

TURNING LEADERSHIP OUTSIDE IN: BOUNDARY SPANNERS' INTERNAL BOUNDARY WORK

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ABSTRACT

Many leaders, organizations and communities wrestle with complex problems, where work needs to span boundaries. Those boundaries can be external and socially constructed around administrative units, jurisdictions or cultures. They can also be internal, segmenting leaders' roles and identities so that they feel they need to shift behaviours in different environments. For leaders who have chosen to work horizontally and span boundaries, such identity management can be challenging.

This paper draws from a recent, larger study that explored ways in which respected, boundary-spanning leaders understood and worked with boundaries. These participants were selected through a referral process in which nominators described how nominees fit the study's criteria. In addition to being respected for their work in complex, boundary-spanning environments where they had relatively little or no positional authority, participants needed experience as formal leaders in hierarchies so they could compare the two types of environments. Participants came from fields including environmental sustainability, counter-terrorism and knowledge management.

Midgley is one of the authors who has described boundaries as fundamental to systems thinking. One of the findings from the larger study was that participants collectively used 10 inter-related strategies for their work with boundaries in complex environments. These strategies were presented through a lens of Midgley's theory of boundary critique.

This paper adds to that study by exploring key informants' perspectives about internal boundary work and identity management. It assesses whether there were links to the overall strategies used for external boundary work. Although this exploration is preliminary, it appears there are many parallels between external and internal boundary work. These parallels can be understood as turning leadership outside in: using leadership strategies suited to work with external boundaries in order to learn and develop as a person and leader through the management of multiple identities.

Keywords: Leadership, Boundaries, Identity, Complex Systems.

INTRODUCTION

This preliminary research explores one intriguing slice of a larger study. It provides a rare glimpse behind the professional exteriors of leaders who work in complex, boundary-spanning environments. The focus of this paper is on participants' internal boundary stories, a theme which was not explored much in the original research. The following

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paragraphs provide some of that larger context, paraphrased from (MacGillivray, Forthcoming (2009)).

The original study—which was completed in 2008—explored how persons respected for their leadership in horizontal environments understood and worked with boundaries. The research questions were:

How do leaders, who are respected in both vertical and horizontal environments, understand concepts of boundary, edge and/or periphery in their work?

How do leaders say they have used those concepts in their practice to enable learning, capacity building or other strengths important to their work?

[How] do these findings fit with key concepts and trends in leadership, complexity or knowledge management? (MacGillivray, Forthcoming (2009), p. 12)

Each of these professionals wrestled with complex challenges such as ecological sustainability through the World Conservation Union (IUCN) or counterterrorism through the Defence Research and Development Canada (DRDC) Centre for Security Science. Each participant also brought current or recent experience as a formal leader in a vertical hierarchy, enabling them to compare and contrast these environments. Descriptors of these two types of environments are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Vertical and Horizontal Environments as Described in the Study

Attributes	Vertical Environments	Horizontal Environments
Organization chart	Yes	Probably Not
Senge's category of leader	Executive or Line	Networking
Positional power	Yes	Little or None
Performance plan and measures	Yes	If group decides to have them
Details of direction and progress predictable?	Yes, when unit has power and resources	Rarely
Typical primary focus	Doing	Learning and doing
Sample names	Company, division, branch, field unit, work unit, region, agency, ministry	Network, community of practice, professional forum, co-operative or collaborative initiative.

Participants understood boundaries and edges in different ways. One of the most common was to see edges of organizations and groups as places for the mixing of ideas to enable learning and innovation.

Some of these individuals thought explicitly about boundaries in their work, and all worked implicitly with boundaries in several interconnected ways. Their behaviours included scanning the environment for potentially productive connections, making context-specific boundary decisions and maintaining adaptive tensions.

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Most of the insights above are based on participants' external boundary stories, where participants spoke about national borders, jurisdictions, organizational mandates, administrative units, values, genders and cultures. However, several people also spoke about how they had multiple identities in their professional boundary-spanning work and personal lives. This paper focuses on multiple identity challenges and how sample participants worked with those challenges. As mentioned earlier, this paper draws on work by MacGillivray (Forthcoming (2009)) to describe the larger study, then presents insights and questions that focus on identities and roles.

The research questions behind this paper are:

How do leaders, who are respected in both vertical and horizontal environments, work with concepts of boundary, edge and/or periphery in their internal management of multiple roles and identities?

How does this internal work compare with leadership strategies for work with external boundaries?

The potential significance of relationships between internal and external strategies is amplified in a complex system. Each can be seen as constructing the other. On one hand, individuals can seem insignificant in large systems; on the other, small actions can result in disproportionately large system shifts (Stacey, 2003). I was interested in how participants thought about coherence, relationships and emergence, whether implicitly or explicitly.

METHODOLOGY

Because there are gaps in boundary-related research, and because I explored boundaries in a distinctive context, qualitative methodologies were chosen to deepen understanding and lead to further research. The study employed phenomenography to reveal qualitatively different ways in which leaders understood and worked with boundaries, and augmented by elements of ethnography to add context and reflection to those findings.

Primary Methodology: Phenomenography

Phenomenography has its roots in Scandinavia where it was used to learn what it means that some students are better at learning than others. (Bowden & Walsh, 2000; , "Phenomenography"). It evolved as a methodology in the 1970s, to explore and describe different ways of understanding students' varied conceptions of concepts within curricula (Osteraker, 2002 citing Dall'Alba). Marton formally presented the term in that context in 1981 (Marton, 1981), defining phenomenography as "the empirical study of the limited number of qualitatively different ways in which we experience, conceptualize, understand, perceive, apprehend etc, various phenomena in and aspects of the world around us" (Marton, 1994, p. 4424).

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In recent years, this methodology has been used in many fields. For example, Larsson study of anaesthetists (2003) is one example from health care and Wagner's study of planned organizational change illustrates the use of phenomenography in organizational studies (Wagner, 2006).

Although phenomenography and phenomenology may have common roots, they are different. Phenomenography does not set out to explore psychological roots of perception and it assumes a limited number of ways of understanding a phenomenon. The degree and nature of differences between the methodologies depends—in part—on whether one draws on the early philosophy of Husserl or later perspectives from Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre (Richardson, 1999, pp. 59-60) as foundational works for phenomenology.

In this study, interview transcripts were analyzed to create graphic outcome spaces: conceptual maps in which categorized ways of understanding were presented. In phenomenography, the researcher often assumes that particular ways of understanding a phenomenon lead to better results, and that the researcher can catalyze progress based on those findings.

Phenomenographic data are typically gathered through semi-structured interviews. Questions are open-ended so that participants have the freedom to decide on the scope and focus of their responses (Bowden, 1996 citing Marton). In phenomenographic interviews, the researcher strives to surface tacit knowledge about a concept, regardless of whether participants previously had previously considered the concept explicitly. Osteraker describes this daunting task by saying “in order to receive a holistic access to the phenomenon the researcher has to understand the informant better than the informant does herself” (2002 no page numbers). Two types of questions are common. The first type explicitly addresses the phenomenon being studied. The second presents a problem or context in which it is likely that participants will discuss the phenomenon, implicitly or explicitly (Bowden, 1996). Although findings are described as empirical (Marton, 1994, p. 4424; Osteraker; Sandberg, 1996), there is recognition that different researchers could categorize and present findings in different ways (Richardson, 1999; Sandberg, 1996).

Complementary Methodology: Ethnography

Ethnography was used in this research to enrich data and findings. Ethnographers draw on direct observations to describe the day-to-day activities of groups (Fetterman, 1998) and their work results in written representations of selected aspects of groups and cultures (Van Maanen, 1988). Some ethnographers now work with subcultures, corporate cultures and small groups of individuals in professions as varied as teaching and equipment repair. Despite the swing away from detached and objective studies, the ethnographer constantly walks the fragile line of being inside and outside of the group being studied.

In this study, I observed most participants for a few days in their work contexts. My field notes included three columns for detailed observations, my reactions, and later reference to theoretical material. Although my interviews were semi-structured, the participants

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usually led their way through the topics of interest. If a key topic had not been explored through their stories, I would raise it at an opportune moment or at the end of the interview.

Ethnography has a concept of key informant or actor, who generally “answers questions in a comprehensive, albeit meandering fashion. [In contrast,] A respondent answers a question specifically, without explanations about the larger picture and conversational tangents with all their richness and texture. Interviewing a respondent is usually a more efficient data collection strategy, but it is also less revealing and potentially less valid than discussions with a key actor...Key actors may be cultural brokers straddling two cultures...This position may give them a special vantage point...They may also be informal or formal leaders in the community” (Fetterman, 1998, p. 48).

Quality

Quality optimization approaches in the full study included:

- having a generous sample size: 15-20 participants are typical in a phenomenographic study;
- striving for epistemological consistency: opinions vary about the nature of this methodology and how to use it; each decision was justified in relation to overall principles;
- being as true as possible to participants’ understanding of phenomena through interview approaches and through opportunities for comments and reviews; and
- not forcing participants into “strange meta-talk about issues which they have never talked about before” (Säljö, 1996, p. 21), by avoiding the term *boundary*, for example.

This preliminary exploration of internal boundary work uses analysis from the larger study, review of field notes and new coding of two of the transcripts were coded. I am very familiar with all transcripts and have been transparent about my reasons for selecting these two for comparison with original findings.

Participants

The full study was based on 29 interviews with “respected leaders” as well as direct observation of their work, where travel and schedules permitted. Every participant was seen as a leader in a complex, boundary-spanning environment. The people and groups with whom they worked were unusually diverse. Each leader was dealing with different cultures (national, ethnic, corporate), disciplines, jurisdictions, sets of terminology, norms, time zones, and so on.

These leaders—who were respected for their work in traditional vertical, and more complex horizontal, environments—were identified through a combination of purposeful sampling (more specifically intensity sampling (Palys, 1997) by going to established networks and communities of practice for initial nominations) and snowball techniques.

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Purposeful sampling seeks out expertise that would be difficult to locate otherwise. Snowball sampling—a form of referral process—is an effective approach for accessing additional eligible participants through networks (Browne, 2003). All participants were nominated for the study by persons who knew their work and completed a standard form, which included fields such as concrete descriptions of leadership respected by the nominators.

FINDINGS

Participants

This paper focuses on two participants who illustrate different ways of thinking about identity and internal boundaries. This focus on two individuals does not capture the full diversity of the sample, but these individuals were key informants who represented two common orientations in the study. Phenomenographers usually include participant profiles so that readers can interpret insights through another lens. Short profiles of participants Chris May and Alex Bennet follow:

Chris May

Chris May was in a responsible, formal leadership role—specializing in counter-terrorism— with the City of Toronto police department in Canada. He was also an active participant in many national and international counter-terrorism groups including the Chemical, Biological, Radiological-Nuclear (CBRN) Research and Technology Initiative (CRTI) network of communities under the Defence Research and Development Canada (DRDC) Centre for Security Science. Chris May’s nominator wrote:

Sgt. May has been one of the CBRN responders that CRTI has called upon to provide advice in science planning. He has been involved in the Forensics Cluster [community of practice], spoken at workshops and participated in projects. He has demonstrated leadership through his willingness to contribute to science and technology (S&T) and his recognition of the importance of dialogue and participation...

Alex Bennet

Alex Bennet was in a vertical leadership role as Chief Information Officer (CIO) of the American Navy, and in a much more horizontal role as the Chief Knowledge Officer (CKO), which involved work across all of the American federal government. Alex Bennet’s nominator sent a comprehensive package of information that included a photocopy of her Distinguished Public Service Award signed by the Secretary of the Navy, published articles about her work and links to other examples of her successes. In his own words, he wrote:

I respect this person as a leader because of her high values, strong and effective personality, and demonstrated consistency in dealing with individuals and groups at all levels in a fair and intelligent manner...Her success speaks for itself. When she retired, she was presented with the Distinguished Public Service Award, the

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highest honour for a public servant...During this time she travelled across the U.S. and around the world representing the Department of the Navy and/or the U.S. government, and was the co-editor of three books in support of government implementation of IT, IM and KM, as well as dozens of articles and case studies...

Both Chris and Alex worked concurrently in related vertical and horizontal leadership roles. Both had decades of experience in responsible positions. They were both married and had children. Both had had successful careers, and had been pleasantly challenged and happy in many work roles. At the time of the interviews, Chris lived in Toronto Canada and Alex in West Virginia, U.S.A. Both had professional presences across their nations and internationally.

The Overall Study: A Brief Overview of Findings

The overall study explored perspectives of respected leaders who had experience in complex, boundary-spanning environments and traditional, vertical hierarchies. Most described vertical and horizontal environments very differently: vertical environments were usually described dispassionately and with factual statements; horizontal environments were usually described passionately with stories of relationships and rewards. Horizontal environments were often underappreciated by persons in formal power structures. Participants had all moved from vertical to horizontal work; they had engaged in boundary-spanning work for a wide range of reasons ranging from personal through system-focused. Most participants considered themselves horizontal by nature.

They varied greatly in the degree to which they explicitly thought about the concepts in this study including boundaries, edges, peripheries and leadership. Some thought about these concepts and their application consciously; others did not. However, all participants showed—through their stories and their actions where I was able to observe their work—that they implicitly considered and worked with boundaries.

As these people were involved in knowledge-intensive occupations in a knowledge economy, it was not surprising that many of their stories had to do with the creation, incubation, sharing, mobilization, and use or re-use of knowledge across boundaries.

They understood boundaries in many ways. They did not generally talk about boundaries as positive or negative; their interventions varied with context and purpose. The interventions and ways of working were more important in their stories than were specifics about the type of boundary (for example, cultural or jurisdictional) with which they were working.

Because they spanned national, jurisdictional, administrative, disciplinary and cultural boundaries, it is not surprising that their work was often complex (unpredictable, involving many relationships and exhibiting emergence). They seemed to be much more comfortable with complexity and ambiguity than were many people they described in their vertical, home organizations.

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Their categorized ways of understanding boundaries were presented in a non-hierarchical outcome space that reflected the complex, organic nature of their work. In addition, their ways of working with boundaries were superimposed on Midgley's theory of boundary critique (2000) to illustrate empirically-derived implications of his theory in practice. In essence, they were creating, spanning, dissolving and engaging with socially-constructed boundaries in many ways in order to enable innovation, relationship-building and other forms of progress.

But what about their work with their own internal boundaries? Did their actions and perceptions relate to their perceptions and actions with external boundaries?

A Subset of Identity-Related Findings

As noted earlier, many participants did not consciously think about boundary work, and phenomenographers strive to work with participants' experience in not superimpose foreign constructs during the interview process. I therefore asked questions about their work activities, challenges and successes, and did not explicitly raise the topic of boundaries until the end of each interview. At that time, I told participants of my interest in how they thought about and worked with boundaries. I presented them with a list of boundary-related themes, which had emerged from earlier research.

One of the items on that page read: "Shifting amongst multiple identities or roles: president, parent, specialist, facilitator, etc." Almost every participant quickly jumped to that item and indicated how much they related to that topic, regardless of whether they had raised it earlier in our conversations.

Among those who resonated with this theme of *multiple identities or roles*, there were two common patterns. One was a desire to achieve more coherence across identities and roles, and an ongoing struggle to do so. This pattern is represented by Chris. The other was success achieving more coherence across identities and roles through previous work, as represented by Alex. No one in this group expressed interest in separating, fragmenting or isolating different identities and roles, although they sometimes provided examples of seemingly necessary shifts. This section explores how identity-related findings relate to findings from the larger study. Quotes from my conversations with Alex and Chris illustrate the concepts.

Theory of Boundary Critique

The very basic ideas behind Midgley's theory of boundary critique are presented in Figure 1. He presents marginalization as a product of boundary constructs, with boundaries as "the core idea of systems thinking" (Midgley, 2000, p. 33). The area between a narrow focus (primary boundary) and a broader focus (larger secondary boundary) can be considered marginalized. And furthermore, the marginalized area can be valued or devalued.

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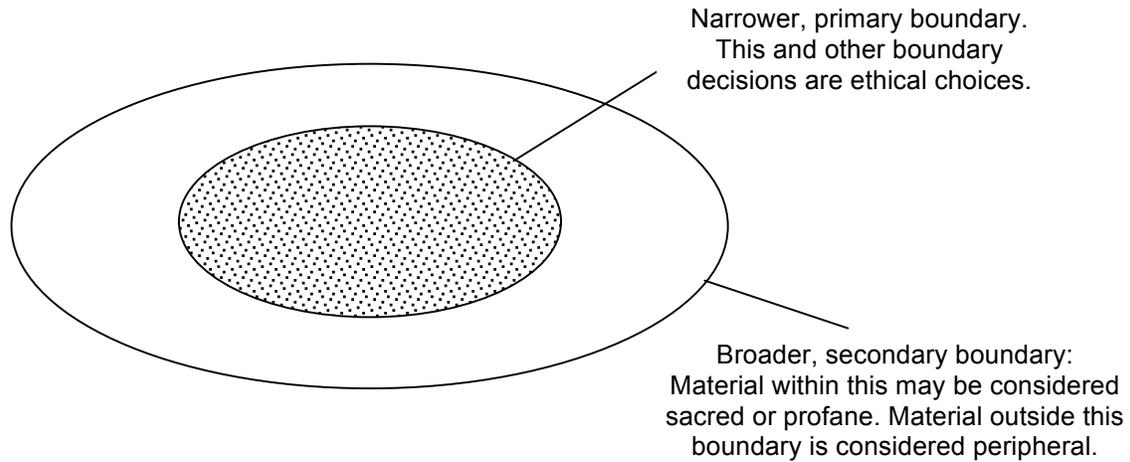


Figure 1. Basic illustration of Midgley’s theory of boundary critique

This theory was used in the overall study in two ways. The first was as a lens through which to interpret a common pattern. In many interviews and interchanges, it was apparent that horizontal, boundary-spanning environments such as communities of practice are sometimes marginalized by the more visible, formal, hierarchical structures with which they connect, as illustrated in Figure 2. This observation was an interesting fit with the fact that participants described the core with factual terms and the marginalized areas—such as communities of practice—with more emotion.

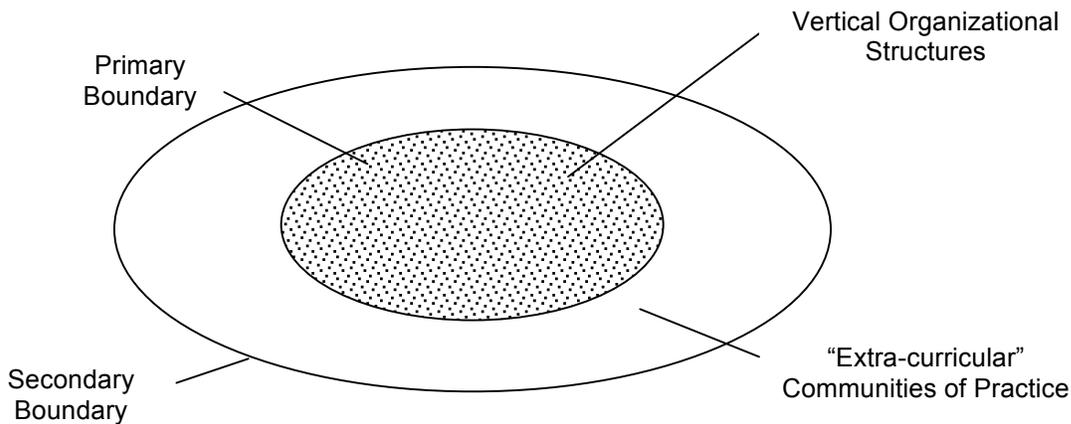


Figure 2. The horizontal as marginalized and devalued or extra-curricular

The second way in which Midgley’s theory was used was to depict ten ways in which participants enabled leadership in complex, horizontal environments. For example, many worked to make primary and secondary boundaries less rigid and more permeable. One of the ten intervention-oriented approaches was: “Leaders work to integrate multiple identities” (MacGillivray, Forthcoming (2009), p. 180). All ten approaches were

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interconnected, forming multifaceted, strategic and coherent approaches to complex system leadership.

If we drill down to look at work with the integration of multiple identities in more detail, how does it compare with the leaders' outward work with boundaries? Insights and stories from Chris and Alex illustrate that there are several parallels, two of which are described below, specifically:

1. the internal impact of primary boundaries around structures of power, and
2. efforts to integrate core and marginalized elements in creative ways.

Power dynamics mirrored in identity struggles

Primary boundaries in the larger study enclosed the powerful, vertical structures. Boundaries manifested in policies and practices such as control over employees' time, protection of mandates and "turf," and barriers to sharing through online environments. As I reread field notes and transcripts, it seemed to me that many participants' stories reflected multifaceted worlds in which there were challenging pressures at the core, and lighter, more flexible options in the peripheries. Pressures from those same primary boundaries and the passion associated with the marginalized areas were mirrored in participants' internal struggles. My visual depiction of this interpretation forms Figure 3.

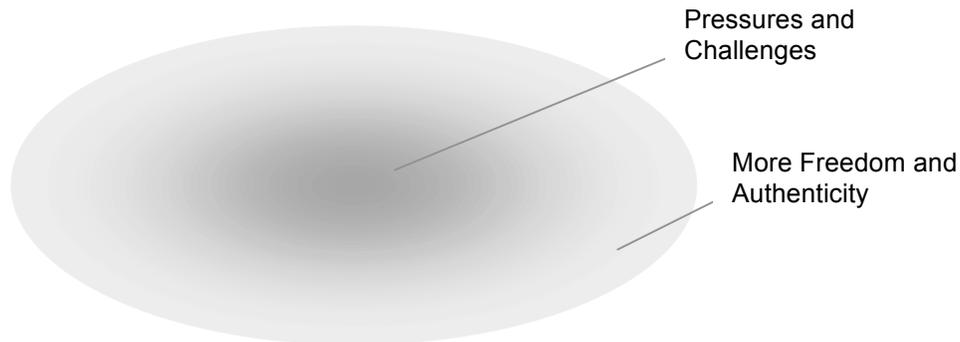


Figure 3. The landscape of participants' reflective, intra-personal stories

Stories from the 2008 CRTI symposium illustrate this dynamic. The agenda on most days had a high level focus on science, technology, policy and related topics. Another day focused more on first responder issues. A typical audience member on the general days would have been a scientist working as a manager or executive with an organization such as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission or Homeland Security. Most worked in headquarters or other central offices. Many were well dressed, even after a few days away from the office. It wouldn't be unusual for them to have a PhD in some area related to counter-terrorism science. A typical audience member on the first responder day might be a fire fighter or paramedic working on the front line. Many came in uniform. Even my limited experience working on the fringes of

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public sector scientist and first responder cultures during my career suggested their language, norms and senses of humour are quite different.

Chris arrived at the symposium mid week. This was a deliberate choice relating to family vs. professional priorities. By the time Chris arrived, I had heard many of the senior scientists and public servants talk about him. He was highly respected in those circles and I assumed he was respected in the first responder circles as well (which was true). Chris delivered two presentations at this symposium: one on a general day and one on the first responder day. Watching from the audience, I noted that he looked very comfortable with the subject matter in both. However, in the first one to the scientist audience, he used some self-deprecating humour about having been slotted in at the last minute and not being as well prepared as he might have been.

When Chris and I spoke later, it was fascinating to hear his take on the two presentations and on presentations in general as they relate to roles, identities and styles. Chris said he could relate to first responders, but could also sit in a room with public sector Canada ministers (elected heads of large public bodies) and relate to them as well on a professional basis. But his degree of comfort with different audiences varied. Chris is known for his use of colourful language but he told me he tends to avoid that around the scientists. Chris told a story that implied the politically correct core within the primary boundary was being protected from his natural style. “There’s been more than one occasion when I’ve been doing a debrief after the final exercise on the first responder program and Steve knows I’m getting up to do it and he’ll walk by and shut all the doors.” Unfortunately I didn’t have a chance to talk with Steve and glean his interpretations of boundaries-at-play. But I did hear from Chris that he considered his approach to presentations a marriage of authenticity and effectiveness.

I've had a lot of people come up to me after I've done briefings or at the end of the course come up to me and say “I wish we'd get briefings like this at home because I was absolutely clear what your expectations were of us. There were no ifs ands or buts. I often—I shouldn't say often—I periodically I think maybe I should calm it down or tone it back a little bit, but guys come up to me and say: “Don't change what you do, it's brilliant. We can relate to this.”

From these and other stories from Chris I had the sense that he could usually act in ways that were coherent with his identity. But like many other participants, he put pressure on himself when the culture—or perceived culture—of powerful structures such as federal ministries or departments come with certain expectations of behaviour that do not allow him to be a fully integrated person. As I analyzed notes and transcripts I noticed I was not immune to these pressures. There were stories from participants that were poignant or vivid or funny, yet I did not even ask permission to quote them. It felt to me—based on my internal boundaries—that they might not be understood or respected within traditional hierarchies.

As described above, Chris struggled with some elements of personal coherence and integration. Alex had done so in the past, and told me stories that reflected that struggle. She described work in one of her high level government positions, in what seemed to be a

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very masculine business culture. Her official, paid position was squarely within the primary boundary. In that culture, she said it was absolutely essential to have a strong ego and powerful presence: something she had to break back down after leaving that role. Like Chris, the experience of being in the core was less authentic for her. She explained: “I meditated every morning and every evening, always cleansing myself, and always filling myself, and always protecting myself, and that was the way I survived through that unnatural experience for me.”

Towards coherence: ways of integrating elements of self

Collectively, there were ten boundary-related complex system leadership strategies and declarations of intent described in the original study. As mentioned earlier, these related primarily to work with socially constructed, *external* boundaries around entities such as companies, ministries and jurisdictions.

I was interested in which intentions and strategies were illustrated in Alex’s stories about her relatively successful efforts to manage *internal* identity boundaries and develop *internal* coherence? The ten intentions and strategies are listed below with annotations about Alex’s internal work. I chose Alex to illustrate these concepts for two reasons. She said she had made significant progress with internal coherence and—as a key informant—she shared more context than did some of the other participants.

- Vertical structure members have opportunities to learn about the nature and benefits of the horizontal. Vertical culture is more open;
- Primary and secondary boundaries are usually less rigid and more permeable;
- Leaders cycle in and out of vertical and horizontal groups and roles; and
- Leaders scan environment for potentially productive connections.

Early in Alex’s career, she worked on a naval base in Japan for five years. I have pages of narrative about how she began with a part-time job on the base newspaper with a circulation of about 20,000 and how she grew that work into the equivalent of two very creative full time jobs.

Many things about the story are fascinating, but I will focus on two that have to do with the boundary between Alex’s formal roles on the base (within the primary boundary) and her personal identity. On the formal side, she set out to demonstrate competence in her writing, editing, public relations skills, music, theatre, event-planning and community engagement with both military personnel and local citizens. Even within the first six months, her talent had been noted to the point of her becoming the Public Relations Manager of the base.

How did this relate to her personal identity? First, she brought knowledge and skills—such as her understanding of music—into her work, even though that might not seem like a logical blending for someone hired to work on the base newspaper. The second link became apparent when I said “I’m curious what was driving you to do what sounds like work way beyond expectations.” Even though my interview questions focused on workplace leadership, this was a bridge into stories about her personal life. Alex replied

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“Oh, right. You want to go back one more layer.” And she told me stories of a difficult childhood, and how so many of her early accomplishments had to do with internal voices: “What was wrong with me? I have to do better. I’m not good enough...I want to be so good and so perfect and do all the right things so that I’ll make this woman happy...”

So these associations were not entirely healthy, but they do illustrate how Alex worked across a number of internal boundaries in order to develop as a person, and serve her work communities in creative and successful ways. If I had not asked about her motives, I would only have heard about the leadership she had shown and enabled in and around the base.

- Cross-boundary connections and conversations increase.

Despite all the successes, Alex’s stories about the years in Japan had undercurrents of dissatisfaction and internal fragmentation. I commented that every story she had told me wasn’t about being noticed; they focused on helping and connecting others, and enabling leadership in her communities. She countered:

But you have to recognize that I didn’t honour myself. There was a failure because I didn’t honour myself and there has to be a balance. I didn’t have an ego; I was literally egoless, which is a real problem for a young woman trying to come into the world.

This was reminiscent of Watson’s description of female athletes, where society has certain images of women and athletes [or leaders in this case] that are in conflict. Watson concluded that the social identity of female athlete can be a positive identity, but that “for women who seek to achieve this identity it is not achieved without the cost of managing the dilemmas inherent in the juxtaposition of contradictory essential and relational entities” (Watson, 2007, p. 444).

Alex later described those egoless successes achieved without a full coherent self as on the “periphery” in comparison with her later work.

I choose this snapshot to illustrate a trend in her stories, which she chose to present chronologically. Early in her career, her blurring of personal and professional boundaries seemed relatively unconscious. Reflections about their significance came later. As she moved through her career, despite the intensity of the work and long hours, she appeared to become more reflective about both internal and external boundaries. In other words, she engaged more regularly in forms of internal cross-boundary conversations and decisions.

- Boundary decisions are deliberate and context-specific.

Alex described many choices in her career, but for one of them, she emphasized very strongly that it was significant and deliberate. She revealed a huge and tragic turn in her life involving her youngest child, who was four months old at the time. The story is full of twists and turns, each of which was a decision point she described in vivid detail. Her baby son—who was in the care of a seemingly responsible girl—came very close to death. Alex quit her job to take a relatively menial position in the hospital, so she could

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be close to her baby. During that time, she learned not to sleep: her body would relax as she sat by his hospital bed, but she would hear every breath.

Later, when her son's life was no longer threatened, she knew she had a choice. She could go back to a more normal routine and regular sleep. Or she could continue with the high energy pace she had learned to sustain. She chose to bring that frenetic pace into her work world, and would sleep very lightly for no more than four hours a night. This was a deliberate choice to bring skills and pacing learned through personal tragedy into her professional work and style. It helps to explain her significant accomplishments with knowledge management change leadership in American, international consulting, publishing and academic achievements.

- Learning and innovation are catalyzed at edges.

Edges are fascinating places, whether in nature, organizations or communities. Edges are places where things meet and interact in unexpected ways. This is a concept explored in more depth in the original study. Alex's stories often included examples of rich activity in and around edges.

She told me about an event that pushed her to understand who she was and who she wanted to become. One of her strategies to build self was to study traits she admired in others and reflect on whether and how she could enhance those traits in herself. She had admired Sister Theresa—not yet Mother Theresa—for years. Alex would work to develop and experience some of Sister Theresa's traits, perhaps drawing on her theatre background by saying: "If this is who I am, how am I to act?" Hopefully the reader has a sense by now that Alex's ideas rarely stayed in the realm of reflective inaction. Later in our conversation she looped back to speak about Mother Theresa:

A few months before I came back, I had an invitation from Mother Theresa to join her for a day in Atsugi base: the first time that she came onto a military base. Two thousand people showed up in Adzuki. I was with her; I took photographs; I was up on stage with her.

At one point I came down off the stage and pushed through the crowds that were pushing up to touch her, a gentle pushing, but they were pushing. I was taking her picture as she reached out. They would kiss her hand and she would touch them. She put a smile on her face and turned over to me and reached out to me. The camera fell absolutely down; thank God I had a strap. At a soul level we touched. I was absolutely stunned. I just stood there. And she had gone on: I don't know whether it was five minutes or one minute. She had gone on touching others and I was still standing in that same pose. I wrote about that.

- Adaptive tensions between vertical and horizontal are sustained.

This is one strategy I am not sure I saw in Alex's stories, although her seeking out role models and working on building strengths from their inspiration may be an example. Perhaps work in complex environments is complex enough without deliberately introducing many adaptive tensions?

- Status of margin is nudged towards—but not fully into—the "sacred" or valued.

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Alex's and other participants' stories were full of examples of valuing themselves, their identities, their roles and their work in horizontal environments or personal lives, even if those ways of being and doing were not appreciated by formal power structures. Yet it was interesting to hear how often people held themselves back from revealing elements of their identity that might not fit. Perhaps individuals build internal barriers based on imagined reactions. This final story from Alex shows the power of taking a chance.

- Leaders work to integrated multiple identities.

Among all of Alex's integration stories, I found her last one the most powerful. Perhaps this was because it came from later in her development and career with the U.S. Navy. Perhaps it was because of the passion with which she told it.

The last thing that happened before acquisition reform was that I was sent down to Georgia to be both a keynote and the lunchtime speaker. The message I was carrying was very bad. There was more pressure coming down the road in acquisition reform and this was for a military base for the marines: 500 people were to be there at that event, and another 5,000 contractors had set up booths.

On the way to Georgia everything went bad. My plane was late getting off the tarmac...I missed my connection...the checking equipment was broken...they lost my luggage...I couldn't get out till the next morning...I would pull out my speech and edit it again and again. When I finally arrived the next morning, technical problems prevented printing the updated speech.

An hour before the event, there's a crack of thunder and all the electricity goes out. So everybody in the event was holding the restroom doors open and making a living stream for people to get in and out of the restroom. Everyone is laughing.

One of the chaplains walks in to the main hall that is set up for lunch and says, 'let there be light.' Nothing happens so everybody is laughing, and then the lights come on and everybody starts applauding. So everybody is high; the energy is high, as you can imagine.

I'm preparing to speak and a guy gets up and he tells about my ordeal getting there, and now everybody is really laughing. They're being very, very entertained. The energy was so incredible in this place, so here was my response.

I said, 'I was confused when I was invited to be both the lunchtime speaker and the keynote because the keynote needs to deliver the message, and I indeed have an acquisition reform message, but the lunchtime speaker needs to entertain, so I'm going to entertain first.' This was the first time I ever did this. I took my glasses off, stood back and sang part of an aria. I hit a high note, they leapt to their feet, 500 people, and started applauding and screaming. I said, "When I was 12 years old I was the little boy in the third act of La Boheme, 'Follow Parpignol, Parpignol, Parpignol' [a toymaker], and in the final act as Mimi died in her muff I was wrapped into the curtain watching and said one day that's going to be me.' And 20 years later, I sang the role of Mimì on the stage of the Metropolitan Opera." So I said to them, "What was left for me but to become a senior executive with the Department of Navy?" And then I added, "I am here to tell you that each and every one of us is capable of

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incredible change,” and went right into my speech on acquisition reform. And for four hours after I finished that speech, people stayed in line to talk to me, to tell me their individual issues and problems and experiences. It was amazing, the first time I ever allowed myself to be a full person. I had shifted from one mode to the other for how many years, and this was the first time I brought them together. (MacGillivray, Forthcoming (2009), pp. 189-190)

SUMMARY

This study has been a preliminary exploration of how leaders, who are respected in both vertical and horizontal environments, work with concepts of boundary, edge or periphery in their internal management of multiple roles and identities. The theme of multiple roles and identities was identified as important by leaders in a larger study, but work with internal boundaries was not explored in depth. Many participants said that they strove to become more coherent and integrated in their work, which—by definition—spanned boundaries. Although all participants were highly respected, they varied in the degree to which they had achieved an ideally integrated state.

This paper focused on two participants: one actively working with this integration, and one who felt she had been successful in eventually achieving a satisfactorily integrative state. It compares their strategies for internal integration and identity management with strategies for work with external boundaries, which emerged during the larger study. I do not suggest that Alex’s specific strategies are ones that would be directly adoptable or effective for others, but her stories provide insights into how she worked within complex environments to make decisions that worked for her and for her workplaces and communities.

Based on that preliminary analysis, many strategies and intentions were used for both internal and external boundary work. This high level finding may be valuable for leaders in other fields. Many authors have written about connections between authenticity and effective leadership, so these shared strategies are not surprising. The data from interviews and observations in this particular study suggests that these individuals were not deliberately selecting strategies to act as role models as much as they were turning leadership outside-in to be personally effective and to engage others around them to be effective in their work with complex problems.

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