.

Diane Blumenthal, a senior analyst who embodies the spirit of cooperation, describes how a boundary spanning initiative within her agency component improved relationships between headquarters and staff in 11 regional offices despite widely known problems that remained unsolved – no mean feat because of the power differential that is perceived by federal employees who are not based in Washington. Simultaneously, Diane leaves trail markers for those who truly seek to understand the employee experience and improve leadership across the bureaucracy. Like the perspectives of executives and line employees, insider and outsider perspectives only overlap so far. No matter how expert the outsider who wants to help, this kind of grassroots information often remains hidden. Her short piece also serves as a valuable reminder to seek multiple perspectives on organizational health often, so that those who must mobilize regional teams rapidly in a crisis do not discover that the organization's capacity has been hollowed out by unaddressed resentment or stagnation.

In the last chapter, I make suggestions to the leadership development establishment and to individual employees who want to have greater impact. Then, I suggest lines of inquiry to academics and practitioners who want to partner on game-changing work. Practicing boundary spanning of some kind to the point of ease will help everyone, not only because of the benefits that convey to the organization *and* the career, but so that everyone is better equipped to be useful no matter what's happening. My conviction that the latter is a high priority goal has been formed by my experience during the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, the seven hours it took to return home from my office near the National Mall after the Pentagon was bombed on 9/ll, and long observation of the leadership development candidate inefficacy noted in the grid below.

To help the frog jump out of the pot while there's still time, let us now crack open organizational complacency and impel current and prospective leaders to challenge their own limitations, especially those that are self-imposed. Read on!

Notes

[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Volatility,_uncertainty,_complexity_and_ambiguity.

[2] https://www.fedview.opm.gov/. Also see http://bestplacestowork.org/BPTW/index.php, which builds on OPM's Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey.

[3] Wooley, Kitty. 2009. "Four New Models of Networked Leadership Development." In Innovations in Human Resource Management: Getting the Public's Work Done in the 21st Century, edited by Hannah S. Sistare, Myra Howze Shiplett, and Terry F. Buss, 131-146. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.

[4] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grace_Hopper.

[5] Elizabeth Branch Dyson, in "The University Press: 46 Insiders on the Future of Scholarly Publishing." The Chronicle Review, Section B of The Chronicle of Higher Education, Volume LXIII, Number 38, p. B12. June 9, 2017. Washington, DC.

The invitation

Image redacted due to inability to locate copy-right owner

Boundary Spanning as an Antidote for Boiling Frog Syndrome

Advance Reading for exploratory conversation in the Metro DC Area on October 1, 2016

By Kitty Wooley

Working Definitions

Boiling frog *is an anecdote describing a frog slowly being boiled alive. The premise is that if a frog is placed in boiling water, it will jump out, but if it is placed in cold water that is slowly heated, it will not perceive the danger and will be cooked to death. The story is often used as a metaphor for the inability or unwillingness of people to react to or be aware of threats that occur gradually.*

A ***syndrome*** *is a group of symptoms that consistently occur together.*

A ***symptom*** *is a phenomenon that is experienced by the individual affected by the disease, while a* ***sign*** *is a phenomenon that can be detected by someone else.*

Boundary spanning *is reaching across borders, margins, or sections to 'build relationships, interconnections and interdependencies' in order to manage complex problems. Boundary-spanning individuals develop partnerships and collaboration by 'building sustainable relationships, managing through influence and negotiation, and seeking to understand motives, roles and responsibilities.' Boundary-spanning organizations create 'strategic alliances, joint working arrangements, networks, partnerships and many other forms of collaboration across organizational boundaries.'*

—Williams, P. The Competent Boundary Spanner. Public Admin. 2002; 80: 103-124.

What's the threat? Civilian government employees are largely shielded from and oblivious to volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity in the environment – until they're not, and then they find themselves surprised and behind the curve. Government faces a growing number of wicked problems that cannot be solved in isolation, yet many career leaders still favor a hunkered-down, status quo, silo-embracing approach, and they want their employees to stay in the silos, too. My observation is that most agencies are behind the curve on systemic knowledge transfer, continuous and self-directed learning, accelerated development of new hires and new supervisors, process streamlining, and other activities that will enable programs to function smoothly as retirements continue or emergencies arise. The overemphasis on control is brittle and non-adaptive. Many leadership development candidates are emerging from programs as isolated and helpless as the day they began them, unable or unwilling to reach across, connect, initiate, and partner for results. That may mean that new selection approaches will be necessary, and OPM's leadership competencies revisited. However, there is little apparent sense of urgency in any of these areas.

How can boundary spanning initiated by self-identified emergent leaders, i.e., not orchestrated by top leaders, interrupt the progression of this fatal disease? After years of trying to effect cultural change inside an Executive Branch Department where there is no real sense of urgency, *my focus* has shifted to what a motivated connector at any level can constructively accomplish without damage to organization or self, and how that activity can be fostered. Government must develop the capacity to operate productively at the intersection of hierarchy and network, in order to develop agility and resilience that can withstand future storms and create positive, sustainable outcomes for the people. Currently, the only contexts in which I can see this happening are pockets in the military (adaptive leadership, *Team of Teams*) and technology (18F, U.S. Digital Service) communities. The program offices and functional areas I have been monitoring are way behind, even as the water temperature rises around them. The lack of a sense of urgency and importance should not be confused with management as firefighting (urgent and not important).

If *your focus* happens to be on what an *organization* can do, terrific! In that case, our interests are complementary, because – to mix metaphors – "it takes two to tango." There is what only an organization can do, and there is what an individual employee also can do. Today's norm is big organization, little unempowered employee – except that anyone, at any time, could begin seeking to develop into a strong, crosscutting teammate and go-to person with muscle who helps, and who exercises leadership behavior from wherever he or she is. I have some ideas about how to make that happen. What are your ideas?

Each of us has done something that challenges the status quo, and that's why you've been invited to attend this small gathering – please give it some thought. In the future, participants could choose to support each other's constructive activity, initiate new activity together, or ask for help. For now, let's discover whether our stories and points of view can be harmonized enough to compile in a useful e-book (I think they can). An effective former colleague and senior executive in Dallas has already signed on to contribute. The e-book will be made freely available on a new Senior Fellows and Friends site upon completion. Meeting details will be sent to those who plan to attend. Please RSVP to me at [redacted] as soon as possible so that I can find a good space and can plan further, based on the combination of people who have opted in.

Kitty's Boiling Frog seed thoughts (What are yours?)

Symptom (subjective evidence)	Sign (objective evidence)	Why is this a problem?
"I went through that leadership program and nothing ever came of it."	The vast majority of midcareer employees I've met since 2002 have graduated and then have resumed waiting to be tapped. Applies to GS-14/15 level, SESCDP, and crosscutting PMC programs. Boundary spanning is "bolted onto" selectees after they've been socialized for years to stay in their silos. New behavior such as taking initiative to reach across doesn't continue after the program.	Selection is not considering "agile" factors such as emotional intelligence, tendency to learn and unlearn continually, or tendency to reach out to others and get results in partnership with them. The current strategy of retrofitting midcareer employees could be supplemented by creating guardrails for all employees to whom connecting is second nature.
"I have mine and am comfortable in this job. There is no reason for me to rotate, connect with others elsewhere in government or the private sector, or venture outside my comfort zone."	Government-wide, only 3.3% of current career senior executives have changed agencies. 53.3% have not changed positions while in the SES. – A Pivotal Moment for the Senior Executive Service	Hinders organizational ability to anticipate coming change, respond rather than react, and make the best decisions possible at any given time. May make the executive irrelevant. Will damage public confidence in government.
"My boss won't let me talk to those people over there!"	Eight bright young employees from 3 cabinet agencies have approached me with this problem in the past 4 years. I keep getting calls, despite the fact that I retired early and left town to take care of my mother.	Impedes knowledge transfer and cross-fertilization, which impedes learning and performance. Best case: Employee moves to a more open environment. Worst case: Employee stays, becomes more helpless, dumbs down, and may even become actively disengaged.
"Social media is an insignificant fad. I don't have time for it." (It's all cat videos)	A surprising number of Feds in my network are not on public business intelligence or career networks such as Twitter or LinkedIn.	Closed mind and non-participation 1-prevent them from seeing trends, opportunities, and risks *("It appeared out of nowhere!")*. 2-deprive them of cross-fertilizing conversation with others who are working on similar issues. 3-lead them to discount or ignore the shift to digital everything. This keeps them behind the curve and may contribute to public distrust of government (as shown by low public survey ratings and difficulty attracting new hires).

How might small experiments in boundary spanning help? Here's a low-risk example in the area of leadership development. By showing individuals how to practice finding and making contact with intrapreneurs, managers, and executives who may be a good fit for information interviews, shadowing assignments, or details, and extending support while they push the envelope, it is possible to help them build agile muscle and enlarged capacity for operating outside their comfort zones. I have introduced several people to such practice over the past five years, and have observed the uptick in self-confidence and agency that comes from learning to fish. They no longer need to wait to be picked because, in the words of Seth Godin, they have "picked themselves." In one case, this led quickly to a contracting expert's promotion to a supervisory position with another agency. However, the larger outcome was that the government's capacity grew incrementally when she rejected learned helplessness.

Here's a higher-risk example in the area of convening conversation to promote knowledge transfer. Some of you know that I negotiated a cross boundary performance goal two years before retirement that leveraged my strengths to increase the use of, and improve the sense of community on, the MAX Federal Community, a robust wiki developed by the OMB Budget Systems Branch to support ongoing interagency streamlining of Executive Branch budget processes. When the Program Management Office Director expressed a wish for a brief skull session among the PMO, OMB, and enterprise architecture leads and Todd Park, then HHS's Chief Technology Officer, I offered to try and arrange a 45-minute meeting – which delivered the desired outcome a few days before Mr. Park was named U.S. Chief Technology Officer and Assistant to the President. Having reflected on the combination of explicit and tacit knowledge, alignment, luck, and tolerance for moderate personal risk that it took to get that meeting, I think that it would be entirely possible to articulate methods, principles, and feedback loops that could help prospective boundary spanners benefit their agencies, and ultimately the public, in new ways.

This kind of strength training could take proficiency in networking at conferences (also valuable) to a whole new level, enabling useful contribution to many aspects of government work that do not require the formality of memoranda of understanding. The point is to help the motivated employee (1) lose the civilian government "disempowerment" meme while retaining unity of effort, and (2) take small steps that are commensurate with his or her judgment and emotional intelligence and are integrated with continuous learning and self-correction. There are federal employees who want to serve, who want to be harnessed and relied on, whose talents are neither fully known nor leveraged for whatever reason. Too much talent is left on the table. There are those in every generation in the workforce who either cross boundaries naturally or crave room to expand. As they practice and learn, their organizations will become more able to meet the demands of the day.

By definition, humans are bigger than the jobs they occupy at any given time. It is possible to leverage our prior boundary spanning experience to move public service forward, if ever so slightly. What questions have you been asking? Shall we engage our discretionary energy together to begin raising the game?

Draft Agenda for October 1st

Saturday, October 1st, 11:30 AM to 2:00 PM, Location TBD

Convene	Reimburse convener for simple lunch, get settled
25 min.	Break bread and participate in introductions – All
10 min.	Short overview, draft plan for e-book, Q&A – Kitty
15 min.	How does boundary-spanning ability relate to sense of urgency? Q&A – Caneva, Wolfberg, and/or Pauley
90 min.	Discussion and skull session – All (partially structured via questions sent in advance)
10 min.	Confirm flipchart notes, next steps and any commitments
Adjourn	

More food for thought:

Now here's where the conflict lies. To experiment and evolve, you need the freedom to fail fast, small and often. From where I stand, the government is its own unique obstacle course — and almost every obstacle works counter to this idea of failing fast, small and often. Simply put, government's obstacle course is designed to support risk aversion. Probably for great reason, too, considering so much of government has been established for decades and so much is at risk if something goes wrong. However, for a brand new organization, experimenting while on this obstacle course is a constant and pretty precarious balancing act.
–Phaedra Chrousos, exiting GSA
http://fedscoop.com/phaedra-chrousos-exit-interview

There are three reasons why today's transformations represent not merely a prolongation of the Third Industrial Revolution but rather the arrival of a Fourth and distinct one: velocity, scope, and systems impact. The speed of current breakthroughs has no historical precedent. When compared with previous industrial revolutions, the Fourth is evolving at an exponential rather than a linear pace. Moreover, it is disrupting almost every industry in every country. And the breadth and depth of these changes herald the transformation of entire systems of production, management, and governance.
–Klaus Schwab, World Economic Forum
https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/the-fourth-industrial-revolution-what-it-means-and-how-to-respond/

From our perspective, the goal is not alignment but self-alignment, and not holding people accountable but equipping people to be self-accountable. As we go forward, these sorts of self-enabled qualities are going to become increasingly important because they allow people and organizations to become more nimble, which becomes more important for survival and success with each passing day.
–James Ferrell, The Arbinger Institute (*Talent Development, July 2016*)

Experts need to change their mindset from having the answer to framing the question.
–Hailey Cooperrider, Collabforge

About the Author

Kitty Wooley, M.A., PMP, spent 19 years at the U.S. Department of Education, retiring in 2013. Her first position in government involved transitioning from college financial aid director to federal institutional review specialist. For a year and a half, she was part of a great team based at 50 U.N. Plaza in San Francisco that traveled to examine college financial aid operations in four states, ensuring that billions of dollars intended to help students pay for college were doing just that. Subsequent positions in Washington, D.C., involved data analysis and risk management, project management, business intelligence and decision support, stakeholder outreach, translation of IT issues into plain language for the business side, report preparation and staff work, and the design and execution of interagency mentoring experiences for executive branch budget staff.

In the evenings, Kitty hosted a dinner salon series named "Senior Fellows and Friends." Since 2003, SFF has promoted an atmosphere of trust that has added value through conversation and relationship among leaders at every level. A small core of participants continues to make space in novel ways for the growth and encouragement of those who have dedicated themselves to public service. We think it's important to span locations, level the playing field, and foil low expectations by noticing untapped talent and capacity and inviting it to play with a purpose and reengage at the office. This is accomplished by in-person events in DC and elsewhere, video conversation, and experimental activity like this ebook. If that appeals to you, please make contact at kitty@seniorfellowsandfriends.com.

CHAPTER 2

At the Street-level Intersection of Organizational Boundaries: Competencies for Sustainable Change

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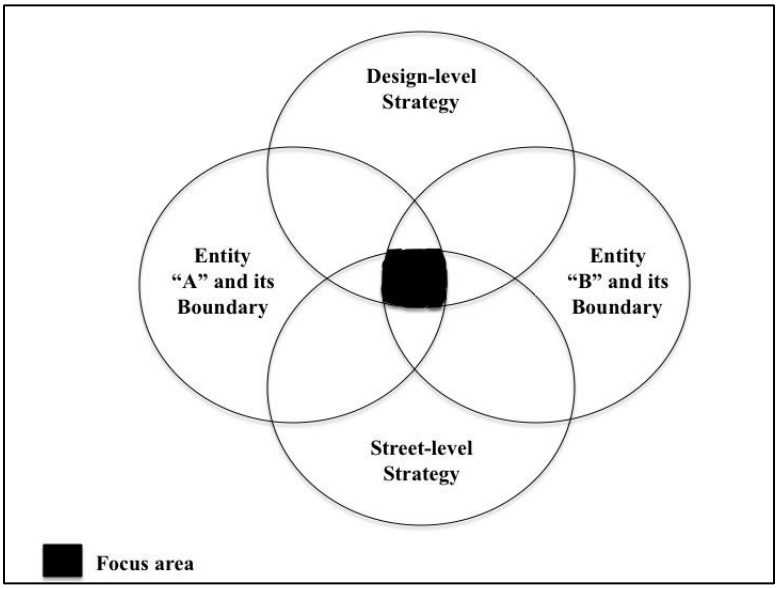
Adrian Wolfberg

We have a love/hate relationship with organizational boundaries, which tends to immobilize us during times of change. Since change is ever-present, identifying competencies for improving our experience with boundaries is a worthwhile pursuit. In this paper, I introduce what I call a street-level view of strategy at the intersection of organizational boundaries. It is a different perspective about competencies than the one emanating from the extensive research focusing squarely on strategy at the policy or decision-making level, which I argue is an incomplete picture of change processes.[1] Without effectively communicating, understanding, and operating at this street-level, and its interaction with higher-echelon design-level strategy, sustainable change lacks a solid foundation, and will likely fail or falter.[2] "Street-level" is defined as the work that happens by frontline organizational members, which, most importantly, has a direct and interacting effect on the policy level where design-level strategy and its leaders occupy.[3] "Design-level" is defined as the intended and deliberate strategy crafted by those in positions of authority for subordinates and others to comply with and participate in its implementation.[4]

In order to identify the competencies needed between boundaries of two or more organizational entities and the corresponding relationship between street-level and design-level strategies, I focus on their intersection (Figure 1). I proceed in the follow way. First, I describe in detail an actual development and change program, called "Crossing Boundaries," serving as a scene-setter and a source of boundary-crossing examples that spans the two levels of strategy. I then introduce the basics of a boundary: its definition, its recursive—self-repeating—nature (Figure 2), its double-edged value, and main types of boundaries (Figure 3). Next, I discuss the design-level elements of strategy: managing boundary disruptions, the need for leader personal involvement, the need for psychological safety, the need for multiple perspectives, and the need for motivation. Then, I describe the components of street-level strategy: how to detect boundaries, how to characterize the level of difficulty crossing boundaries (Figure 4), when and what boundary crossing mechanisms to use (Figure 5), and the need for creating boundary infrastructure. I conclude with comments about the linkages between the main elements of the paper (Figure 6), and provide a recommendation for the development of three competencies (Figure 7) for individuals to operate effectively during times of change at the intersection of organizational boundaries and strategies.

Figure 1: Competencies Needed at the Intersection of Boundaries and Strategies



Source: Adrian Wolfberg

Regarding change, there is an important difference between the terms organizational change and organizational development. Organizational change is typically about a specific change event—large or small—when an alteration is made to structure and/or function, whereas organizational development is a change process over a period of time whose purpose is the development of the organization and its members.[5] Organizational development is change, no doubt, but it is a broader idea that encompasses the narrower sense of organizational change. I am interested in this broader development idea of change rather than any single specific one-time change, and how and why a focus on the boundary crossing phenomenon and associated competencies—viewed at the microscopic level—are critical elements of strategy. I use the terms development and change interchangeably in the paper, though they both refer to the broader sense I have just described.

The audience to whom I am writing is, then, twofold: leaders and frontline organizational members. I want to help leaders who are typically involved with strategy design gain a deeper appreciation of the interaction between strategy design and street-level strategy—where organizational members execute the design—in the pursuit of change at the intersection of boundaries. I also want to provide the recipients and others directly involved with change efforts a conceptual roadmap, and the knowledge of boundary conditions they will likely face at the intersections of boundaries and strategies. I judiciously refer to research studies and provide amplifying remarks in the reference section at the end of the paper.

A Street-level Example: The "Crossing Boundaries" Program

Overview. Just over ten years ago in 2006, I started a unique program within the federal government called "Crossing Boundaries" at the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), a combat support agency within the Department of Defense.[6] The DIA Crossing Boundaries program (hereafter referred to as "Crossing Boundaries") produced very positive and interesting results during its three and a half year life span. Crossing Boundaries was an employee-engaged, highly social interactive, and collaborative process to overcome complicated organ-

izational problems in order to reach common goals that, left unattained, would fester and increasingly negatively affect organizational performance. Interestingly, little is understood within the research community about the mechanisms used in boundary crossing from a social relation or interpersonal communication perspective.[7] It is for this very reason that Crossing Boundaries is informative as a real-world example of boundary crossing at the organizational and individual levels.

Crossing Boundaries encouraged and required interpersonal communication such as collaboration across organizational silos, networking, team-building, and creativity on the part of employees who participated. Employees who embodied these traits witnessed their proposed solutions to problems discussed and debated openly within Crossing Boundaries and mostly productively among their network of peers they created. Employees who did not embody these traits often saw their solutions disappear into the quagmire of bureaucracy. With these traits, employee's solutions galvanized and created grassroots movements spanning boundaries, organizing it into what has been called a "knowledge marketplace."[8] The reason Crossing Boundaries was like a knowledge marketplace was because those solutions that developed a demand and consensus across boundaries survived. Those that did not, they never accumulated a demand.

History. Crossing Boundaries began in May 2006, although the planning began months earlier. The idea behind the creation of Crossing Boundaries was motivated by personal observations made by the then incoming director of DIA, Lieutenant General (LTG) Michael D. Maples, United States Army, and has been published in a number of venues.[9] He read the comments made by employees in a 2005 agency-wide culture climate survey. He saw evidence of poor morale. One specific insight he garnered was a concern expressed by employees that they felt they had little ability to push ideas for improvement up the chain of command. I worked with the director to come up with a plan as part of my role as creator of and lead for the DIA Knowledge Lab, a headquarters-sponsored entity serving as a change agent, formed in 2005 in direct response to the 2004 DIA Strategic Plan.[10] The Knowledge Lab conducted over forty development- and change-related projects and programs—many occurring over multiple iterations—over its five-year lifespan. Besides Crossing Boundaries, its other two keynote multi-year programs were "Full Spectrum Analysis" and "Critical Discourse."[11]

> *"LTG Maples believed that making DIA better was part of every employee's job description, not just senior leaders, or people working explicitly designated change initiatives. The General's vision was not just to empower change, but to make employees the stakeholders and implementers of that change. LTG Maples' objective of the Crossing Boundaries program was to underscore that changing DIA for the better was not just an employee right, but also their duty and responsibility. At the time, this latter obligation may not have been as clear as the workforce's ability and permission to make change, but the greater goal certainly stands out in retrospect. In fact, nearly 10-years later, LTG Maples' Crossing Boundaries forum still stands out as an exceptional act of leadership! I can't recall anything like it before or since in any U.S. Government organization during my 26 years as a federal employee. It is particularly stunning that Crossing Boundaries flourished in this military-associated, high op-tempo, chain-of-command organization with a strictly prescribed information flow and aversion to risk-taking. Crossing Boundaries was unique on a number of levels."*
>
> *–Former DIA employee.*

Crossing Boundaries ended roughly three and half years after it began, in October 2009, primarily as a result of a change in agency leadership after LTG Maples retired. There was a shift in agency priorities due to

funding constraints that the incoming director faced, but its value proposition created a meme that would stay in the minds of some—from those employee participants directly involved and from external observers in government and industry who knew about the program—for years to come. After it ended, I came across the work of management consultants Spender and Strong who found examples of how leaders use conversation to engage employees in generating solutions to existing organizational problems, akin in spirit and delivery to Crossing Boundaries.[12] Spender and Strong categorized different ways conversation has been used, the most effective category having the highest impact and inclusivity, was called "innovation communities." Those communities consisted of "…a diverse team of employee leaders, empowered by and in constant communication with senior management, who collaborate on specific issues outside of their normal operational duties to promote cross-organizational model innovation critical to the organization."[13] Crossing Boundaries was such an innovation community.

During its existence, Crossing Boundaries' value to leadership was its venue to directly hear from and interact personally with the workforce, improved communications across the agency's line and staff organizations, engagement of employees in addressing agency common goals and priorities, and a demonstration of DIA's commitment to solutions. Its value to employees was it offered a safe forum to put forth and discuss ideas that were personally relevant to their individual and team performance, provided an opportunity to directly engage with senior leadership, and created individual and team leadership and growth opportunities in pursuing their own solutions for change: these are important ingredients to develop organizational members.[14] These value propositions all involved individuals, whether employee or leader, who had to engage in new ways of organizing in order to communicate with individuals at the intersection of organizational boundaries.

> *"Crossing Boundaries went deeper into the organization than other operational improvement initiatives I have seen. Those tend to only engage with mid-level leadership, or operate as a suggestion box for the Director, or tend to focus on very narrow questions of efficiency. Crossing Boundaries went all-in on trust for the working level of the organization. It said, "We're prepared to trust your judgment, and we'll ask something of you in return." A lot of people in leadership weren't ready for the first part of that sentence, and some of the people who joined were not ready for the second part. Nonetheless, it worked for over three years. Crossing Boundaries showed what is possible when you remove the constraints and offer people the chance to be heard and make their environment work better. That is all they wanted to do: improve the way the agency worked so that they could be more effective in executing the mission. In every other setting I have since Crossing Boundaries, there have been few people as willing to throw open the possibilities as LTG Maples. I admire his readiness to let people decide what mattered to them and give them an opportunity to improve it. The only concept I have seen since that I thought came close is the concept of the "inclusiveworkplace" (one word), which says that people have their own unique contributions to make, and if we let them make those contributions we will free them to apply their talent fully. I agree with that. Crossing Boundaries operated from the same perspective."*
>
> *–Former Crossing Boundaries program member.*

Description. Once a month, employees and managers were invited to attend a meeting, chaired by the agency director, held in a large auditorium. Some initially interpreted this venue as a town hall. Knowledge management consultant Nancy Dixon, coined Crossing Boundaries as just the opposite, as an "un-town hall" because it was nothing like a complaint session typical of a town hall where employees expected leaders to then act upon the complaints.[15] Instead, the agency director sat in front of the auditorium and asked those in attendance for solutions to problems they experienced. Later, we expanded the in-person meeting to include

virtual participation through teleconferencing. The process was again adapted to include online asynchronous participation between scheduled monthly meetings.

The unique part of the engagement process was that employees who brought solutions to the foreground were required to own the solution process, to take an active lead in collaboration, shepherding their solution idea towards acceptance by those identified as responsible for implementation. My role was to help manage and psychologically protect the employee-led shepherding process so that the solution could survive the initial first contact with organizational resistance. Here are three examples of how Crossing Boundaries created valuable changes that might not otherwise have been implemented. The first two are typical examples of how employees viewed their involvement, each showcasing specific problems and solutions that would resonate with any individual employed in the public and private sectors. The third example demonstrates the complexity of intra- and inter-organizational solutions.

"Student loan repayment has been an issue voiced by several employees via the Director's Suggestion Box, the Human Capital Feedback forms, the Council of Employees, and a few other informal venues. Each and every time the issue has been surfaced, I have noted the same answer being repackaged, justified, and sent back to the individual or organization who asked the question. Eyes roll and you can hear the grumbles in the hallways about having to answer the same questions again and again. The answer has always been a definitive "No," without question, without deliberate thought as to why the question was asked, whether it should be rethought about, or how we may be able to leverage such an incentive for recruitment and retention purposes. That both fall directly in line with the director's new strategic plan, goals, and objectives. The answer has been "no"… that is, until the last Crossing Boundaries meeting when the director openly agreed to relook this incentive."

–Anonymous former Crossing Boundaries idea submitter.

"The Agency's Flexiplace program has been outdated and underutilized for years. Each year DIA continuously falls significantly below the required numbers of participating individuals that Congress asks each federal agency to report on an annual basis. Many DIA managers and employees have asked its Office of Human Resources in the past to expand the program to include true telework: the ability to also perform work from alternate secure locations that could accommodate this being done. The benefits of a telework program fall in line with the Workplace Flexibilities Act, presidential memorandums to federal Agencies by both President Bush senior and President Clinton, as well as the fuel consumption reduction request by our current President last year. The answer has always been that there "was not time to expand it." Crossing Boundaries has seen a flurry of ideas surrounding the expansion of the Flexiplace/telecommuting issue. Recently, these ideas gave the Flexiplace Program Manager permission to work on updating and expanding the program. She recently briefed managers on the current program and asked that they identify one representative from each of their directorates to work on a planning committee. She also invited a few Knowledge Lab members and Crossing Boundaries participants who met for the first time last week. This group will be responsible for making recommendations to the program and rewriting the telework/flexiplace instruction…. We hope, with the new ideas and concepts included."

–Anonymous former Crossing Boundaries idea submitter.

"Most ideas targeted change in DIA's support organizations, IT, human resources, training and facilities. It's not clear if the workforce impact was greater there, or if these ideas were perhaps easier to implement. One mission-related idea stands out both for its implementation difficulty, and also for its huge potential payoff to customers and core business line alike. Also striking, were the not only the number of boundaries that had to be crossed to implement it, but also the unmovable nature of these borders. The idea owner was geographically separated (over 700 miles from Washington, DC) from both the coaching staff and "process owners;" the "Owners" resided in another government agency; and the idea's achievement required changes to existing security regulations. Undeterred, the "Idea Submitter" understood that access to the data he needed to do his job—the gist of the solution—would not just greatly improve his and the broader intelligence community analytical judgments, but would have a positive and direct impact on operational and policy customers' decisionmaking. That this DIA employee succeeded remains an amazing feat!"

—Former Crossing Boundaries program member.

Strategy. From the outside looking in, Crossing Boundaries appeared as a change program to fix problems, and because people are naturally resistant to change, some had a negative reaction. However, from the inside, my view, and I believe LTG Maples' view, was that Crossing Boundaries allowed employees to gain individual leadership and organizational developmental skills through the actual experience of and value in collaboration across organizational boundaries. How to balance these conflicting internal and external views was my challenge. My goal was to minimize resistance, because resistance reinforces closed, impermeable boundaries, and to maximize the flourishing of its participants, because development and maturity leads to open, permeable boundaries.[16]

There were four key tools in my strategy toolkit I used to achieve this balance at the intersection of boundaries. First, the status and results were made visible so that everyone in the agency could see that change was possible through their own leadership. In its over three-year life span, employees and managers brought 436 solutions into Crossing Boundaries. Of these, 214 resulted in change, roughly a 50% success rate. At the time, I benchmarked change programs that had the flavor of Crossing Boundaries in the private sector—none existed at the time in the federal government—and found these typically had a five percent adoption rate of solutions.

Second, in Crossing Boundaries there was a dedicated staff to track the progress of the solutions raised. This staff consisted of a combination of industry consultants who were contracted to support me, and government employees who reported to me. The staff was the workhorse of the program. They worked the logistics before, during, and after each monthly meeting. Most importantly, they coached and mentored employees, helped them network throughout the agency, and helped them actively reach out into the organization. They were the eyes and ears of the program.

When an employee presented a solution, that employee was immediately paired with a coach. The coach was responsible for helping the employee acquire and/or develop the skills needed to bring a business case forward to a process owner who would accept/not accept the solution, and, if accepted, that process owner would eventually own and implement the solution. For example, the coaches helped the employee articulate and scope their solution in a way that could be absorbed by others in the wider organization, and was achievable. They also helped the employee come to accept that they would take full ownership of the solution and be responsible for its maturation and presentation. Coaches helped facilitate connections between the employee

with the solution to other resources and individuals within and external to DIA. Finally, coaches helped the employee navigate the inevitable hurdles and/or roadblocks along the way such as taking more time than the employee imagined, operating within time constraints much more compressed than imagined, dealing with initial rejections of the solution, and expanding the employee's social network. Coaches met with each other regularly to discuss and share coaching approaches, those that worked and those that did not. Maintaining high quality coaching was a critical success factor, and one that coaches warmly and excitingly embraced.

> *"In addition to LTG Maples' "permission," employees needed help to work their proposal to fruition. Most "idea owners" had never implemented changes outside small initiatives inside their line organizations. The Crossing Boundaries coaching Staff helped workers articulate their idea, identify organizations and individuals to contact, and package the "solution" for an implementation presentation to organizational business line(s) responsible for its fruition. That these coaches were not embedded in a DIA line organization, but rather attached to the DIA headquarter's command element also was a key factor to success. Organizationally, this limited pressure on the "Idea Owner," especially those working solutions outside their home organization, and also underscored that the desired change had been "blessed" by the agency's Director."*
>
> *−A former DIA employee's view of the coaching function*

Third, flexibility was the key to the strategy. During its lifespan, we had to become more responsive in order to stabilize the program. For example, when we started in May 2006, there were no restrictions about what problems and solutions could be raised during the monthly meetings. This was intentional because we did not want to say "no" to anybody, thinking it would discourage participation in such a radically new adventure. Within a year's time, by February 2007, we realized that about 75% of the solutions centered on workforce or enterprise operation issues. Only 25% of the solutions directly addressed core mission challenges. While this distribution may not seem a concern now, at the time, we felt that improvements to core mission problems seemed a better pursuit. As a result, we pre-selected a topic for each month, one that we thought was more aligned with mission. For example, one monthly topic was "knowing your customer" and another was "removing barriers to collaboration."

Similarly, at the beginning, we experienced a long implementation cycle from idea submission to idea implementation. In September 2007, to overcome this dilemma, we created the Crossing Boundaries Council made up of representatives from the major line organizations who had direct contact with their leadership, who could then promulgate information upward and downward into their organization. This council operated horizontally and vertically, making the status, expected involvement, and progress of solutions more visible and more quickly available throughout the agency. Then, in September 2008, to further steer employees to think about the most difficult and unsolved problems, we solicited the leaders of each line organization to present what they thought were the most worthwhile problems that needed a solution, instead of what the Crossing Boundaries team thought.

Fourth, and perhaps most important, the agency head, LTG Maples, saw Crossing Boundaries as his program, and a way to demonstrate his personal involvement. Any developmental program requires the commitment of a senior sponsor. That sponsor sets and maintains the tone, and sets expectations. LTG Maples gave me guidance to allow the Crossing Boundaries staff broad leverage and to adapt as necessary. For example, during the first year of the program, employees who attended the monthly meeting and/or shared solutions

were sometimes discouraged to do so by their line management, who did not attend. I brought this to the attention of LTG Maples as part of my responsibility to provide psychological protection to employees interested in participating. He then required the heads of each line organization to be present at each monthly meeting.

A more routine example of his involvement was the level of effort he made to keep the meeting alive by linking the solution presented in real time, through direct conversation with the solution submitter. I intentionally use the term "conversation" because it implies an openness to learning from each other, as opposed to other terms that imply arguing for or against a position or agenda.[17] He linked the solution to efforts he knew were underway that could leverage such thinking or guide the solution submitter to parts of the agency that should respond and eventually implement the solution. His style of personal interaction was intended to give employees the permission to take the initiative in turning opportunities into innovation, called a "strategic conversation."[18] Crossing Boundaries was, in effect, a social contract between employees and leadership, one that LTG Maples had to nurture through strategic conversations.

> *"Before Crossing Boundaries, working level employee interaction with the Director of DIA was limited, structured and filtered, consisting mostly of pre-reviewed mission-related briefings or automated suggestion boards. LTG Maples wanted to interact personally and directly with employees in all areas and at all levels of his organization. The Director committed to hosting Crossing Boundaries once each month, and rarely missed a session during its over three-year run. Billed as a forum for positive change, employees were encouraged to suggest ideas to improve mission outcomes, organizational effectiveness, or Agency quality-of-life issues."*
>
> *—Former DIA employee.*

An Introduction to Organizational Boundaries

The focus on boundary intersections results from the recognition that one of the key leadership qualities for today's environment is the ability to collaborate across organizational boundaries in order to build and achieve common goals. This competency requires an understanding of change and developmental processes at the individual, organizational, and cultural levels. In the public sector, especially in federal government, this competency is part of the Senior Executive Service core qualifications, and helps overcome some of the naturally occurring challenges of rigid hierarchy and bureaucracy.[19] In the private sector, one of the most important competencies to excel within a competitive environment includes building effective collaborations across boundaries in order to be innovative.[20] In the non-profit sector, a key competency is the ability to collaborate across boundaries in order to share the burden of operating and administrative costs. Regardless of which sector one works, recognizing, facing, and crossing organizational boundaries are key competencies for change efforts now, and for the foreseeable future.

Managers and executives in the for-profit, non-profit, and public sectors may not engage or may have forgotten what it is like operating at the intersection of boundaries, and may not see the sort of feedback and reasoning necessary to adjust strategy when traversing boundaries. Traveling through boundaries is a fundamentally different experience than managing and working on one side of a boundary or the other. A key requirement for managers involved with development and change efforts, therefore, is the recognition that suc-

cess of such efforts ultimately depends on what happens at the intersection of organizational boundaries. We rarely, if ever, consciously reflect upon the experience of what it is like within the intersection. It may seem like an execution detail not worthy of management attention, but it is precisely because successfully entering and crossing boundaries is a necessity for change efforts. Why? The reason is because achieving change involves the challenges of designing, constructing, and navigating a strategy to carve out a pathway across and through boundaries that may never have existed.

Planning for boundary crossing is akin to reading a map before you hike an unfamiliar trail. You want to become familiar with the territory, as best you can, before you set out. You want some background knowledge. But you know that when you are on the actual trail, the experience will be very different than what you planned and the focus of your attention will then be on adapting to the actual conditions.[21] Identifying the specific competencies at a level of detail sufficient for making these adaptations is exactly what this paper attempts to provide.

Boundary Definition. A boundary is "something that indicates or fixes a limit or extent," as defined by Merriam-Webster, and so, human boundaries are inherently multidimensional and nested since we operate in and about multiple boundaries.[22] A more precise definition says that boundaries are socially constructed conceptual distinctions created intentionally to foster specific patterns of behavior by one set of individuals that are different from other sets of individuals.[23] This inherent facet of boundaries—common in both the generic and the precise definitions—of a distinction that separates can greatly complicate organizational interactions and changes, and, the reason why understanding the competences for navigating boundaries is so important.

Boundaries come in all forms. A boundary can be a physical line or structure that marks the limit of an area, thereby creating a distinction that separates that which is on one side of the boundary from the other. A river is a boundary, but so is a multi-story building, the former typically occurring naturally, the latter constructed typically for humans to populate. More commonly in organizational settings, boundaries are things we create in our mind or someone else's mind that apply to the organization. Some are easier to see such as those that identify a knowledge limit, at the edge of a subject matter or sphere of activity. These kinds of boundaries may have recognizable artifacts associated with members belonging to one side or the other, like organizational names or symbols. Others are harder to see. There are also personal boundaries that limit ways we want other people to behave towards us, and ways we want to behave towards other people. There are social and cultural boundaries related to how we identity ourselves as distinct from the identity of others. Identities can occur simultaneously, highly differentiated, and multilayered.[24] These identities could be shaped by professional affiliation but also ethnicity, religion, gender, history, and so on. How closed or impermeable any of these boundaries are depends on the value individuals, teams, groups, and organizations place on the role they feel boundaries play into satisfying their personal and professional needs.

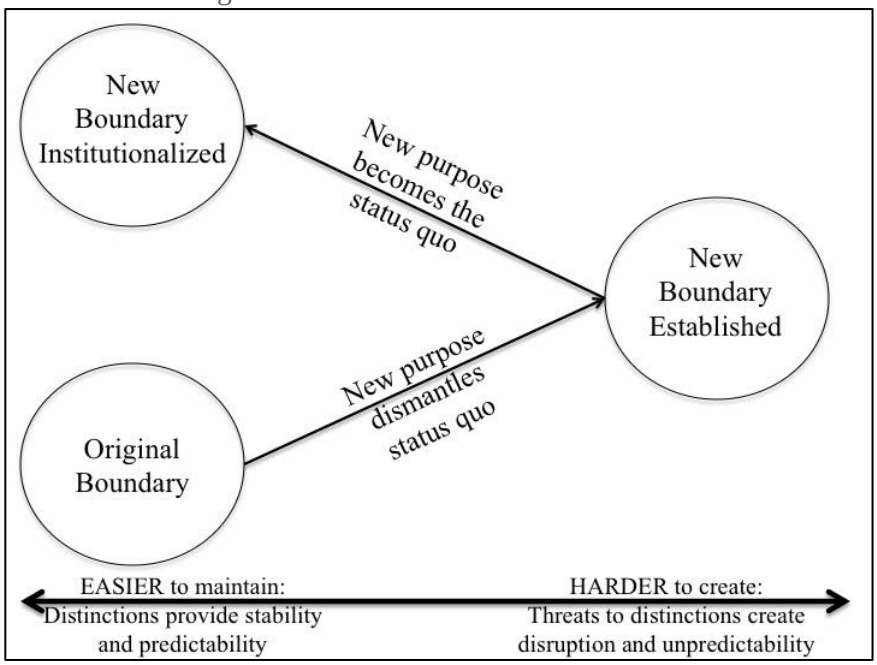
Nature of Boundaries. Organizational boundaries are not mere abstractions. They are substantive and have real effects. Metaphorically, if you imagine a boundary as a physical wall, then to travel through that wall without pathways like doorways or windows would require a very different set of competencies. Without these pathways, moving through a boundary is no ordinary feat but it does not require magic or supernatural powers. Yet, in professional life, we must work with others because the knowledge needed to address complex issues is rarely resident within the minds of employees and managers of one organizational unit. Compounding the chal-

lenges of gathering or generating knowledge from units is the multi-level nesting of organizational identities and boundaries.

Boundary crossing, therefore, requires constant adaptation because what you are really doing is changing and developing multiple elements of the organization in the midst of its status quo. You are changing the distinctions we have come to accept. When change in purpose occurs, amidst this change, differences emerge in what is valued and in decision-making, which creates conflict.[25] Boundary changes, then, are threats to existing distinctions, and create disruption and unpredictability, which make it harder to dismantle them. Consequently, what is often overlooked is that new boundaries eventually become old boundaries after they become institutionalized; this is the recursive—self-repeating—nature of boundaries. Recursive phenomena can be difficult to understand and detect because they are not recognized as part of our everyday experience and lexicon, and therefore hidden, in a sense.[26]

It is easy to overlook this recursive nature, which creates surprise when a new purpose stimulates the creation of a new boundary.[27] The purpose of an existing boundary that created the distinction in the first place in order to separate no longer serves as an advantage for the organization. However, the structural benefit of boundaries—its double-edged value, discussed next—is hard to forget from the collective consciousness of the organization, even after its purpose no longer exits. This recursive nature of boundaries means that boundaries, once established, are hard to dismantle. This dilemma is an example of why boundary crossing is such a critical competency in support of organizational change and development. It also reinforces the need to view change through the long lenses of development and sustainability, rather than a one-time change event. Figure 2 summarizes the recursive nature of boundaries.

Figure 2: Recursive Nature of Boundaries



Source: Adrian Wolfberg

A Double-edged Value. In organizations, the boundaries we create have a double-edged value: positive and negative. On the positive side, creating boundaries potentially allows us to deepen and specialize knowledge and activity.[28] In government and the private sector, boundaries allow us to focus energy on specific functions where such expertise potentially contributes to the overall goal of such organizations. In academia, the establishment of disciplines affords the opportunity to focus research efforts in specialized areas of interest to that discipline. But, the creation of boundaries is a controlling mechanism that management can use to set and monitor the level of resources exerted on functions it deems necessary for success, an especially relevant skill set in a highly competitive or austere environment.[29] This leads to their negative side, control, which requires authority and accountability, a feature of organizational behavior that is not conducive to the agility needed for maintaining open boundaries. Nevertheless, both positive and negative aspects of boundaries are important for different reasons, and they bring to the forefront the reason why knowledge and experience at the intersection of boundaries are so important.

Organizational boundaries have been constructed so that distinctions and limitations occur in both the vertical and horizontal directions of organizational life and communication. The number of levels of hierarchy within an organization also affects control. We have long known that organizations with a large number of levels, say six or seven, are more tightly constrained due to the increased level of effort to maintain and monitor authority and control.[30] Organizations with few levels, perhaps one level or two that might be called a flat organization are not constrained nearly as much in terms of information flow and hindrances to interaction. Managers should be aware that if they are members of organizations more highly constrained, the characteristics of hierarchy are more likely to strengthen boundaries, make them closed or impermeable, and solidify the culture and identities within boundaries. Impermeable boundaries thwart change, developmental and collaboration efforts.

Structural Boundaries. Boundaries can be structural or conceptual and are summarized in Figure 3. There are many structural types of organizational boundaries: vertical, horizontal, external, and geographic, to name a few.[31] The most common type, which I have introduced already, is the vertical boundary, which serves to create distinctions between functional controls from an organizational perspective, and to create distinctions between formal positions of authority from an individual perspective. One consequence of vertical boundaries is the viewpoint one acquires from operating within a specific level of hierarchy. DeWitt Dearborn and Herbert Simon reported what is now known from a very famous study in 1958 of how one's position in the hierarchy affects one's view.[32] They asked executives primarily from line organizations such as sales, production, and accounting, and asked them to assume the view of the chief executive officer of the company. Their perspectives remained limited by the line organization from which they sat; they were unable to assume the more global vantage point of the chief executive officer. We now know this phenomenon from the adage "where you stand depends on where you sit."[33]

Another type of structural boundary is the horizontal. Here, within a line organization, for example, a multitude of subordinate units share a common reporting officer at the top of the hierarchy. Horizontal boundaries do not so much require individuals, groups, and organizations with positional authority over others to maintain control, as is typical with vertical boundaries. Rather, in horizontal boundary contexts, maintenance and development of specialized or unique expertise is more the focus. It is within these horizontal boundaries that specific knowledge is developed, thus creating and using unique language associated with precise meanings.[34] This

uniqueness in language serves to reinforce distinctions that separate from others and is further compounded with the creation and use of unique metaphors to ease or quicken communication between members within a horizontal boundary.[35] The vertical direction is typically consumed by a need for managing control through its generalized policy-related language of what to do while the horizontal direction is fraught with the uniqueness of implementation-related language associated with specific functions of how to do. The combined effect of vertical and horizontal boundaries makes communication through these boundaries a challenge, especially at the intersection of these boundaries where generalization and specialization of language and communication collide.

An external structural boundary separates members within an organization from an entity or entities it reports to, but also from peer and/or competitor organizations, as well as from customers—recognizing that reporting organizations and peers and/or competitors can also be customers. This means that not only are individuals shaped and constrained by the vertical and horizontal boundaries within one's organization but their view of the outside and others' view of them from the outside are shaped by and constrained by those outside of their organization, as well. Hence, the character and context of how individuals and organizations are embedded within their external relationships and context that surround them shapes and constrains their identities, goals, and outcomes.[36] Specific factors that differentially shape organizations and the individuals within them include the degree of common purpose, its view towards the future (short- or long-term), the degree of emotional engagement within the organization (positive or negative), the character of its external outreach, its philosophy and practice of innovation, and the degree to which individuals within organizations can make their own professional decisions.[37]

Lastly, there are geographic structural boundaries that separate individuals and organizations. The extent of separation can be local as in different cities within a state, or different states, and countries. Geographic boundaries can both have an effect on cultures, identities, and ethnicities within a local area or from afar. A classic example of the effect of geographic boundaries is the differences in organizational culture and practices between the innovation hubs in California's Silicon Valley and Boston's Route 128 corridor, shaped by local institutions, culture, industrial structure, and corporate organization.[38] Even though both hubs emerged in a similar post-World War II context focused on similar computer-based technologies, these two regions evolved in a fundamentally different way. Silicon Valley ended up using a network-based approach open to inter-organizational learning, experimentation, entrepreneurship, and agility, yet remained highly competitive with each other. The boundaries between organizations in Silicon Valley are more open. A few large companies, who valued knowledge hiding and loyalty, thus, reinforced stability, dominated Boston's Route 128 corridor, creating more closed boundaries.

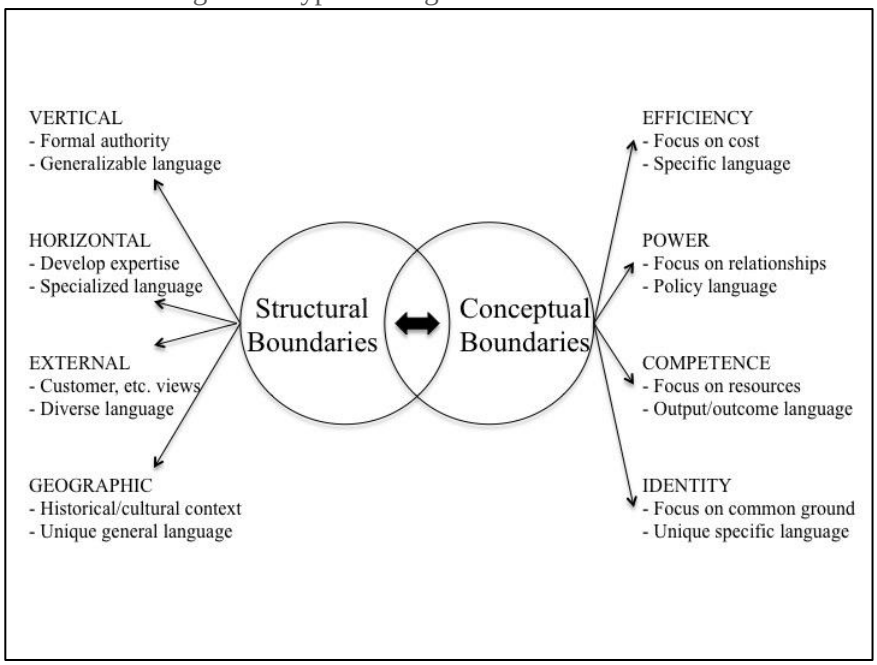
Conceptual Boundaries. Structural types of boundaries are easily recognizable but there are also conceptual types of boundaries that can be embedded and/or intertwined within structural boundaries, which are not so easily recognized. Conceptual boundaries can be created for specific purposes, to name a few, to create or maintain efficiency, power, competence, and identity.[39] Efficiency-based boundaries have their primary objective of cost minimization or cost control, and focus on cost as the currency of exchange. This would mean, for example, that if an individual within a finance function is communicating with someone from research and development, each frames their view of what is important during the communication. The finance person would

exchange information by cost-related knowledge, which may not be the emphasis of the research and development individual, and therefore result in an unproductive conversation and outcome.

Power-based boundaries have their primary objective as identifying the span of control over which an organizational entity has influence over others, and focuses on relationship management as the currency of exchange. Competence-based boundaries have their primary objective as identifying who has the resources needed to complete the mission, and focuses on resources (people, money, and facilities) as the currency of exchange. Identity-based boundaries have their primary objective of establishing and maintaining a common way in which individuals make sense of incoming and workflow information, and focuses on an organizational identity as the currency of exchange. Power-, competence-, and identity-based boundaries have their languages: power is policy language of what to do, competence is output/outcome language, and identity creates a common ground, a unique and specific language reflecting its identity.

The relationship between structural and conceptual boundaries is bi-directional: structural boundaries can serve as the basis for conceptual boundaries to emerge, maintain, and strengthen over time, but it also works the other way, emerging or differential conceptual boundaries can be used as the basis for making changes to the organization using structural boundaries. Managers are encouraged to figure out the evolution of the causal direction as it is important to understanding why elements within an organization behave the way they do. Figure 3 summarizes the types of structural and conceptual boundaries discussed above, and the language associated with each. The types discussed above and shown in Figure 3 are not exhaustive, just representative. Having said that, the reader can appreciate the complexity of operating at the intersection of organizational boundaries.

Figure 3: Types of Organizational Boundaries



Source: Adrian Wolfberg

Design-level Strategy

Crossing through boundaries requires the design of a strategy, which is a different kind of logic than used to support the decision used in organizational functions. A main purpose for existing functions is to make decisions about an organizational goal. These are called decision strategies. On the other hand, the strategies for crossing boundaries have as their immediate purpose the successful communication and exchange between individuals from two or more functions. Decision strategies assume various paths and languages are knowable a priori, and therefore the focus is on the best choice or option; whereas open strategies assume various paths are not knowable a priori and require the imagination of unanticipated paths and languages from which to select a course of action.[40] Managers and boundary crossers need to be competent in constantly being involved with the crafting and recreation of strategy.[41]

Managing Boundary Disruption. The first element of a strategy is the recognition of the iterative nature of boundaries. If boundaries are to become open and journeyed through, instability automatically comes with the decision to cross boundaries. Crossing boundaries has the potential to create disruption and significant change. Organizational behaviorist, Robert E. Quinn, calls this type of change "deep change" because entering boundaries will destabilize the status quo, creating a change process that will demand different ways of reasoning, different patterns of encountering, definitely include taking risks, and having the willingness to relinquish some control.[42]

In Crossing Boundaries, LTG Maples, who came from a large military organization, entered DIA, which is a large government, mostly civilian organization, and very hierarchical, but not so unlike large for-profit corporations. In both military and civilian government organizations, interaction between hierarchical levels typically occurs at contiguous levels. For LTG Maples, as the DIA director, his work- and task-related communication and interaction occurred with his direct reports, and those to whom he reported. In Crossing Boundaries, he broke that constraint by communicating directly with the frontline employee skipping over many echelons. That disruption affected the employee more than him and created uncertainty and ambiguity within many employees, at least in the beginning of the program because in the beginning their new boundary had not yet been formed. Distinctions as they knew them essentially disappeared and the void had not yet been filled.

Personal Involvement. More importantly, organizational development efforts involve leader recognition that such a change will personally affect them as well, as they must be willing to participate in any disruptive experience, putting their skin in the game. I make a key assumption that sustainable change—to the extent it can exist—occurs only if leaders are included in identifying and resolving the challenges during change processes, in addition to the frontline member's similar engagement.[43] This is what LTG Maples did as the voice of Crossing Boundaries. If leaders leave it only to employees and subordinate managers to experience the change, then the leader will have no such experience. As a result, the leader will ignore, distort, or diminish hurdles and resistance from the status quo, which is not the activity or the support needed by those experiencing boundary crossing. Leaders and managers must become fully engaged, get exposed to the risks inherent with instability, and get personally involved with or lead solution strategies.

By using his personal involvement, LTG Maples participated in the forming and stabilization of the new boundaries he created. He made it okay for employees, managers, and eventually executives to participate in the Crossing Boundaries environment. He modeled the behavior for others to see. Without this modeling, new boundaries would have been hard to establish. Managers and leaders have the responsibility to model through themselves new behaviors in development efforts.

"The Director of DIA officiated at the Crossing Boundaries meetings. Employees saw the Director's continued presence as testament to his aspiration to bring about change in the agency. The success of the program was enhanced by the authenticity he exhibited during the meetings. For example, when an employee presented an idea, the Director typically listened closely, played back to the employee the kernel of the issue, and then checked to see if he had understood the idea accurately. All accomplished before offering any comment of his own, which typically acknowledged the importance of the issue that had been raised and as often asked others in the audience to add their thoughts on the topic. Broadening the response to the idea provided additional support and affirmation to the presenter. It also served as a further indication that the Director valued the ideas of employees. There were many features in place, that together, made Crossing Boundaries successful, but from my perspective, the Director's humility, generosity and skillful interaction was a significant element in the success of Crossing Boundaries."

–Nancy M. Dixon, PhD, CEO of CommonKnowledge Associates.

Psychological Safety. Leaders—whether those with informal or formal authority—play a critical role in managing boundaries.[44] Managing boundary crossing entails creating safety for individuals doing the boundary crossing and the ability to feel their effects. Providing psychological safety is a key competency that needs to be in place in order for other individuals to take risks in social situations.[45] In Crossing Boundaries, psychological safety was provided through the personal interventions of three contributors. It was clear that LTG Maples fostered safety during the monthly Crossing Boundaries meetings. He accomplished this through listening to employee solutions and then reframing them in a way that the employee could check that he had understood the solution, and that the employee could hear efforts DIA was currently involved with pursuing that the employee may not be aware. The coaches of Crossing Boundaries provided safety to employees between the monthly meetings by working closely with them to build their confidence in embarking on a journey many had never pursued. Last, I provided safety as Crossing Boundaries manager, keeping an ear to the ground for cases of threats to safety either that were not visible to the DIA director or Crossing Boundaries coaches, or, if they were visible, assisting them in providing such safety to employees.

The importance of providing psychological safety to those involved with change cannot be overstated. Leaders and managers must demonstrate by their actions—not merely their words—that employee risk-taking is supported, that their thoughts and actions are accepted and encouraged. In Crossing Boundaries, the pursuit of an agreed-upon implementable solution required the employee with the original idea to be the change agent. Those who facilitated Crossing Boundaries—the leadership team consisting of the director of DIA, the Crossing Boundaries staff, and me, its program manager—provided as much psychological safety as needed or was possible for them to be that change agent, but in the end, they had to make the contact, develop the connections, have the conversations, and bring as many viewpoints to bear as possible or needed.

"The Director's personal style was a vital component to the forum's success. The Director encouraged often fearful idea owners by listening carefully to each idea, re-stating it in his own words, asking clarifying questions as needed, and thanking the employee. Fully understanding the cultural impact on power and

pride to employees in the idea's core business area, LTG Maples solicited immediate "idea" feedback from these leaders and experts to understand potential legal impediment, or if the issue had been resolved or if a solution was currently in the works. Depending on the answers, the Director then empowered the idea owner to work with others (sometimes named, other times unnamed) across organizational boundaries to bring their idea to fruition."

—Former DIA Crossing Boundaries coach.

Multiple Perspectives. Managing boundary crossing requires more from leaders than providing psychological safety. Boundary crossing also needs employees and managers—those making the journey from one side of a boundary to another—to have the ability to see both sides of the boundary. Employees and managers obviously see the problem from where they sit, and their solution reflects such a vantage point, but knowing how others think on the other side of their boundary is important. Again, the adage, where you stand depends on where you sit, applies. It is important because reaching a consensus on a solution that draws on the participation of a number of organizational entities requires a common understanding. In Crossing Boundaries, its staff provided this service; helping the employee or manager with the solution shift from a position they thought was the only possible one to a solution in which many faces of the problem space could and should contribute. The Crossing Boundaries staff accomplished this perspective-broadening maneuver by helping the employee or manager extend their professional network.

Leaders and senior managers have the vantage point of seeing across boundaries. They should not take for granted their opportunity to see different perspectives. Others have more limited opportunities because in the day-to-day workplace, policy and decision alignments are biased towards the perspectives of one side of a boundary over another. Leaders and managers must help those subordinate to them to understand the perspectives of others and their reasons why. Such an understanding may not come risk-free but it is essential for those without authority to navigate successfully amidst the uncertainty and ambiguity of development and change efforts.

Motivation. Paying attention to motivating employees and managers to work hard involves not only a reason for crossing a boundary but also the activities, narrative, and interpersonal engagement necessary to sustain that motivation. Getting into the thick of a boundary issue is hard, unpredictable, and risky, so there needs to be a good and believable reason for doing so. Managers must take ownership of the role that motivation plays in supporting boundary crossing efforts. Organizations have used various methods to promote motivation in the workplace. These include, but are not limited to, improving appraisal systems, pay-for-performance systems, participatory decision-making, leadership engagement, workplace improvement, quality of life improvements, improving techniques for developing trust and resolving conflict, and improving the organizational culture.[46] Some of these are relatively easy to employ but typically fail to motivate such as improvements in appraisal systems while others are clearly hard to employ but when successful do motivate such as improving the organizational culture. Motivation is probably one of the most difficult management responsibilities to achieve. When considering motivation during development and change efforts, however, managers must carefully assess which methods and through whose involvement they can achieve meaningful results.

In Crossing Boundaries, the motivation was twofold: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsically, employees had the opportunity to take on a leadership role by solving their own problems. Extrinsically, employees had the opportunity of being heard by senior leadership. The sustainment of this dual-sided motivation was the continued

face-to-face presence, interaction, and dialogue between employees and the director of DIA, especially important during the early days of the program. When the motivation value came into question, as mentioned earlier, some managers who felt threatened by potential changes and perceived disruptions dissuaded their employees from participating in Crossing Boundaries. The subsequent actions taken by the DIA director to require managers to be part of Crossing Boundaries reintroduced any motivation support that was lost.

The Street-level Strategy: Where the Action Is

Using another metaphor, let's say on your hike, the trail unexpectedly comes to an end, and you have to cross a river to continue. It is pretty obvious that you have detected a distinction that separates; an obstruction prevents you from moving forward at the moment. The next step is to figure out the river's character. Is it shallow? Is it fast-moving? Is it narrow? These are the questions you need to know before entering the river. Then, one could use a raft if the water was deep but not too fast-moving. If deep and fast-moving, one could construct a bridge. One could swim across it if the currents were too strong or walk across it if shallow. When faced with difficult boundaries to cross, this becomes a problem, and when faced with a problem, one needs a strategy. A strategy in which cross-organizational boundary crossing is involved means that complexity is an inherently constraining factor and must be considered by managers and frontline members alike. Such a strategy typically has four components: detecting a boundary, defining the character of the boundary, selection and use of the appropriate boundary mechanisms, and the establishment of infrastructure for the newly created boundaries.[47]

Detecting a Boundary. Recognizing when you come across an impermeable boundary is the first task in navigating it. We have known for a long time that what and how an individual reacts to information or behavior from individuals or policies—on the other side of one's boundary—is a function of their ability to selectively pay attention.[48] We pay attention to the goals around us and those are nested within multiple levels: our personal goals, the goals of our immediate supervisor, and cascading upward through the overall goals of the organization writ large. We also know that amidst the degree of selective attention paid to these goals, there are things that further distract us and narrow the degree of selective attention we possess: the degree we are overloaded by information within our own unit's function and the degree of ambiguity in the information and context in which we work.[49] It should not come to anyone's surprise then that when someone external to an organizational unit—having their own boundary-sharing and selective attention behaviors—enters into a communicative relationship with someone inside the unit, potential resistance will occur. Experiencing resistance—which could present itself in various forms from pleasant pacification to intentional distortion to outward confrontation—then becomes a hallmark indicator that a boundary has been approached or about to be breached.

Resistance is a behavior that the organizational literature typically says occurs during strategic change efforts.[50] But in the context of navigating organizational boundaries, the concept of resistance is not only strategic, rather it is quite the opposite, it is very tactical in the everyday sense of carrying out one's work. It is in the realm of person-to-person relationships and their purposes that resistance will emerge. One's purpose is, as are all purposes, framed by a human-created boundary. When you sense resistance in this context, your first reaction may be to go on the defensive and interpret the resistance as a negative behavior, perhaps even one you feel is personally targeted at you. Such a reaction will reinforce boundaries in place, however. What you want

to do, instead, is step back and recognize that resistance is an indicator that a boundary needs to be navigated, and that the task at hand is not to reinforce your boundary, but, rather, to start thinking about how to navigate the boundary. Resistance is a blessing in disguise for the detection of boundaries, and is an indicator that strategy is necessary.

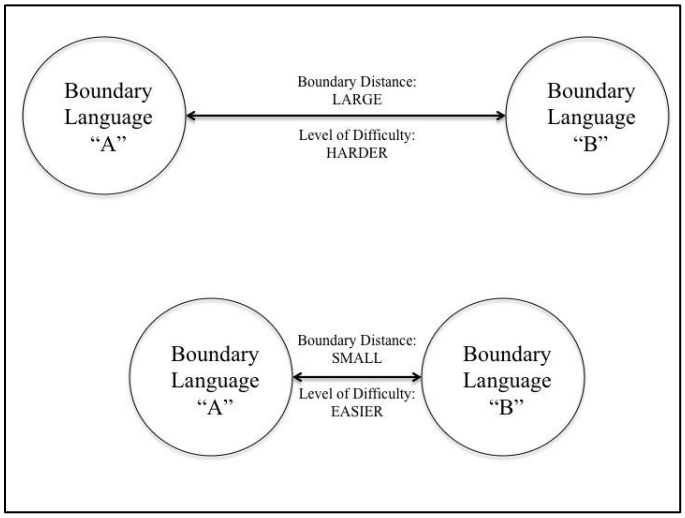
For example, during the early part of Crossing Boundaries when some managers felt the idea of Crossing Boundaries breached into their boundary, they expressed their resistance to those subordinate to them. Fortunately, some of these subordinates came to my attention with news of the resistance, which led me to inform LTG Maples. As discussed above, what LTG Maples then did was bring the overall leadership into the Crossing Boundaries environment so they could see for themselves its purpose. This action served to bring down the wall between the divergent purposes, those of Crossing Boundaries to change, and that of line manager's status quo to not change.

Identifying the Boundary Character. The ease of entering a boundary varies according to the character of a boundary, which is why it is incredibly important for managers and key individuals to accurately evaluate it. Thinking it is easy when it actually is difficult is a recipe for disaster for individuals and the organization because you have not prepared people in your care. Thinking it is difficult when it is actually easy is not only a waste of precious human resources and social capital because of the preparation and implementation strategy employed, but it is also an indication that you do not understand the nature of boundaries and/or your organizational context. Either error in judgment—thinking it is easy when it is not, or thinking it is difficult when it is not—is an imperative for accurately assessing the character of a boundary.

The character of an organizational boundary is detectable and interpretable in the language we use to communicate, as shown in Figure 3. Detecting the existence of and recognizing the character of a boundary is therefore a key communication competency for individuals entering boundaries. The character of a boundary consists of three nested levels of communication: most elemental, the structure of sentences and paragraphs (i.e., the syntax); next, the meaning of these elements (i.e., its semantics, or how words are used to mean certain things); and the knowledge of how these meanings can be applied to understand each person's worldview (i.e., the pragmatic impact of their meaning in a person's context, how we say things, the body language associated with language, etc.).[51]

In any organization, there is usually sufficient commonality with understanding the syntax of language that differences are insignificant. The boundary challenges within an organization become most acute at the semantic and pragmatic levels. When there is a large difference within or between either or both levels, there will be great difficulty in communicating across boundaries, because each person on one side of a boundary has difficulty understanding the person on the other side of a boundary. The reason for the difficulty is that individuals who work inside a boundary space have common assumptions, participate in the same work-related routines, and interpret thought and actions in much the same way.[52] These commonalities do not usually exist across boundaries. Figure 4 summarizes the differences in difficulty crossing boundaries when the boundary language distances are large and small, respectively.

Figure 4: Assessing the Level of Difficulty



Source: Adrian Wolfberg

In Crossing Boundaries, for example, the boundary spaces with the greatest ease of entering were those problems that were common to the workforce. Such problems included, for example, technology-related issues associated with desktop computers and its software, human resources policies, and facilities-related concerns. These were issues expressed by a common language that pretty well everyone could understand regardless of the function they served because they affected everyone. As a result, employees had a common understanding of the meaning of the language to describe the symptoms and solutions to these problems. For the most part, there was also a common understanding of the impact of these problems regardless of function. These common problems facilitated the development of diverse networks across many boundaries to assist in creating cross-boundary solutions, and their implementation.

However, there were other very different kinds of Crossing Boundaries problems that were unique to one function, typically specialized functions associated with the core mission. Such specialized problems, though, had great difficulty generating sufficient interest largely because people outside of the specialized function did not have an understanding of the pragmatic importance of the problem. Developing diverse networks that were needed to generate creative solutions was very difficult under these circumstances. Common problems made it easier to enter and cross boundaries while unique or specialized problems made it more difficult.

Boundary Mechanisms. The mechanisms for crossing into and communicating through boundaries vary according to the need assessed, and are usually used in combination with each other. Four common communication mechanisms are: boundary spanner, boundary architect, boundary object, and boundary practice.[53] At the end of this section, Figure 5 summarizes the selection criteria of these four mechanisms based on the boundary crossing level of difficulty and methods.

First, a boundary spanner is a person who can operate within a boundary that separates two or more organizational entities, can navigate the boundaries, and can negotiate the meaning and usefulness of external information to those within the boundary, and/or vice versa.[54] The kinds of general competencies commonly found in boundary spanners include the ability to build sustainable relationships, manage power and authority differences through influence and negotiations, manage complexity and interdependencies, and manage divergent

roles, different measures of accountabilities, and conflicting motivations.[55] A boundary spanner may not have to occupy much time during any one episodic contact in the middle of a boundary since their role is more of a hand-off between people on each side of a boundary. Boundary spanners transfer knowledge; they translate information between different interpretation systems.

In Crossing Boundaries, the director of DIA often served the role of a boundary spanner. This occurred when an employee raised a solution to a problem. The director would recast the problem and/or the solution in real time back to the employee but providing additional context about where else in the organization, the problem existed or the solution was either in progress or a related solution was under consideration. The director knew about these external activities, which were beyond the awareness of the employee, who from their unique situation, were only able to understand their own context. The director did not change the problem and/or solution, rather, by transferring knowledge of what one part of the organization knew, he increased the awareness of aspects of the problem and/or solution previously unknown to the employee. Other people also served as boundary spanners: the Crossing Boundaries coaches, other idea submitters, and, myself as its program manager.

Managers must realize that development and change are a "contact sport" with all involved; therefore, the identification of a boundary spanner should be carefully considered and selected. I say it is a contact sport because entering and making new boundaries involves communication by creating new person-to-person connections; these connections temporarily suspend existing boundaries, which creates disruptions, and are used to establish and maintain new boundaries.[56] The goal is to maintain enough stability by keeping existing boundaries intact to reinforce existing identities and purposes, while at the same time creating a new collective identity and its associated new boundary.[57] Boundary spanners should have a high level of emotional maturity because of two factors: they must be able to comfortably interact with individuals outside of their domain so that they are seen as "one of us," while at the same time, not offend or alienate those within their domain who naturally see them also as "one of us." Authentically dealing with this paradox of being "one of us" simultaneously to multiple groups of individuals takes emotional maturity and cognitive finesse.

Second, in order to sustain the connection of two sides of a boundary, a new boundary has to be organically grown. The individuals who forge this new boundary and informal organization are the "boundary architects."[58] Boundary architects grow the connections between organizations; in the wall metaphor used in the beginning of this paper, if an organizational boundary is thought of a wall without doors or windows, it is the boundary architect who does the construction—the humble, heavy lifting—of new pathways. Development and change efforts benefit when individuals, who are boundary architects, are involved because they can forge a common ground with others, which requires communication skills and the development of a shared identity.[59] Boundary architects transform the boundary landscape whereas boundary spanners translate knowledge across existing boundaries. If the wall has existing doors and windows, then pathways already exist and a boundary spanner may be sufficient to communicate. Essentially, for the boundary architect, what this means is that a new boundary gets created around the emergence of a new purpose and identity; this idea is a critical component of operating at the intersection of boundaries.

In Crossing Boundaries, this is exactly what happened. It first began with the employee working with the Crossing Boundary staff, feeling part of a new identity that they could make change happen. As more employ-

ees got involved, there emerged a new group identity of being part of Crossing Boundaries. A new community was formed, one with purpose and one that produced results. In Crossing Boundaries, I could see that LTG Maples recognized the emergence of a new shared identity between employees who attended the monthly meetings, separate from those not attending. But what he did next raised the consciousness of this new identity to a wider DIA audience.

I began to hear stories from employees about discussions LTG Maples had with them outside of Crossing Boundaries, during his walk-arounds or scheduled meetings. These other encounters had nothing to do with the Crossing Boundaries program but apparently, during these encounters, employees raised problems to the director, which is typically the case when a leader asks, what can I do to help? Quite often, his response to these employees was to ask for them to identify solutions and bring them into Crossing Boundaries in order to leverage the knowledge marketplace. To me, what LTG Maples had done was become the voice of Crossing Boundaries within the wider employee population, not just within its structured monthly meetings. He was implicitly telling employees to become a boundary architect. Leaders and managers must reinforce and strengthen employee's new identities and their new boundaries as they develop for shared problem-solving, organizing, and leading change.

Third, unlike boundary spanners and architects, boundary objects are not people. Boundary objects are stable enough such that they allow people with different views to maintain their existing identity and view of the world, yet are flexible enough to create a shared space for new meaning.[60] They are concrete or abstract communication-related objects for which people with different perspectives, reflecting different boundaries, can develop a shared and new meaning. Examples of concrete boundary objects are planning and project task charts, figures embedded in papers, an architects' design drawings, information on white boards, technology, and human and animal artifacts like bones, skeletons, and fossils. Examples of abstract boundary objects are the words we use to talk, the metaphors used to make connections between two disparate concepts, and the stories we tell. Boundary objects are used when the difficulty factor of the boundary is more complex than what a boundary spanner can handle. A boundary object is managed by a person and involves the transformation of viewpoints, typically by a boundary architect.

In Crossing Boundaries, we used many boundary objects. For example, each solution required the development of a business plan. Business plans were written documents created by the idea generator in consultation with the network of individuals who were willing to participate in the maturation of the solution, in other words, to transform it from a single point of view to an agreed-upon consensus view. The business plan was a collaborative effort between the employee with the original solution, the Crossing Boundaries coach, the individuals within the network, and the individuals responsible for implementation of the solution, should the solution be accepted for implementation. The business plan was the result of a combination of informal dialogue and written documentation while the idea generator was the boundary architect.

Another example of a boundary object was my presentation of the monthly Power Point slides of the status of Crossing Boundaries solutions. These slides showed statistical data as well as narrative. The slides were displayed and discussed at the beginning of each Crossing Boundaries session to share knowledge about activities in progress. The slides were subsequently posted online for further access. The purpose of the slides was to remind and provide knowledge that the program and the individual idea submitters were making progress. Dur-

ing each slide presentation, one or two examples of success stories were presented. The slides and stories were instrumental in taking an individual participant in Crossing Boundaries with his or her unique content into a broader collective belonging to a process of organizational development and change.

The value of boundary objects to managers is very important. Certainly, we all have experiences with using white boards and paying attention to the written or spoken word, for example, to explain something. But, the bigger idea that managers and others should take away from boundary objects is that concrete or abstract things can be created as part of a strategy to negotiate a boundary crossing because these objects are selected to both recognize where one stands while at the same to imagine where one could shift their stance. If one boundary object does not work, use another. Keep experimenting until one or more works. Look for examples used elsewhere but in similar contexts.

Fourth, boundary practices are routine activities, procedures, or processes that are used bring people together but without the need for having common ground and a shared identity in place. Such practices facilitate the creation of a new boundary space showing that legitimacy and integrity can exist between disparate identities. The best way to describe what a boundary practice is, and its importance, is to provide an example. Crossing Boundaries had many types of boundary practices. One example is the role of coaches and their interaction with idea submitters. As soon as an employee raised a solution to the director of DIA, what next took place was a process of engagement between the employee and the Crossing Boundary coach. That process was the boundary practice and set the stage for the specific expectation to complete a business plan.

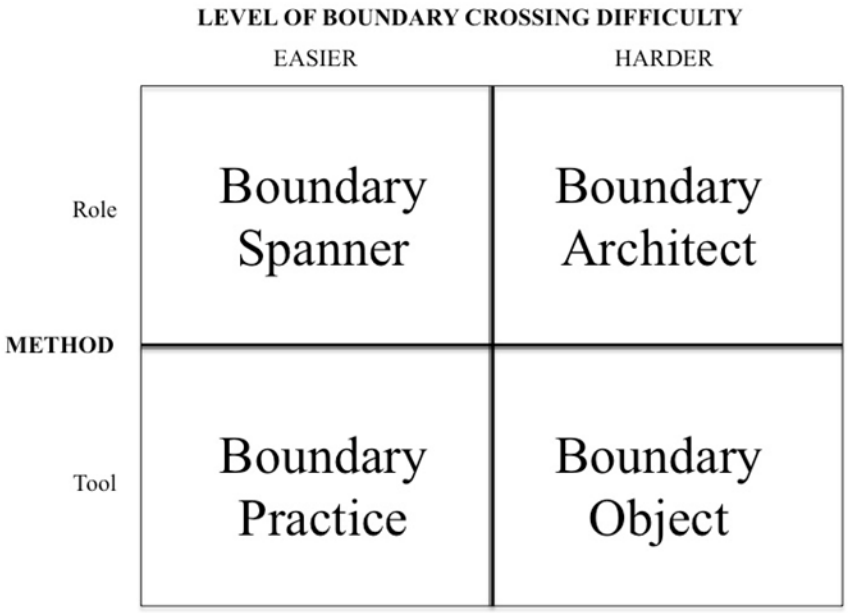
This boundary practice consisted of many components: initial meeting between the coach and the idea submitter; the coach shares sample business cases with the idea submitter and guides them in their own development; the collaboration with the Crossing Boundaries Council (discussed earlier) to accelerate the networking of ideas across the broader organization; connect the idea submitter to other idea submitters to further network and share lessons learned; help identify process owners who would eventually become the implementers of the solution; help the idea submitter understand how other agencies in the government and the private sector addressed the same or related issue; help the idea submitter incorporate feedback from the Crossing Boundaries Council, process owners, other idea submitters, and other external organizations to build a robust business case; help the idea submitter rehearse a presentation of the business case to a decision maker; attend decision meetings, take notes during decision meetings, keep track of action items, and negotiate a decision when it was not clear at the decision meeting; and notify the idea submitter when the solution was considered “closed” from a Crossing Boundaries perspective.

Boundary practices have to be integrated into change and collaboration plans. They have to make sense and be meaningful to the organizational members involved. This is usually the dilemma for the manager: aligning a top-down organizational goal with the use of a boundary practice that makes sense and is meaningful to the frontline employee. What appears so obvious to the manager may not be interpreted the same by the employee. In the Crossing Boundaries example above, the practice of interacting with the coaches made sense and was very meaningful because it helped idea submitters achieve their goals. It also helped with the management of Crossing Boundaries achieving its goals. When boundary practices fail to be recognized as sensible and meaningful by all involved, the change effort will likely fail or significantly falter. Boundary practices serve as

translation mechanisms, so in a sense, they are like boundary spanners. Both are helpful when the level of difficulty of crossing boundaries is easier to manage.

In summary, these four mechanisms are selected individually or collectively—at any given time within the intersection of boundaries—based on the level of difficulty at the intersection of boundaries, and on the method available. Previously, Figure 4 provided insight into how the level of difficulty can be assessed. The level of difficulty is easier when trying to connect people with different identities across existing boundaries, and harder when it becomes necessary to create new identities with new boundaries. The former often occurs at the beginning of a change process and the latter after the beginning, but since the elements of change are not linear, both levels usually exist simultaneously. The dominant methods are through roles that people play, and through the inanimate tools used in these roles. Roles are either to connect disparate group boundaries or create a new group and boundary. Inanimate tools—boundary practices and boundary objects—are used to facilitate the delivery of these roles. Figure 5 summarizes the mechanisms and when they should be used.

Figure 5: Boundary Mechanisms: When and What to Use



Source: Adrian Wolfberg

Boundary Infrastructure. Boundary infrastructures help institutionalize the changes made through boundary crossing efforts. These emerge and develop over time. What is important for managers is to be keenly aware of their importance as the change evolves. The need for them is often overlooked until the change effort has finished, and therefore not considered necessary during the change. They are, however, the sustainment vehicles to maintain the change momentum until those in positions of authority make formalized organizational modifications sustaining the new boundary. A cautionary note to managers: balance the creation and use of infrastructure with boundary practices. In other words, do not try to formalize a change before the change matures or else the change will not be sensible or meaningful to those who are affected by the change effort. Simi-

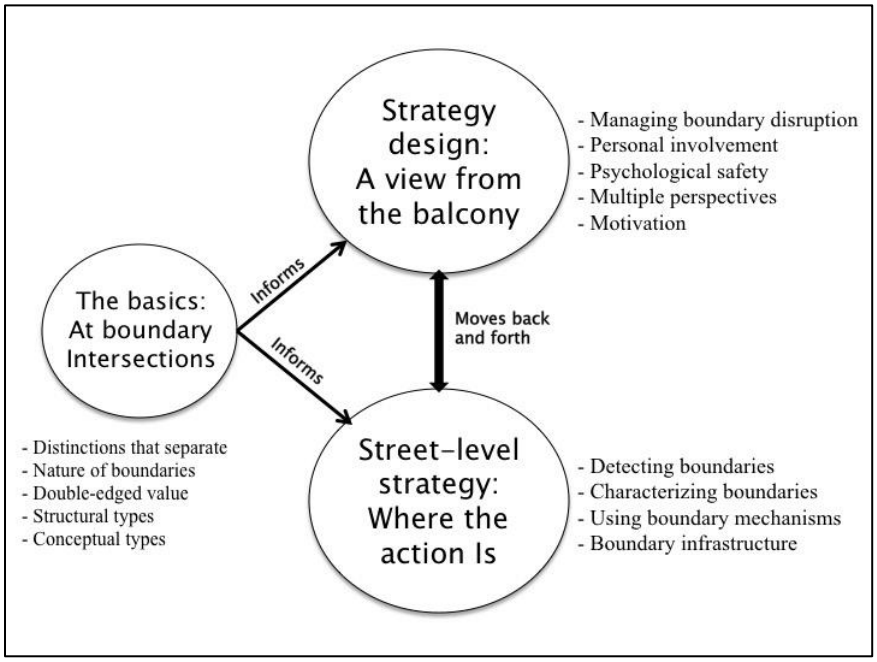
larly, do not wait too long after the need for stabilization is apparent even if the formal programmatics of the change effort have not ended.

To keep Crossing Boundaries alive in the hearts and minds of potential and actual idea submitters, we found programmatic sustainment activities that helped employees see the value in their ideas and that their actions had an impact. One example was the use of a strategic communication protocol to keep employees, managers, and leaders informed. By informing employees of the impacts of their peers, this created the confidence in others that the program was real and eventually accepted, a now-routine activity. Similarly, by informing managers and leaders of the impacts of Crossing Boundaries, we hoped this would motivate them to encourage employees to participate. The communication consisted of tailored and mass communication protocols, which by themselves are examples of boundary objects. The tailored communication included personal discussions, presentations to interested groups, emails from the Crossing Boundaries team, emails from the Crossing Boundaries Council, emails from the Director of DIA, and emails from the lead executives from the various line organizations. The mass communications included all-hands emails, articles in the agency weekly newsletter and monthly magazine, posters displayed in the various facilities, tent cards in the cafeteria, and an online discussion board.

Conclusion: Strategy for Sustainable Change

The interplay between the design-level strategy and street-level strategy creates an "entrance ramp" to get from the present to the future, a pathway to develop individuals and the organization. The entrance ramp means having a way to organize, to be involved with the process of organizing and communicating rather than just being statically in the organization. This vantage point of the entrance ramp provides a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of boundary crossing, and how it creates new identities, boundaries, and informal organizations. This is the benefit of operating at the intersection of organizational boundaries, the start of the process of organizing.[61] In terms of strategy around organizing for change, the design elements of strategy and the action elements of strategy are neither static nor sequential. Rather, there is the constant and adaptable interaction between strategy implementation and design, what leadership expert Ronald Heifetz calls the "back and forth between the action and the balcony."[62] By "balcony," Heifetz means the vantage point whereby one sees the productive and unproductive organizational patterns, the reasons for change, and the history and current context that will affect change efforts. The balcony is where design-level strategy is normally constructed. This interaction between the two levels of strategy is especially complex because of differences in purposes, identities, boundaries, language, interpretation, meaning, and communication.

Figure 6: Strategy Model for Sustainable Change



Source: Adrian Wolfberg

Figure 6 summarizes the key elements from this paper as a model for sustainable organizational development: the basics of boundaries; how strategy design to cross boundaries looks from a view from the balcony; and what implementing strategy at the street-level intersection entails, which is where the action is. The basic knowledge of boundaries informs both the leadership view—from the balcony—and the street-level strategy. The basics includes understanding that boundaries are meant to create separations for legitimate reasons—the double-edged reasons to build expertise and to control—which present a built-in imperative why successfully navigating boundaries is so important for development and change efforts. Two broad categories of boundaries exist: structural boundaries that are well-defined, intentional, quite visible, and recognizable, and conceptual boundaries which are abstract and subject to variations in interpretation, and as a result, not so obvious or understandable, yet as impermeable or more so than structural boundaries.

The basics of boundaries inform two interacting components: high-level design from the balcony and ground-level execution in the street. From the design-level view, framers of a strategy should understand the recursive nature of boundaries: the stabilizing nature of boundaries while at the same time employing a strategy to break through and disrupt boundaries creating new boundaries, which then become old boundaries. The cycle persists. Change triggers change.[63] Sustainable change is fleeting in a relative sense, sufficient to maintain stability yet provides the engine for future change. This recursive nature is the primary reason that sustainable change requires a competency in understanding what happens at the intersection of organizational boundaries—at the micro-level of change.

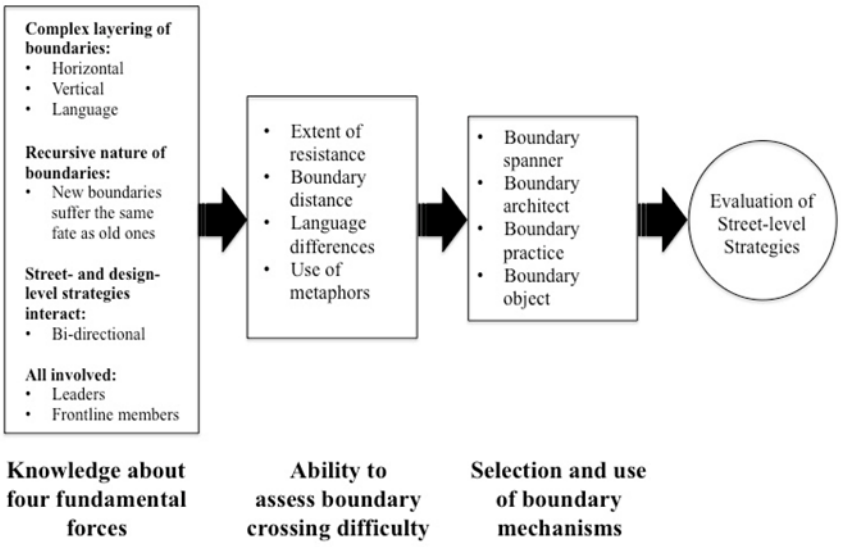
Leadership involvement requires personal commitment to model behavior in the midst of disruptions. As a corollary, leaders must provide psychological safety so that organizational members take the risks to make changes as part of a developmental process. Because crossing boundaries can be disruptive, having a broad perspective on situations is important for everyone's development; this mean helping members by providing

them with different perspectives on how other members interpret situations. This helps with developmental processes. Lastly, in the midst of such change and disruptions, having a motivated workforce is key to reaching sustainable outcomes. It is incumbent on leaders and others to authentically provide the motivation needed for members to fully engage.

Where the action is, at the street-level intersection of organizational boundaries, is where the hard work and diverse communication systems take place. Those on the street have to be able to detect the existence of a boundary in order to know what to do next. They have to make sure the boundary or boundaries are accurately described and understood so that the mechanisms they use upon entering boundaries are the right ones for creating new boundaries. These boundary mechanisms are selected based on level of difficulty and method available. Boundary spanners and boundary architects are people who translate and transform knowledge between boundaries, respectively. Boundary practices and objects are processes that also translate and transform knowledge, respectively. Boundary infrastructure is the last part of a strategy; it is the shoring up of people and processes to institutionalize new boundaries.

This strategy model for sustainable change makes visible four fundamental forces that converge on the frontline organizational member at the street-level intersection of organizational boundaries. First, the simultaneous layering of multiple types of boundaries—structural ones are easier to recognize, while conceptual ones are much harder—along with characteristic languages for each type, occur in every context. Second, the recursive—self-repeating—nature of boundaries means a long-term view of change is needed since what is new becomes old, potentially defeating the new purpose for new boundaries. Third, the street-level and design strategies are in constant action and reaction to each other generating sources of feedback to each other, which has a bi-directional quality: policy (i.e., design-level strategy) stimulates implementation (i.e., street-level strategy), and implementation stimulates policy. Fourth, leaders and frontline organizational members are both involved as participants in change processes, which means their combined and interacting experiences, knowledge, responsibilities, and communication mechanisms must be a focus of attention.

Figure 7: Three Competencies for Sustainable



Source: Adrian Wolfberg

As a result, a focus on the development of individual and organizational competencies is recommended through the understanding of boundary crossing-specific processes—discussed in this paper—that operate in highly complex and potentially ambiguous situations.[64] Figure 7 shows the three important competencies of leaders and frontline members: having an understanding of and a disposition towards accepting the strategy model's four fundamental forces and how they are combined in context; an accurate assessment of the difficulty in navigating boundaries within a context; and the appropriate selection and use of boundary mechanisms based on these contextual assessments. These should be mastered in sequence: first, the knowledge of the four forces; second, the assessment of boundary crossing difficulty; and third, the selection of appropriate mechanisms. These competencies will help organizations evaluate the effectiveness of their development and change strategies.

Notes

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About the Author

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CHAPTER 3

Reaching Across the HQ/Regional Office Divide

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Diane Blumenthal

Employee Engagement Committees became very popular in Executive Branch agencies in the second term of the Obama Administration. Our Assistant Secretary decided to establish an Employee Engagement Advisory Committee and I worked to stand it up with one of our political Deputy Assistant Secretaries. That Deputy became our champion and helped develop a committee charter and an application process. While there was an application process, the Deputy decided from the beginning that anyone who completed an application would be accepted. So, the committee got off to a good start with no hurt feelings among staff. It consisted of representatives from each of our 12 regional offices and 3 headquarters components. While membership fluctuated, it was typically 25+ members. Most participants were line staff, but there were also a few managers. No political appointees were members of the committee; all participants were career civil servants.

The purpose of the committee was to give the Assistant Secretary direct access to staff and vice versa, as she wanted recommendations from staff on how to make the agency a better place to work. The committee met once a month using videoconferencing technology, although some people who were working from home or onsite phoned in to the conversation when they had no access to the technology. Unless we requested assistance, no senior manager was at the meeting. Each committee member worked with their own regional office or headquarters component to develop recommendations on how to make our agency a better place to work. Over time, committee members got to know each other pretty well, particularly those of us on the executive committee who planned the meetings and agendas and strategized with each other on how to best approach the Assistant Secretary on sensitive issues. The executive committee was responsible for combining the many, varied staff recommendations into a report that was issued to all employees and for the Assistant Secretary's consideration.

At the heart of the report was staff dissatisfaction at having been excluded from meaningful participation in decisions that directly affected their work life. They felt that they were held accountable for meeting unrealistic timeframes on complex work for which they had inadequate training. Also, they had no input into developing standards for their performance agreements. At other points in time, having some say in their work and performance agreements would have been a realistic expectation for employees. However, a highly placed member of the Senior Executive Service and the executive managers who worked for that person had become responsible for the work of over 300 people in 12 regional offices. They were bullies who valued control over collegial-

ity and they reported directly to the Assistant Secretary. Without saying so overtly, staff wanted her to exert influence over the senior executive and mitigate the senior executive's dictatorial leadership style.

Not only were a majority of regional office staff angry with the top career executives who were their managers, they were angry with the Assistant Secretary who they felt colluded with the senior executive to prematurely force the retirement of a much respected director in one of the regional offices. That director's retirement caused a cascade of resignations from long-time senior managers in the office. It also created much confusion and resentment among office staff left without strong leadership.

Many recommendations in the report would have required the Assistant Secretary to override the senior executive and/or reverse her previous decisions. For example, staff wanted to have input into the Assistant Secretary's future decisions regarding senior leadership positions in the agency. Of course, it would have violated all sorts of statutes and regulations for staff to have input into the Assistant Secretary's hiring/firing decisions. Nonetheless, the executive committee included that recommendation in the final report. While it may have shown some naiveté and lack of human resources knowledge on the part of non-managerial staff who made up the majority of the agency, it also expressed their deep concern about the Assistant Secretary's thoughtless solution to a management problem that traumatized an entire regional office, rendering it all but ineffective.

I can't say that we got tremendous results from our report to the Assistant Secretary. She read and thanked us for our report, knowledgeably discussed our recommendations during several long video conferences, and did take action to implement some of them. But, it was clear that she had a personal leadership style and political agenda that made many of our core concerns impossible to resolve. A few of the committee members were angry from the start and had predicted from the committee's inception that the Assistant Secretary would do nothing to address employee concerns, They were even angrier when they felt their prediction had come true. By and large, they were the members who had done little to no work on the committee, and so had no ownership of the committee's results.

While it was difficult to discern because we felt under siege due to poor leadership and the constant pressure of our work, some of us gradually realized that being active on the committee and working to change the status quo was empowering. Cross-office meetings had previously been restricted to upper level management who met regularly face-to-face at a central location to share information and discuss common concerns. The videoconferencing technology we used helped create a feeling of community and encouraged trust among committee members. Slowly, some staff began to realize that the committee was not just an avenue to air concerns with the Assistant Secretary; it was a non-hierarchical structure crossing the entire agency that gave them unrestricted access to each other. Some of the younger committee members who worked in regional offices were excited by the opportunity to gain knowledge of the inner workings of headquarters afforded them during videoconference discussions. One of them was promoted to first-line management while on the committee.

One midcareer attorney who had felt beaten down in her regional office excelled on the executive committee. After making several well-received teleconference presentations to the Assistant Secretary, she gained confidence, applied and was selected for a higher level position outside of our agency. Other committee members began to actively support colleagues in different field offices, helping compensate for lack of training by shar-

ing expertise. Still others like me, who had senior positions in headquarters, were able to informally mentor younger staff and pass along historical knowledge to a new group of leaders.

It's unclear how the Assistant Secretary viewed the committee's utility or results. With distance, it seems pretty amazing that she enabled staff to issue a report critical of the way she and the career executives were managing the agency. While she did not implement some of the most desired recommendations, forming the committee clearly encouraged unrestricted lateral information sharing. It did nothing for the angry staff who experienced no benefit from the committee and are still trying to engage the Assistant Secretary to solve their specific issues. But, it was successful for the people who leveraged it for intellectual stimulation, cross-agency knowledge, and/or collegial support. It also provides senior leadership with direct access to staff and vice versa. For those reasons, the committee that the Assistant Secretary created in 2014 still exists today. And the people who have chosen to participate on the committee, despite the workplace challenges that still exist, are some of the most engaged in the agency.

About the Author

Diane Blumenthal began her federal career working as an art historian at the Smithsonian Institution's National Portrait Gallery. Six years later, seeking a change in livelihood, she applied to a career intern position in a cabinet level agency. The manager, who took a chance on hiring the lapsed art historian, told Diane he was doing so because she could "read and write." She capitalized on her non-specific qualifications by remaining a generalist, gaining experience in different subject matter areas including budget, human resources and customer service, often as a special assistant. After 36 years of service, Diane recently retired from her federal government position and is in the process of becoming certified as a personal property appraiser.

CHAPTER FOUR

Toward A Boundary Spanning Opportunity Guide: Call for Input

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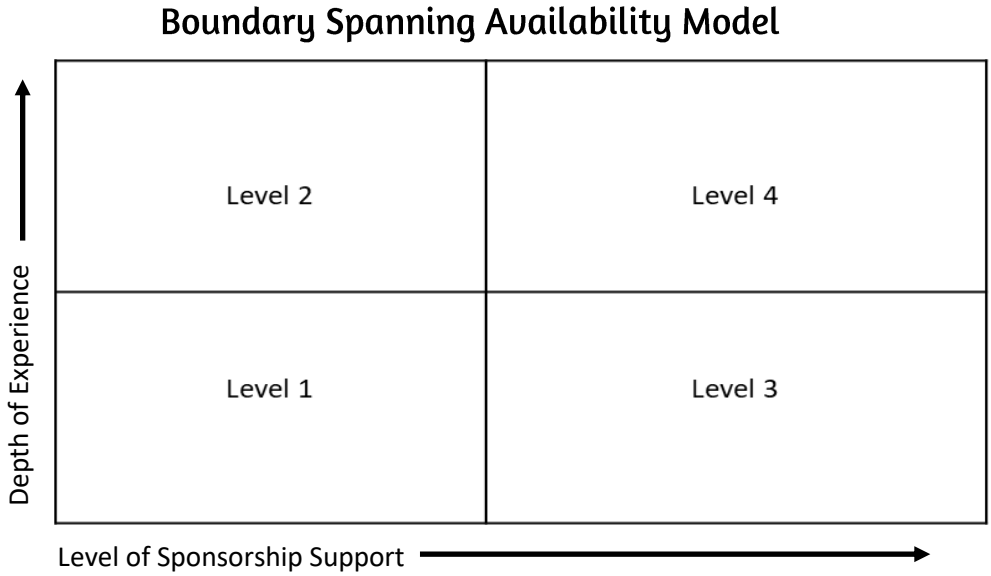
Kriste Jordan Smith

This document provides the first known attempt to establish a framework for identifying and optimizing boundary spanning opportunities for public service professionals. The Senior Fellows and Friends community is seeking input and ideas for elaborating on this guide with the intention of publishing it (open source) once completed.

Background. The purpose of this guide is to help you brainstorm opportunities to pursue boundary-spanning work that will enhance your professional skillsets, thereby enhancing your capacity to successfully navigate challenging or complex problems.



Source: Kriste Jordan Smith

Boundary spanning opportunities appear within one of four levels, depending on the depth of a professional's experience and the level of sponsorship support anticipated to be available. This is not a maturity model; no one level is higher or better than another level. The model is merely a tool for each of us to quickly assess our current state, thereby accelerating our ability to identify the most readily available and viable options to explore boundary spanning.

Level 1: I do not have experience with boundary spanning. You have not spent much time working with multiple groups outside your organization on creative, collaborative, entrepreneurial projects that broke new ground or implemented new ideas. You want to get your feet wet in a safe way that builds your skills, enhances your network, and broadens your worldview. You are either unclear on your manager's position on boundary spanning, or you work for a manager who would not support you doing these types of activities during your work day.

Level 2: I have experience with boundary spanning, having worked with multiple groups outside my organization on mutually beneficial endeavors. You know the value of the entrepreneurial mindset, and thinking well beyond today's needs to tackle tomorrow's tough problems. However, your day job currently consists of a narrowly defined role, and your manager is not keen on giving you any work time to pursue your "science projects". You intend to keep excelling at your day job, and will need to use your free time for most of your boundary spanning work.

Level 3: I report to a highly supportive, forward-thinking manager who would sponsor at least some of my work time in pursuit of boundary-spanning activities. You are intrigued, and want to dig in, but do not know where to start. You know you will have top cover, and want a clear and safe path for building your boundary-spanning skills.

Level 4: I have extensive experience with boundary spanning, and have successfully developed high profile, mutually beneficial endeavors. Your manager has given you carte blanche to develop your network towards establishing a new product or service in support of your agency's mission. Since it is the early stages, you probably have not received any funding, staff, or other resources to assist. However, based on your strong track record for results, you can use nearly all of your work time to pursue boundary-spanning endeavors.

Boundary Spanning Opportunity Inventory

This is the section of the document that likely needs the most help. This is intended to be an inventory of boundary spanning opportunities along with various attributes that would help reader choose their most viable paths. Your ideas and input on how to format these opportunities and their associated attributes are welcomed.

Opportunities:

a. Boundary Spanning Map
b. Information Interview
c. Short-Term Shadowing Assignment
d. Long-Term Shadowing Assignment

e. Detail Assignment
f. MAX Federal Community
g. Open Opportunities website
h. GovLoop Discussion Forums
i. LinkedIn Follow
j. LinkedIn Like and Share Others' Content
k. LinkedIn Originate Content
l. Twitter Follow
m. Twitter Like and Share Others' Content
n. Twitter Originate Content
o. Blog Follow
p. Blog Like and Share Others' Content
q. Blog Originate Content
r. Networking at a Conference
s. Presenting at a Conference
t. Join a Professional Association
u. Serve on a Board for a Professional Association
v. Performance Goal Boundary Spanning

Attributes:
Ease of Entry; Time/Effort Investment; Personal Financial Investment; Flexible Hours; Flexible Location

Here are the kinds of questions we could consider together:
1. What can I contribute to this leadership development whitespace to make our learning together more interesting and accelerate my progress?
2. What novel combinations or interdisciplinary intersections could open up new vistas of value?

If those questions appeal to you, even though you may not have time to play now, then sign up for the newsletter at https://seniorfellowsandfriends.com/ and put yourself into our stream of freshly curated content, informed opinion, and opportunity.

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About the Author

Kriste Jordan Smith has led strategic improvements and large-scale operations for multiple federal agencies for the past twenty years. She has managed large and geographically-dispersed teams delivering enhanced capabilities to hundreds of locations, overseeing both steady state and emergency needs with complex procurements and innovative, cross-sector partnerships. She is a member of the Senior Executive Service who believes in unleashing infinite potential through the power of engaged employees and supportive networks. Her current role ensures aviation system security at Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport through an exceptional workforce and outstanding, multi-sector partners. She also volunteers for professional and non-profit entities that share her passion for delivering results through focused leadership.

CHAPTER FIVE

Workforce Isolation and Agility Are Incompatible

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Kitty Wooley

One of our purposes has been to share reasons why the current trajectory is unsustainable. It won't work to continue making barely imperceptible progress in changing how top leaders, employees, teams, and agency components work with each other or the rest of the world. Here are two reasons why not:

- The inconvenience and discomfort that keeps us from venturing beyond our comfort zones is perpetuating static leadership and followership at scale. That way lies danger – and irrelevance.

- The inability to adapt that results from not reaching through silo walls and across other boundaries routinely is making us less serviceable to 323 million Americans – who are the only reason our work exists.

Another reason for this ebook is simply to demonstrate that there are leaders who are able to hold in creative tension, and who do not think incompatible, the work of their day jobs and the work of connecting, relating, experimenting, thinking, writing, and exercising patience. So much of the potential of boundary spanning comes from its invitation to reframe experience with an open mind, examine the limitations that are keeping things stuck and preventing all those things we say we want, and unlock new opportunity together with others.

Feedback for developers of leaders

Boundary spanning at the Senior Executive Service level alone is not sufficient.

How realistic is it to expect executive-level leadership program participants who have been leading within the confines of well-worn silos for years to adopt behavior that will push them out of the nest late in their careers? The SES is small and only has so much reach. How much impact can any subset of that group that successfully changes mindsets and begins spanning boundaries in isolation have on the work of government?

Selection processes at the GS/14-15 level do not seem to support boundary spanning.

When testimonials are sought at the conclusion of an expensive, months-long leadership development program, and the biggest result the senior employee can think to report is that "I learned more about other agencies," the wrong person may have been selected for the program and the financial investment may have been wasted. If a graduate leaves government shortly after finishing the program, he or she may have been selected for reasons that are nonsensical in the context of talent management and succession planning. When a person who was selected for a program that explicitly mentions boundary spanning as a major goal completes the program and then shows up consistently as incurious and unwelcoming, it's a clue that the selection process is not working well enough.

Incoming employees who are boundary spanners on arrival are often squelched by the system.

There are those who come into an agency talking with everyone about everything. For example, some young new hires enter the civil service having already achieved success in the nonprofit arena, enabled by this capability. If they are cautioned about staying in the silo, often they don't stay long – they look for more enlightened organizations in which their talent will be understood and leveraged. Boundary spanning behavior shows up all along the General Schedule grade level continuum and it is mostly squelched. Managers who are insecure or less skillful may contribute to disengagement among such employees or even drive them away – whereas confident, competent managers are more likely to seek to harness their boundary spanning impulse in order to achieve objectives such as developing goodwill with those in other units who control scarce resources, or cultivating project stakeholder cooperation.

It is counterproductive in the extreme for an organization to shut down an employee's boundary spanning behavior, only to try to "bolt it back on" or retrofit the person years later. Human beings begin relating to others outside the family unit before they can walk. The real task in our context is to enable the boundary spanning behavior that will make work more meaningful and improve organizational performance.

This is an avenue for fruitful discussion within the leadership development community, in conjunction with agency HR leaders and deputy secretaries. They ought to consider the real tradeoffs between the risks and disruption associated with mistakes employees are certain to make, as they and their managers learn how to incorporate boundary spanning into work, versus the risks associated with the perpetual reinforcement of internal silo boundaries.

The unspoken norms and assumptions preventing greater return on investment should be examined.

There is something about the relationship between public employee development and performance that is keeping leadership development return on investment stuck. The norms and assumptions that underpin current practice ought to be reviewed using a design thinking approach, so that new possibilities can begin to emerge.

Two tips for those who want to have greater impact

Whatever your span of control, **i**n order to maximize your public service contribution in the future, you will need to develop the ability to span boundaries with ease. Push yourself outside your comfort zone, without waiting to be told, and practice. That expands your comfort zone and equips you to do more, in more settings. That makes you more valuable to your organization and improves your career prospects. That attracts new opportunities to serve in meaningful ways. It is a virtuous cycle.

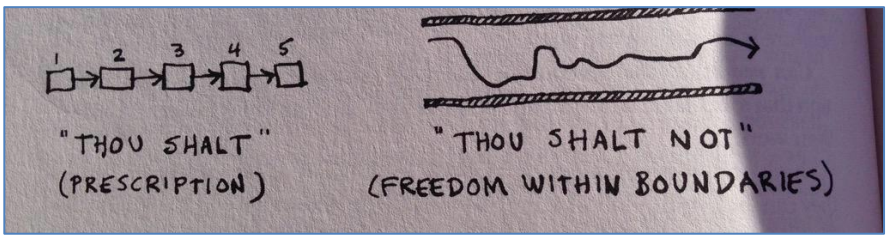
Be approachable! Whether you are SES or civil service, when your concern for your gravitas is uppermost in your mind, you shut off information and the opportunity to improve things. Instead, be curious and listen to the person in front of you. If what you hear strikes a chord, consider scheduling follow-on activity. If the other person outranks you, don't begin by assuming that he or she will not value your input. Ignore the occasional snub and move on. Learn from everything and everyone, all the time. Let your desire to be part of the solution override your fear of the unknown.

> *Breaking down silos is tough, even when the intention—and the company goal—is there. Individuals must have persistence and make it part of their personal leadership journey.*
>
> *—John Rice, vice chairman of GE and president and CEO of the GE Global Growth Organization, in "How GE is Becoming a Truly Global Network," McKinsey Quarterly, April 2017*

Related topics that are ripe for exploration

Undoubtedly, there are future Ph.D. dissertations lurking below, although these areas seem ready for exploration by academics and government practitioners together, right now:

Supporting boundary spanning behaviors earlier in careers. How could line and HR managers who are serious about accelerating employee development partner on the implementation of "guardrails," as shown at right, below? That shift would make space for novice boundary spanning and self-directed growth while giving the organization a way to manage the risks associated with it.



Source: Unknown

What are ways in which more seasoned employees can hone the ability to improve outcomes by reaching across component, agency, or even sector boundaries, while remaining firmly aligned with agency objectives?

> *The opportunity is to replace processes that control behavior with principles that empower decision-making.*
>
> *—Mark Bonchek, in "How Leaders Can Let Go Without Losing Control," HBR, June 2, 2016*

Addressing the 800-lb. elephant in the room, Control. Large organizational systems are hierarchical out of necessity. But does it make sense that, when the stakes are highest, military commanders can flex between detailed command and mission command,[1] as the situation requires, whereas civilian government leaders seem unequipped ever to flex, instead remaining in detailed command?

How much is really understood about the link between excessive control and employee departure or disengagement? As Adrian Wolfberg points out in chapter 2, above, "Organizations with few levels, perhaps one level or two that might be called a flat organization are not constrained nearly as much in terms of information flow and hindrances to interaction. Managers should be aware that if they are members of organizations more highly constrained, the characteristics of hierarchy are more likely to strengthen boundaries, make them closed or impermeable, and solidify the culture and identities within boundaries. *Impermeable boundaries thwart change, developmental and collaboration efforts."* (Italics mine.)

Implementing effective knowledge management and amping up learning. Organizational and individual learning is moving beyond the mastery of traditional bodies of knowledge ("stocks") to encompass the discovery, curation, creation, and exchange of knowledge by many people continually ("flows").[2] The talent development community is grappling with this shift as it relates to Learning Management Systems, which are evolving towards the accommodation of both structured and unstructured data. Other challenges await.

Are agencies making the most of those knowledge-hungry, big-picture analysts who are magnets for the question, "Why do you need to know that?"

How does the widespread reluctance to sponsor and support internal learning communities thwart the boundary spanning behavior that the country's best leader developers are simultaneously striving to bring about?

The link between increased transparency and bad behavior & poor performance. The increased transparency that occurs when silo walls become more permeable makes all behavior easier to see, and thus may make bad behavior easier to deal with. Some employees may even be embarrassed into better behavior. One of the downsides of tightly controlled, opaque fiefdoms is that they have been known to mask bad behavior and poor performance, enabling them to continue.

Equipping agile IT teams and program offices to do the challenging work of digital transformation together. Digital transformation presupposes significant change to the way some work is done. It may be especially disruptive in a time when resource constraints are beginning to determine whether some work is still done at all. IT and non-IT staffs usually need some translation and facilitation to understand the other group's

technical jargon and point of view. Those informal translation and facilitation roles have always provided fertile ground for natural boundary spanners. Will those roles change or be replaced with something new as in-house IT staffs, and temporary consulting teams like 18F, introduce agile software development practices?

In closing, what's an appropriate response to those who do not perceive their work context as volatile, uncertain, complex, or ambiguous, who aren't sure what the fuss is about and see no reason to change their ways? William Gibson's famous quote applies:

> *"The future is already here – it's just not evenly distributed."*[3]

Yet.

Notes

[1] U.S. Army on Mission Command: http://www.benning.army.mil/MSSP/Mission%20Command/.

[2] Hagel III, John, John Seely Brown, and Lang Davison. "Abandon Stocks, Embrace Flows." Harvard Business Review, January 27, 2009. https://hbr.org/2009/01/abandon-stocks-embrace-flows.html

[3] Grossman, Lev; Richard Lacayo (October 16, 2005). "Neuromancer (1984)". TIME Magazine All-Time 100 Novels. Time. Retrieved November 6, 2007.

Other useful reading

Center for Creative Leadership. "Boundary Explorer (Beta)." 2014.
http://solutions.ccl.org/Boundary_Explorer_(beta)
This card deck is a companion tool to the book, Boundary Spanning Leadership (2011), by Chris Ernst and Donna Chrobot-Mason.

Corrigan, Jack. "OPM Offers a New Career Guide for Executives," Government Executive, August 1, 2017.
http://www.govexec.com/management/2017/08/opm-offers-new-career-guide-executives/139913/
"Through continual learning and development, senior executives may broaden their leadership and technical skills, experience, and perspectives, while promoting increased collaboration across the Federal Government," OPM wrote in its report. The agency partnered with the governmentwide Chief Learning Officers Council on the project.

Cross, Rob, and Robert J. Thomas. 2008. How Top Talent Uses Networks and Where Rising Stars Get Trapped. Organizational Dynamics, Vol. 37, No. 2: 165–180. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2008.02.001
"Rather than simply adding more and more people to their Rolodex, we suggest that rising stars need to adopt a thoughtful approach that extends beyond simply developing bridging ties. They need to know how to increase and decrease connectivity in ways that enhance productivity and performance."

Denning, Steve, "The Reinvention of Management: Part 3: From controller to enabler," January 19, 2011.
http://stevedenning.typepad.com/steve_denning/2011/01/the-reinvention-o
f-management-part-3-from-controller-to-enabler.html

Gopalakrishnan, R. "Boundary-spanning behaviour: The ability to adapt, stretch and operate at the boundaries is an invaluable skill," Business Standard, April 14, 2016.
http://www.business-standard.com/article/opinion/r-gopalakrishnan-boundary-spanning-behaviour-116041400911_1.html

Kane, Gerald C. "'Digital Transformation' Is a Misnomer," MIT Sloan Management Review, August 7, 2017.
http://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/digital-transformation-is-a-misnomer/amp/
Kane asserts that "It's not about digital or transformation. It's about adaptation." This short article provides a very useful frame of reference for internal design thinkers, budget directors, CFOs, and all who seek to frame a common vision for teams of technologists and program analysts.

McChrystal, General Stanley, and Tantum Collins, David Silverman, and Chris Fussell. 2015. Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World. New York: Penguin Random House.

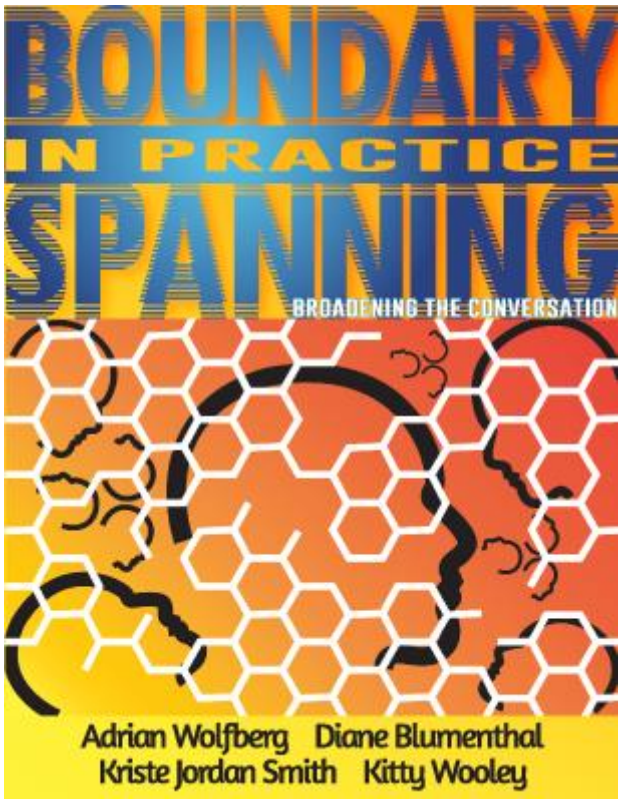
McNulty, Eric. "Leading in an Increasingly VUCA World," strategy+business blogs, October 27, 2015.
https://www.strategy-business.com/blog/Leading-in-an-Increasingly-VUCA-World
Eric McNulty, director of research at the National Preparedness Leadership Initiative, puts VUCA into context and outlines an adaptive strategy.

Sanders, Ronald. "A Blueprint for SES Reform," Government Executive, May 11, 2017.
http://www.govexec.com/excellence/promising-practices/2017/05/blueprint-ses-reform/137745/
"In that regard, it is only fitting that we end this series where we began, with our original premise: That 21st century government, with all of its challenges, will require a career senior executive corps like no other before it, one whose members are capable of leading across the whole of government if they are to effectively address those challenges. Even those career executives who have a singular agency focus (and there will always be some) will have to be able to demonstrate the acumen to lead across boundaries as all of the things government does become more and more interconnected, co-produced, and net-centric."

Schneider, Troy K. "Can government get digital services to stick?," Federal Computer Week, June 8, 2016.
https://fcw.com/articles/2016/06/08/digital-services-roundtable.aspx

Snowden, Dave. The Cynefin Framework, July 2010. https://youtu.be/N7oz366X0-8.
"Using the Cynefin framework can help executives sense which context they are in so that they can not only make better decisions but also avoid the problems that arise when their preferred management style causes them to make mistakes." Don't miss Dave's description, beginning at 7:00, of the *complacent zone* between the simple and chaotic domains.

Yip, Jeffrey, Chris Ernst, and Michael Campbell. "Boundary Spanning Leadership: Mission Critical Perspectives from the Executive Suite," Center for Creative Leadership, 2016.
www.ccl.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/BoundarySpanningLeadership.pdf
Figure 11 shows the boundary spanning priorities of senior executive survey participants who were asked to rate the level of priority they would place on various collaborative outcomes over the following five years.


BOUNDARY
IN PRACTICE
SPANNING
BROADENING THE CONVERSATION
Adrian Wolfberg Diane Blumenthal
Kriste Jordan Smith Kitty Wooley