

BOUNDARY SPANNING LEADERSHIP

**SIX PRACTICES FOR SOLVING
PROBLEMS, DRIVING INNOVATION,
AND TRANSFORMING
ORGANIZATIONS**

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ISBN: 978-0-07-170158-7

MHID: 0-07-170158-3

The material in this eBook also appears in the print version of this title: ISBN: 978-0-07-163887-6, MHID: 0-07-163887-3.

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INTRODUCTION

On the seventy-ninth floor of International Financial Group's (IFG) global headquarters in New York City, *Paul Andrews* sits alone in a teleconference room. He has just wrapped up a meeting concerning one of IFG's most ambitious projects in years: to develop and deliver within six months a new financial service solution simultaneously across the Americas, Europe, and Asia. Minutes ago, faces and voices representing five functions, three levels of management, 11 countries, four suppliers, a customer panel, and seemingly every type of human diversity imaginable were rendered in nearly face-to-face precision across a wall-length screen.

Ambitious, talented, and experienced, IFG has identified the team members and partners as the right people to develop and deliver its innovative service, but at the moment, Paul wonders if his dream team can overcome the rifts and divides he observed during the meeting and how his leadership might enable better

collaboration. He jots down some thoughts about how the disparate groups are working together, both the positives and the negatives, and notes the root causes of his concern:

Negatives

Rift—lack of trust between upper and middle management.

Silos—R&D and operations not on same page. No respect.

Turf battle—jockeying suppliers. They feel like outsiders. No common purpose.

Generation gap—young team members love the cutting edge technology, but old timers feel threatened by it. Need safety to overcome threat.

Culture clash—Europe lacks buy-in. They think it's just another US HQ project of the month. Ownership lacking.

Positives

Partnership—Asia senior and middle management well coordinated. Shared vision.

Collaboration—marketing and sales well-linked. Lots of innovation potential.

Common ground—excellent feedback from customer panel. Clear on the type of solution they want us to deliver.

Engagement—willingness to share wide-ranging perspectives. Diversity seen as a strength.

Global mindset—high energy to develop global solution. Commitment toward cross-regional thinking.

As Paul assesses the team, he realizes that even in a world of vast collaborative potential, powerful and limiting boundaries surround us. At IFG and in organizations and communities like yours, boundaries separate people into groups of Us and Them. These boundaries—some temporary, some deeply rooted—are built around both vertical and horizontal structures as well as diverse stakeholder, demographic, and geographic groups. Ideally, our organizations and communities can harness the collaboration and innovation that come from wide-ranging expertise, diverse experiences, and varied identities. All too often, however, the boundaries are borders—barriers that limit, confine, and lead to wasteful conflicts and counterproductive divides.

The word *boundary* has two very different meanings.

bound-a-ry

1. something that indicates bounds or limits; a *border* or bounding line
2. Also called *frontier*. The location of the most advanced or newest activity in an area

—Random House Dictionary, 2009

In this book, we explore the notion that boundaries can be experienced in organizations and broader communities as two very different things. Boundaries may be borders that limit human potential, restrict creativity and innovation, and stifle necessary business and societal change. But boundaries also may represent frontiers: the location where the most advanced thinking and breakthrough possibilities reside. What explains the difference between limiting borders and limitless frontiers? In a word, leadership.

In navigating today's unfamiliar terrain, we are all challenged to think and act beyond the current borders that confine us, our teams, and our organizations as a whole. Developing innovative solutions requires reaching beyond present boundaries and seeking new frontiers at the nexus where groups collide, intersect, and link.

Like Paul at IFG, many of us—senior executives, directors, plant managers, community organizers—are at a loss about how to think and act in today's shifting leadership landscape. The challenges of boundaries call forth a need for new ways to bring groups together and, yes, new ways to practice leadership.

Boundary spanning leadership is composed of six practices for leading at the nexus between groups: buffering, reflecting,

connecting, mobilizing, weaving, and transforming. Through these practices you will be able to transform borders into new frontiers to solve problems, create innovative solutions, and evolve and transform your organization to thrive in a flat world.

In so doing, you will be rewarded with new possibilities and inspiring results, including the following:

- Increased organizational agility to respond to a dynamic marketplace
- Advanced cross-organizational innovation processes
- Achievement of mission-critical bottom-line results
- An engaged and empowered workplace at all levels
- Flexible, cross-functional learning capabilities to solve problems and adapt to change
- A welcoming, diverse, and inclusive organization that brings out everybody's best
- New abilities to work in deeper, more open relationships with customers
- Better-managed risks and rewards through enduring cross-sector partnerships
- Well-integrated merged or acquired organizations
- A more socially responsible organization
- Higher-performing virtual teams
- Global mindsets and cross-regional collaboration
- Improved capacity to create shared direction, alignment, and commitment throughout the organization

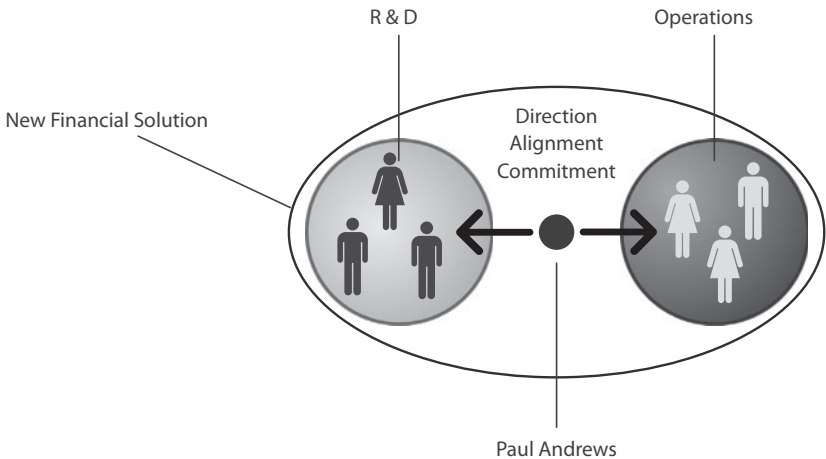
Realizing these and other inspiring results is not just an ideal but an essential business reality. A new approach to leading across

vertical, horizontal, stakeholder, demographic, and geographic boundaries is needed. We call this new approach boundary spanning leadership.

An Introduction to Boundary Spanning Leadership

Boundary spanning leadership is the ability to create direction, alignment, and commitment across boundaries in service of a higher vision or goal.^{1,2} By employing the six leadership practices, you create direction, alignment, and commitment between groups to achieve critical organizational outcomes. These practices reside within the interactions across groups, teams, functions, units, organizations, and broader communities. As a boundary spanning leader, your job is to build a bridge and your role within that job is to provide the space for these practices to occur. Figure I.1 shows an example.

Figure I.1 Boundary spanning leadership.



At IFG, Paul Andrews's task is to bring together multiple functional, regional, and stakeholder groups to develop a new financial service solution. A simplification of these relationships is illustrated in the figure. First, the diagram illustrates two groups, R&D and Operations (we left out all the other groups to keep things simple). Second, these groups need to collaborate to achieve a higher vision or goal: the creation of a new financial service. However, this won't be easy. These two functions operate as silos, with little respect or trust between them. To achieve the goal, Paul needs to span boundaries to create effective leadership across groups. In our research and practice at the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL), we define leadership in terms of accomplishing three outcomes:

- *Direction*: a shared understanding of common goals and strategy
- *Alignment*: the joint coordination of resources and activities
- *Commitment*: a commitment to collective success that is equal to or above the commitment to the unique success of any single group³

We hope you can appreciate the complexities of boundary spanning leadership in this simple example. In this case, generating increased direction, alignment, and commitment across two divergent functions—R&D and Operations—is challenging enough. Achieving that goal becomes even more daunting when you find yourself stuck in the middle of multiple groups and boundaries simultaneously. To put it bluntly, when you are leading in the middle between groups, the days of “I lead and you follow” are over. Gone are the days when leaders work *within* an intact group in which leaders and followers share a culture, values, and interests.

Instead, today you must lead *across* groups, at the juncture where wide-ranging experience, diverse expertise, and varied identities intersect. It is here at the intersection where two powerful human forces—differentiation and integration—collide that you can enact the six boundary spanning practices to catalyze collaboration, drive innovation, and transform your organization. Shortly, we describe more fully the six leadership practices you need to make that happen.

But first a few words about the organization of this book, a preview of what you'll find in these pages, and a model of boundary spanning leadership that pulls the main ideas together.

Book Overview

Part 1: The Forces That Pull Us Apart and Bring Us Together

The landscape beneath your feet is shifting dramatically. Advancing technology, changing global demographics, and expanding globalization are dismantling boundaries in organizations around the world rapidly. In Chapter 1, we explore how you will need to think and act differently across five types of boundaries: vertical, horizontal, stakeholder, demographic, and geographic. We'll also walk you through an activity to identify your own unique Nexus Challenge and return to it at points throughout the book as a means for you to apply the book's concepts to your own organization.

After providing an orientation to the five types of boundaries found in today's landscape, we focus on you and your unique identity as a leader in Chapter 2. You'll have a chance to “map” your identity: the unique attributes, characteristics, skills, and interests

that make you *you*. You'll come to see how identities are formed out of the interplay between two fundamental, universal, and powerful human forces: the need for differentiation, divergence, and uniqueness and the need for integration, convergence, and belonging. This most basic of human needs to establish a positive identity—to simultaneously belong and to be unique—provides the science on which the ideas in this book are based.⁴

In Chapter 3, we apply what you learned about identity to demonstrate the unfortunate but all too real potential for destructive Great Divides—*the limited and counterproductive outcomes that occur when groups divide into Us and Them*. As technical and structural boundaries are dismantled in an “ever-flattening” world, the boundaries that remain in human relationships paradoxically become sharper and more jagged. The boundaries that matter most today are psychological and emotional rather than organizational and structural. Great Divides between Us and Them are about identity: our core values, how we define ourselves, and our beliefs concerning how we fit within our social world. Paul Andrews didn't attribute the root cause of the rifts and divides he observed in his team to systems, structures, or technology. He attributed them to the deeper dynamics found in human relationships: lack of trust, no respect, no common purpose, the need for safety to overcome threat, lack of ownership. There's no quick fix or technical solution for any of these problems: They address not *what* people do or *how* they do it but *who* they are.

To bridge, span, and reach across such complex boundaries in human relationships, you must learn to do three things: manage boundaries, forge common ground, and discover new frontiers. This is the core of the book and our focus in Parts 2, 3, and 4.

Part 2: Managing Boundaries

A boundary demarcates where one thing stops and another starts. To manage boundaries is to define and understand what differentiates groups. Ultimately, this book is about how you can bring groups together to achieve inspiring results. The first step to spanning boundaries is, ironically, to create or strengthen them. You must be able to see group boundaries clearly before you can bridge them. In Part 2, we describe the two practices—buffering and reflecting—that enable you to manage the boundaries between groups.

The practice of *buffering* involves defining boundaries to create safety between groups. Buffers monitor and protect the flow of information and resources across boundaries. To see buffering in action, we will visit South Africa in Chapter 4 and learn how Joe Pettit and Zanele Moyo worked together to manage the boundary that still exists between blacks and whites in a postapartheid organization.

Once groups have achieved a state of safety between them, the next practice, *reflecting*, involves understanding boundaries to foster intergroup respect. Reflectors represent distinct perspectives and facilitate knowledge exchange across groups. In Chapter 5, we'll go to Chatham County, North Carolina, to witness the incredible transformation that occurred within Rick Givens and ultimately within the community he led. Through his own inner journey, Givens used the practice of reflecting to become a boundary spanning leader.

What if your organization and your broader community were places of unconditional positive regard, psychological safety, and mutual respect across vertical, horizontal, stakeholder, demographic, and geographic boundaries? What new opportunities would arise? With this foundation in place, you are ready to move

forward and upward, to go beyond managing boundaries and toward forging common ground.

Part 3: Forging Common Ground

Common ground represents what is universal and shared. To forge common ground is to bring groups together to achieve a larger purpose. Recall that the human need for uniqueness is balanced by an equally powerful need for belonging. In Part 3, we describe two practices—connecting and mobilizing—that enable you to tap into the human need to be part of something larger than yourself.

The practice of *connecting* involves suspending boundaries to build trust between groups. Connectors link people and bridge divided groups across boundaries. To witness connecting in action, we'll go to Europe in Chapter 6 and see how Daniel Sutton successfully led a cross-sector task force by building trust across three divergent groups—energy executives, environmentalists, and government leaders—to develop a new, more sustainable plan for their city.

Once the boundaries between groups fade into the background, the next practice, *mobilizing*, involves reframing boundaries to develop intergroup community. Mobilizers craft common purpose and shared identity across boundaries. History was made in 2005 when the Chinese computer company Lenovo announced that it had purchased IBM's global personal computer operation. In Chapter 7, we'll learn how leaders at Lenovo are bridging boundaries between East and West by building community in their quest to create the world's most innovative PCs.

What if your organization and broader community were places of mutual trust, community, and collective action where groups

collaborated skillfully across vertical and horizontal structures, along with disparate stakeholder, demographic, and geographic groups? What new avenues for creativity and innovation would come into view? Connecting and mobilizing are the next practices in boundary spanning leadership. You are now ready to go further yet, moving beyond forging common ground to discovering new frontiers.

Part 4: Discovering New Frontiers

A frontier is a place of emergent possibility. It represents the outer limits, the location where the most advanced and breakthrough thinking resides. The frontier is where both of the powerful human forces—differentiation and integration—intersect in transformative new ways. In Part 4, we explore the final two practices—weaving and transforming—that enable you to discover new frontiers where similarities and differences meet.

Weaving occurs when boundaries are interlaced in new ways to advance intergroup interdependence. Weavers draw out and integrate group differences within a larger whole. In Chapter 8, we'll travel to India to observe how the CEO of the nonprofit organization Child Relief and You (CRY) used the practice of weaving to lead a wildly successful strategic change in support of the organization's mission.

Once groups have achieved a state of interdependence, the final practice, *transforming*, involves cross-cutting boundaries to enable intergroup reinvention. Transformers bring multiple groups together in new directions to realize emergent possibilities. The issue of energy sustainability represents perhaps the most critical boundary spanning dilemma of our time. In Chapter 9, we'll see how Mark Gerzon, one of the world's foremost authorities on

intergroup leadership, is cross-cutting boundaries to create an alternative future that is distinctly different from the present.

What if your organization and broader community were places of interdependent collaboration, collective learning, and positively transformative change? What alternative futures could be created to thrive and adapt in an ever-changing world?

Part 5: The Nexus Effect

In the final section of the book, we bring all the pieces together. In Chapter 10, we encourage you to put the ideas in this book into action. We'll do this by sharing the remarkable story of John Herrera and by illustrating the Nexus Effect: *the limitless possibilities and inspiring results that groups can realize together above and beyond what they can achieve on their own*. You'll see how John was able to tap into the power of the Nexus Effect by using the six boundary spanning leadership practices to create the Latino Community Credit Union, the fastest-growing credit union in the country. It has far exceeded anyone's expectations, but it took a collective vision and the collaborative effort of many community leaders working across boundaries to make it happen.

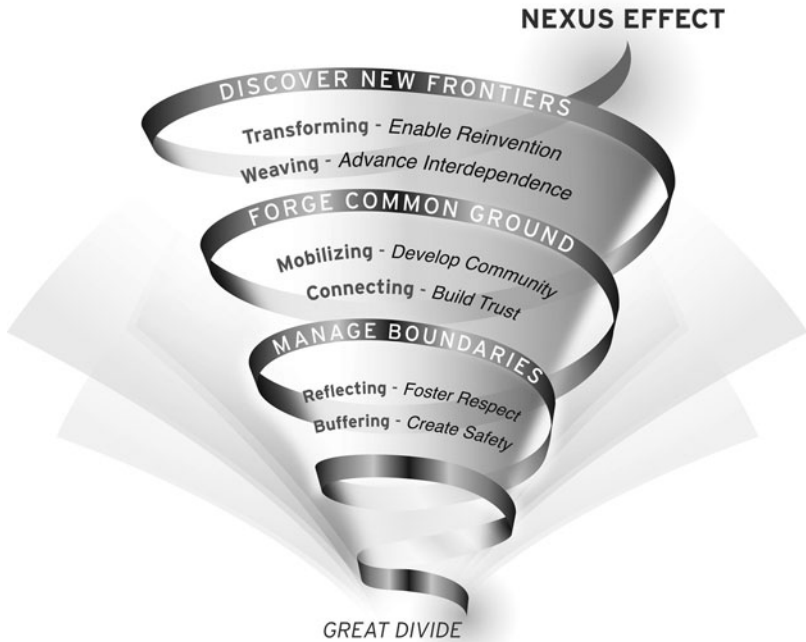
Finally, in the Epilogue we take a look ahead. Through tremendous advances in communication and transportation technologies, the scale of human interaction now encompasses the globe. Yet it is also true that our potential for collaboration remains largely unrealized. The real-world stories throughout this book are regrettably the exception rather than the rule; they are about ordinary leaders achieving extraordinary things at the nexus between groups. In the Epilogue, we return to their stories one final time to consider the possibilities for a more interdependent, collaborative future.

We welcome you to the book and the exciting places we'll go. To navigate today's shifting leadership landscape, there's never been a more urgent need for boundary spanning leadership.

Boundary Spanning Leadership Model

By using six boundary spanning practices, leaders can transform the limited and counterproductive outcomes of a Great Divide into the limitless possibilities and inspiring results of the Nexus Effect. The boundary spanning model shown in Figure I.2 illustrates the upward

Figure I.2 The six practices of boundary spanning leadership.



spiral leaders must travel to increase intergroup collaboration. This spiral depicts how leaders progress from managing boundaries, to forging common ground, to discovering new frontiers at the nexus between groups. Through the six boundary spanning practices, leaders create a Nexus Effect to solve problems, create innovative solutions, and transform their organizations.