Working Across Boundaries: Barriers, Enablers, Tensions and Puzzles

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Introduction

The notion of working across boundaries continues to receive attention from scholars and practitioners of public policy, administration and management. In recent times, much emphasis has been placed on notions of inter-organisational, inter-jurisdictional and inter-sectoral working and a range of terms have emerged to capture this phenomenon: horizontal coordination, joined-up government, collaboration, whole-of-government, holistic government, collaborative governance and so on. However, there is a core element that binds these various manifestations – the notion that we must traverse *boundaries* to achieve goals.

Most of the post-New Public Management (NPM) models which have emerged over the last decade or so have put the notion of working across boundaries front-and-centre: the New Public Service model articulated by Denhardt and Denhardt (2000) focuses on collaborative structures and shared leadership; the New Public Governance model set out by Osborne (2006) includes a notion of inter-organisational management, inter-dependent agents and on-going relationships; there is a strong relational, collaborative thread through the Public Value Management approach articulated by Stoker (2006); and Halligan's (2007) work on Integrated Governance demonstrates that new models of governing place horizontal collaborative, boundary-spanning ways of operating at their centre. Indeed Kelman (2007) has argued that the topics of collaboration across government agencies ('connect the dots') and between government, private and non-government organisations (networks, or collaborative governance) are the "most-discussed questions involving the performance of public institutions and achievement of public purposes (p.45).

In this paper we provide a synoptic overview of the literature on working across boundaries as a means of ordering the field on four key questions. First, *what* do we mean by the notion of working across boundaries? Second, *why* has this emerged – what is the imperative for this phenomenon? Third, *what* does working across boundaries involve – what are the forms and configurations? And, finally we identify a series of critical enablers and barriers which help us to understand *how* this works (or not). In doing so, we seek to open up a discussion on the enduring puzzles and tensions as they relate to working across boundaries.

Working Across Boundaries: What?

Boundaries separate, demarcate and define the line between that which is included and that which is excluded. In relation to our interests it makes sense to focus on organisational boundaries initially. Differentiating between organisational members and those that are not, enables observers to draw a clear boundary around an organisation and identify the outer bounds of formal authority (Aldrich and Herker, 1977). In addition to organisational boundaries we are also interested in policy boundaries as these demarcate and create enclaves: health, education and urban development all represent bounded policy domains. Further we are interested in jurisdictional boundaries, those which are built into our system of government by our political structures and systems. Finally, we are interested in sectoral boundaries – public, private, non-profit – all are distinct with various ways of operating, underpinning philosophies, and aims.[1]

Boundaries are complex, constructed entities that we use to understand behaviour and groupings, and an area of much contention. Defining a specific boundary occurs within a conceptual and empirical context (Aldrich and Herker, 1977). There is considerable debate as to whether boundaries are "real", "objective" or "imagined". Heracleous (2004), for example distinguishes between boundaries in the mind (akin to symbolic boundaries) and objective, more formally articulated, boundaries. Others distinguish between symbolic and social boundaries. *Symbolic boundaries* are "conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space" (Lamont and Molnar, 2002:168). These operate at the inter-subjective level and operate to separate people into groups. Such symbolic boundaries have profound effects in how we understand the formation and perpetuation of social boundaries (Heracleous, 2004).

Social boundaries "are objectified forms of social differences" which create patterns of association and structure social interactions, and manifest as groupings of individuals (Lamont and Molnar, 2002:168). The notion of boundaries attracts attention because it focuses us on *relationality*: "the fundamental relational processes at work across a wide range of social phenomena, institutions, and locations" (Lamont and Molnar, 2002:169). Indeed Heracleous (2004) argues that the framing of boundaries as relational processes has long been at the centre of social sciences. Thus, boundaries are critical for understanding and framing a range of issues – separation, exclusion, communication, exchange, and inclusion (Lamont and Molnar, 2002). And boundary properties are also of interest – how rigid or permeable are they? Are they durable over time? How are they created, bridged, traversed, or dissolved? (Lamont and Molnar, 2002). Such aspects are what make the concept of boundaries of interest to scholars and practitioners of public policy, administration and management.

We can also conceive of knowledge boundaries or interfaces for knowledge production (Lamont and Molnar, 2002). Here we can consider three distinct approaches (Carlile, 2002). First a *syntactic* approach which relates to the existence of a shared syntax at the boundary (i.e. codes, models) which allows accurate communication between sender and receiver. This syntax is effective as it has already been agreed to in advance. Second, a *semantic* approach recognises that even where there is common syntax, how this is interpreted created differences making

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[1] There are also other ways of thinking about boundary issue – for example it is appropriate to consider the boundaries between strategy/policy and implementation (Williams, 2002).

communication and collaboration challenging. Different meanings of common syntax develop in different functional settings or "thought worlds". Effective communication across depends on processes for translating and learning about inherent differences (e.g. standardized forms). Third, a *pragmatic* approach recognizes that knowledge is localized, embedded and invested in practice. The major cross-boundary challenge moves beyond the notion that communication is difficult and towards the notion of dealing with the consequences for individuals as they have to learn new knowledge, question old knowledge and transform. Effective communication and action across boundaries therefore relies on the development of integrating devices that seek to transform knowledge. It is this approach which helps us to understand why knowledge is seen both as a source of innovation and a major barrier to innovation.

Thus boundaries can by physical, social or mental; they act as "metaphors of containment" and as a means of determining who is in or out (Heracleous, 2004: 100-101). Boundaries appear in a range of conceptual discussions – in systems theories, for example, boundaries demarcate an organisation from its environment and we talk of open or closed systems; in approaches such as transaction cost economics the boundaries of the firm are determined by a focus on economizing on transaction costs; in management studies boundaries are often barriers to organisational effectiveness (Heracleous, 2004).

As the issue of boundaries continued to occupy practitioners and scholars in a range of areas Pollitt (2003) notes it is too easy in the current debate and focus on working across boundaries to assume that they are "a symptom of obsolescent thinking" (p.39). However, boundaries play an important role in ordering domains and understanding. Designing organisations, for example, requires the drawing of boundaries and there are multiple principles for doing so. It is common to design for *purpose* where all those from different functions, but focused on a common purpose come together (e.g. development of specific regulations); by *process* or *function* where experts are separated into functional units (e.g. accountants, lawyers, marketing); by *clientele* where all those dealing with the same clientele are brought together (e.g. children's services or Indigenous services); or by *place* where all those who deal with a specific geographical area are organised together (e.g. region, town). (Kelman, 2007:46 drawing on Gulick, 1937). Any design decision inevitably creates challenges of coordination because any task naturally contains pieces of each principle. Thereby, any departmentalisation creates a coordination challenge, even if it is required. Pollitt (2003) also reminds us that the coordination and policy and administration are an enduring challenge. Indeed, creating new modes for operating across boundaries in itself creates new ones which privilege particular ways of seeing the world and defining the focus of effort. Thus we may create boundaries around problems, places, or people.

Heracleous (2004) identifies three theories to assist in studying boundaries. First, a strategic choice approach which sees organisations and environments as interrelated, not separate, with a shifting and dynamic relationship. Second, a negotiated order approach which views social order as continually negotiated and renegotiated through communicative actions, within a context of existing structural arrangements which are themselves the outcomes of prior negotiations. Third, structuration theory which "emphasizes that what appears as stable, institutionalized structures both inside and outside the organization are in fact the consequences of recurrent patterns of actions

… and are thus subject to re-definition if these patterns and schemes change" (Heracleous, 2004:101).

Boundaries matter because most public sector relationships can be conceived of as crossing boundaries, which raises distinctive challenges: "Coordination across boundaries is more difficult than within them. Different sets of rules tend to evolve independently in different domains" (March and Olsen, 1989: 26). The actors on different sides of the boundary often bring distinctive values and goals to the relationship. How different will depend on whether they are both located within the public sector, different sectors or the political and bureaucratic realms.

We have provided an overview of the notions of boundaries, and next we put some broad stakes in the ground related to *what* the notion of working across these means in a policy, administration and management sense. Once we focus on boundaries then the notion of working across boundaries encompasses myriad possibilities. In this paper we specifically focus on what happens *within* government, but acknowledge the importance on developments across sectoral boundaries as well – largely captured by developed in public-private partnerships, government contracting, networks, and co-production. Here we identify some key themes related to question of "what do you mean by working across boundaries", in a later section we focus in some more detail on the forms, dimensions, and configurations.

Whether we decide to organise on a principle of purpose, function, clientele or place – each with their advantages and disadvantages - we create boundaries. Regardless of the principle of on which we organise our cross-boundary activity we create additional boundaries and coordination challenges (Kelman, 2007) which we then design mechanism to address. A range of modes of operating or mechanisms are identified and discussed in the literature creating a fairly messy and ambiguous field. There is no clarity and hear we point to a range of ways in which the boundary issue manifests in different settings.

There are many variants, but all have in common a focus on working across boundaries – organisational, sectoral, and jurisdictional. As Williams (2002) noted, "[s]trategic alliances, joint working arrangements, networks, partnerships and many other forms of collaboration across sectoral and organizational boundaries currently proliferate across the policy landscape" (p. 103). In the US, the challenge of working across boundaries is linked to collaborative public management (Christensen and Laegreid, 2007). Joined-up government also emerged as a popular or possible umbrella, term which described a group of responses to the problem of increased fragmentation of the public sector and public services and a wish to increase integration, coordination and capacity (Ling, 2002). In the UK joined-up government (JUG) was the mantra of the 1990s under the Blair government, and joined-up *management* emerged in the late 1990s (Parston and Timmins, 1998). JUG sought to "achieve horizontally and vertically co-ordinated thinking and action" (Pollitt, 2003:35) and represented a stark contrast to notions of departmentalism and vertical silos (Christensen and Laegreid, 2007). In Australia there has been much focus on the notion of 'whole of government' models – formally cross-portfolio approaches at the Commonwealth level, but in practice a range of experiments with working across

various boundaries (organisational, jurisdictional and sectoral). This term was also picked up by Christensen and Laegreid (2007) who argue that joined-up government had, over time, developed into whole of government approach. They also point to notions of collaborative public management, horizontal and holistic government.

So how might we order this diffuse and confusing domain? There are a range of dimensions that could be applied to categorise forms (set out in more detail in the next section). Donahue (2004) uses eight when examining collaborative governance; however these are readily applicable to broader notions of working across boundaries.

- *Formality* – does the arrangement operate formally (i.e. through contracts) or informally through informal agreements or understandings?
- *Duration* – is the arrangement permanent, ad hoc, somewhere in between?
- *Focus* – is the arrangement narrowly focused on a specific task or challenge, or broader to encompass a range of issues and challenges?
- *Institutional diversity* – public, private, non-profit? How diverse are the group of actors in the arrangement?
- *Valence* – what is the number of distinct players involved in the arrangement? What is the minimum and maximum within which we can consider these to be something unique versus a norm of governing?
- *Stability versus Volatility* – do the members share a normative view of successful governance or do interests diverge?
- *Initiative* - which actors initiated the arrangement? Who is leveraging whom? Who defines goals, assesses results, and triggers adjustments?
- *Problem-driven versus Opportunity-driven* – is the arrangement defensive (i.e. constructed to solve a joint threat, or offensive (i.e. designed to pursue a shared opportunity)?

Working Across boundaries: Why?

In the previous section we gave a broad overview of *what* we mean by boundaries and working across them. In this section we provide a synoptic overview of the imperative for this – the *why* component of our paper. Boundaries clearly demarcate and separate and therefore boundary construction process – symbolic, social, formal and informal - has, as it corollary, methods, models and attempts to traverse these boundaries. This is inevitable in any process of organising be it organisational, political or sectoral. In this section we point to six main imperatives that we have identified in the literature.

Working across boundaries as modus operandi

There is a strong thread from some quarters that working across boundaries represents *the* modus operandi of governing for the 21st century. Perhaps the strongest assertion of this comes from Cortada and colleagues (2008), who argued that governments must develop 'perpetual collaboration' capabilities that cut across boundaries to cope with looming challenges of the 21st century: "More connectedness and cooperation is needed than ever before: across agencies, across governments, and with more constituencies" (Cortada et al, 2008:2). Others have argued that "the future belongs to those who collaborate" (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2007:4), and that "the fundamental performance improvement challenge facing government today is for leaders to achieve results by creating collaborative efforts that reach across agencies, across levels of government, and across the public, nonprofit, and private sectors" (Abramson, Breul and Kamensky, 2006:22). Such an approach fits with the post-NPM models (mentioned earlier) that emerged over the last decade or so. However, claims

such as those above are fairly vague and aspirational. In fact, they tend to attach to a collection of more substantive issues considered below.

Working across boundaries as enduring issue of coordination and organisation
If we conceive of working across boundaries from this perspective then it is, in the end, nothing new. More than three decades ago, Schermerhorn (1975) argued that inter-agency cooperation was developing as a panacea for the coordination gap which existed in social services; and Perri 6 (1997) argues that from the beginning of the 20th century ministers in the UK have been arguing that more inter-departmental working was needed, often triggering grand reform plans. The cause of these coordination and organisation issues is multi-faceted, and here we point to some of the most important. There are multiple ways to organise: by *purpose* where all those from different functions, but focused on a common purpose come together (e.g. development of specific regulations); by *process* or *function* where experts are separated into functional units (e.g. accountants, lawyers, marketing); by *clientele* where all those dealing with the same clientele are brought together (e.g. children's services or Indigenous services); or by *place* where all those who deal with a specific geographical area are organised together (e.g. region, town). (Kelman, 2007:46) Any one of these inevitably creates challenges of coordination because any task naturally contains pieces of each. Thereby, any departmentalisation creates a coordination challenge. Kelman (2007) noted that the modern focus on collaboration *inside* government is an attempt to deal with the "inevitable tensions and trade-offs among different organization-design departmentalization decisions" (p.46).

Ling (2002) argues that JUG emerged a means of dealing with the problems caused by functional separation. Because the goals of public policy cross boundaries, JUG was a means of connecting up the different parts of the system that were connected to these goals. JUG, he argued, aimed "to coordinate activities across organizational boundaries without removing the boundaries themselves. These boundaries are inter-departmental, central-local, and sectoral (corporate, public, voluntary/community)" (Ling, 2002:616).

Perri 6 (1997) notes that whilst there has been a historic focus on the issue of working across boundaries, most attempts in the UK have failed because they have not addressed the primary cause – functionalism. This has, he argues, continued to stymie horizontal integration. Connected to this are the power and control structures that emerge from functionalism and hierarchy, built on the "virtues of rationality, professionalism and compartmentalism", which block attempts at more postmodern organisations forms and focus on building inter-organisational capacity (Williams, 2002:105). Whilst functionalism remains, therefore, the central issue of coordination and organisation will remain. However, it is important to note that whatever the organising principle, boundaries are created which require coordination issues.

Working across boundaries as corrective to recent disaggregation and fragmentation
Whilst some argue that the focus on working across boundaries is nothing new because it reflects the enduring problem on coordination, others claim that there is something new about this trend. Whilst coordination issues themselves have always existed there are claims that the imperative for working across boundaries comes from the dysfunctions of reforms under the NPM banner; that is, disaggregation and fragmentation within the system. Working across boundaries then is a corrective

device to swing the pendulum back towards more coordination, especially within the governmental system. There were, of course, major developments in cross-boundary working which emerged here under contracting out which drove cross-sectoral working and which clearly demonstrated that government's would work across boundaries. Public administration reforms, however, disaggregated and fragmented administrative systems, whilst at the same time increasing inter-sectoral boundary crossing.

There has been ample debate about the nature, content, effects and aims of NPM and it is not the purpose of this paper to revisit them. The important point is that in assessing these reforms and focusing on working across boundaries, there has been arguments made that reforms produced incentives for intra-organisational focus, not inter-organisational. In the UK context, for example, Ling (2002) has argued that reforms of the 1980s produced an environment where incentive structures prioritised the achievement of organisational aims over broader system-wide aims, and undermined horizontal working. Christensen and Laegreid (2007) agree, arguing that performance management systems which took hold under the banner of NPM focus attention away from horizontal issues. These cross-boundary approaches then developed as a response to negative effects of disaggregation and fragmentation and a means of enhancing coordination and integration. Halligan, Buick and O'Flynn (forthcoming) put forward a similar argument, noting that, in part, the imperative for these joined-up cross-country approaches have emerged as a reaction to disaggregation trends which produced specialised agencies, and the increasing involvement of a range of parties in the practice of governing. They also point to the effects of devolution on fragmentation and disaggregation, a point also made by the Management Advisory Committee (2004) in Australia: "devolution of authority to agency heads and a clear vertical accountability for agency outcomes may make collaboration across organisational boundaries more difficult" (p.6).

Working across boundaries as response to complexity
Another imperative derives from the notion that working across boundaries is the only possibility for addressing complex problems of public policy; some old and some new; or increasingly complexity in the strategic operating environment. This has been an especially strong thread in the literature, both scholarly and practitioner.

Some writers focus on broad drivers reshaping the strategic environment; Cortada et al (2008) is a good example of this. They identify six drivers shaping societies and government - changing demographics, accelerating globalisation, rising environmental concerns, evolving social relationships, growing threats to social stability and order, and the expanding impact of technology - which "demand" custom-designed, cross-cutting, approaches to government. This make collaboration "the ultimate capability that governments need and it will form the foundation of strategies necessary for coping with these drivers" (p.2).

A substantial group of writers point to the complex nature of problems and challenges faced by government as the driving force for the focus on working across boundaries. Williams (2002) argues that these are problems that disrespect boundaries, which "bridge and permeate jurisdictional, organizational, functional, professional and generational boundaries" (p.104). These are problems "capable of metamorphosis and of becoming entangled in a web of other problems creating a kind of dense and

complicated policy swamp" (p.104). A catalogue of problems with such characteristics is identified in the literature – pollution, drugs, terrorism, health care, urban sprawl, avian flu, natural disaster (Christensen and Laegreid. 2007; Linden, 2002). In some sense these are the potentially "wicked" problems identified by Rittel and Webber (1971), and which many authors have connected to the imperative for cross-boundary working. Talbot and Johnson (2007), for example, discuss JUG as a means of coordinating to address wicked issues that "fall between traditional structures" (2007:58). And, Jackson and Stainsby (2000) have also noted the need for coordinated effort across boundaries to address these wicked issues. It also raises the question of whether, given this complexity, the state has the capacity, by itself, to deliver on public policy goals (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002).

Given that these problems disrespect boundaries, many have now written on the need for working across boundaries to confront them; indeed this has become somewhat of a panacea for this complexity. Bryson, Crosby and Middleton Snow (2006), argued that collaboration had emerged as *the* way to address complex problems. Linden (2002), for example, argues that

  "… the answers will not be found within any one unit, agency or discipline. When we fully recognize this reality and organize ourselves to work across boundaries, we will be able to provide integrated solutions to the complex problems facing us. The public deserves no less. And the stakes have never been higher" (p. 6).

Many official documents from government have been in a similar vein: In the UK the *Our Healthier Nation* report noted that "Connected problems require joined-up solutions" (cited in Parston and Timmins, 1998:4); in Australia the *Tackling Wicked Problems* (2007) report advocated a cross-boundary approach specifically to address complex problems.

Working across boundaries to realise synergies or leverage capabilities
Another rationale for working across boundaries comes from the synergies that may be realised by working with other organisations, sectors or levels of government. Pollitt (2003), for example, argues that there may be synergies from bringing together key stakeholders in a specific area of policy or within a network, or from improving the exchange of information between them. Kelman (2007) argues that interorganisational collaboration between *sectors* is premised on the idea that organisations outside of government hold resources, capacity or legitimacy that can help address policy problems; using collaboration to leverage these enables synergies to emerge. Similar points are made by Cortada et al (2008): "It is intended to leverage available capabilities across all facets of a society, not just within the governmental environment" (p. 7), and also by Entwistle and Martin (2005).

Working across boundaries for efficiency, effectiveness, service
Another strand in the literature focuses on working across boundaries to improve facts such as effectiveness, efficiency and service delivery. JUG, for example, has been seen as a means of making better use of scarce resources (efficiency), eliminating duplication of removing contradiction and tensions between policies across government (effectiveness) and bringing together a range of services for citizens (Pollitt, 2003). Entwistle and Martin (2005) also point to the service issue, arguing

that more collaborative approaches might transform service systems. The more general collaboration literature points to a range of reasons to traverse boundaries which are relevant here, such as pooling resources, leveraging new ones, or reducing transaction costs (see O'Flynn, 2008 for a discussion).

Working Across Boundaries: Forms and Configurations

When we delve into the broad and expansive literature on cross-boundary forms a veritable catalogue emerges– overlapping, and amorphous terms abound. There has been a lot of typologising, but considerable ambiguity remains in the literature which relates to working across boundaries. Here we point to several approaches. In the end all deal with ways of working together or engagement strategies that traverse boundaries. There are a range of descriptors – Christensen and Laegreid (2007) talk of the development of joined-up government into whole-of-government, of collaborative public management, of horizontal and holistic government. There are many variants, but all have in common a focus on working across boundaries – organisational, sectoral, and jurisdictional.

Working across boundaries has many forms, and whilst collaboration is seen as critical to these, there are, in fact, a range of modes for enacting this including contracting which is not focused on collaboration, but can involve purchased cooperation, or demanded engagement via legitimate authority (i.e. the power of the state). All of these are modes of cross-boundary working which are deployed in practice (see Hardy, Phillips and Lawrence, 2003 for an excellent discussion)[2].

Working across boundaries: some general typologies
When we look at the broader literature we can identify typologies of cross-boundary working. A useful one comes from Mattessich and Monsey (1992) who point to three different models of working together. *Cooperation* is described as an informal relationship without common mission where information is shared on an as needed basis, authority remains with each organisation, there is little (or zero) risk, and resources and rewards are kept separate. *Coordination* is seen as more formal and there are compatible missions which require some common planning and more formal communication channels. Whilst each organisation retains authority, risk enters the equation. *Collaboration* is a more 'durable and pervasive relationship' (p. 39) which involves creating new structures within which to embed authority, developing a common mission, engaging in comprehensive and shared planning, and formal communication across multiple levels occurs. Collaboration includes pooling and jointly acquiring resources, sharing reward, but also increased risk.

A similar approach is suggested by Himmelman (2002) who identifies four common strategies for working together each representing a unique inter-organisational linkage, requiring different commitments of trust, time, and turf.[3] *Networking* is an informal relationship where information is exchanged for mutual benefit. Himmelman uses the example of an early childhood centre and a public health department

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[2] Kelman (2007, drawing on Salamon, 1981) picks up this point noting that most cross-boundary production occurs through contracting or indirect policy tools such as tax incentives or vouchers.
[3] The different strategies can also be considered as developmental stages, for example, a relationship may begin as coordination, but develop over time into cooperation.

exchanging information about their approaches to supporting early childhood development. *Coordinating*[4] involves a more formal linkage where information is exchanged and activities are altered in pursuit of mutual benefit and achievement of common purpose. Compared to networking it involves more time, higher trust, but little or no access to one another's turf. *Cooperating* involves an exchange of information, altering of activities and resource sharing for mutual benefit in pursuit of common purpose. Organisational commitments are higher, formal agreements may be used, and this linkage requires higher levels of time and trust vis-à-vis networking and coordinating. Each party will provide access to its turf. *Collaborating* is distinctive as it involves a willingness of the parties to enhance each others capacity - helping the other to 'be the best they can be' (p.3) - for mutual benefit and common purpose. In collaboration the parties share risks, responsibilities and rewards, they invest substantial time, have high levels of trust, and they share common turf.

Another interesting example is provided by Leat and colleagues (1999) in *Governing in the Round*. Eight different approaches for working together are identified, each reflecting higher degrees integration: taking into account; dialogue; joint project; joint venture; satellite; strategic alliance; union; merger.

Working across boundaries as collaboration
Collaboration has been defined as " a process in which organizations exchange information, alter activities, share resources, and enhance each other's capacity for mutual benefit and a common purpose by sharing risks, responsibilities, and rewards" (Himmelman, 2002:3). There has been some critical evaluation of the use of the term collaboration in government; O'Flynn (2009), for example, has argued that this has become a buzzword which describes a range of activity not much of which is rightfully labelled collaboration.

In the public policy world where terms such as collaborative governance - an "amalgam of public, private and, civil society organizations engaged in some joint effort (Donahue, 2004: 2) - are used, collaboration becomes a loose term. Others have used the term collaborative public management to describe a "process of facilitating and operating in multiorganizational arrangements" (McGuire, 2006:3). Collaboration itself becomes a fairly elastic term, and the distinctiveness of it is lost. Collaboration is something more complex than simply working together; it involves sharing across a range of dimensions (e.g. goal setting, risk, reward, resource and culture), a more strategic nature, and autonomy (Head 2004, 2006; Axelrod, 1984, 1997, Economist Intelligence Unit, 2008).

Working across boundaries as joined-up government
One of the most popular descriptors of working across boundaries has been joined-up government (JUG). JUG developed from the UK into an umbrella term which described a range of ways of "aligning formally distinct organizations in pursuit of the objectives of the government of the day" (Ling, 2002:616). JUG captured a range of forms and dimensions: *new ways of working across organisations* (e.g. shard leadership, pooled budgets); *new ways of delivering services* (e.g. joint consultations,

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[4] The placement of cooperation and coordination differs in the typologies offered by Himmelman and Mattessich and Monsey, with Mattessich and Monsey placing coordinating before cooperating.

shared customer interface); *new accountabilities and incentives* (shared outcome targets; performance measures); and *new types of organisations joined in various ways* (e.g. training, culture, information, values) (Ling, 2002). Pollitt (2003) extends this somewhat and notes that joined-up approaches can be horizontal – across national government – or vertical, between layers of government; and also distinguishes between joined-up government (inter-agency arrangements) and joined-up governance (cross-sectoral arrangements) (Pollitt, 2003).

Working across boundaries as networks
There is an enormous literature on the notion of networks as a form of working across boundaries and it is not out intention here to summarise this. One useful typology which covers much of the terrain is provided by Abramson, Breul and Kamensky (2006). They identity four network forms that can act as cross-boundary mechanisms: *service implementation networks* which are intergovernmental programs; *information diffusion networks* which are networks for sharing information across boundaries; *problem solving networks* which set agendas related to important policy areas; and *community capacity building networks* built to develop social capital to enable communities to better address a range of problems.

Working across boundaries as whole of government
Another form of cross-boundary working which has emerged is that of whole of government. Christensen and Laegreid (2007) argued that whole of government was an extension of JUG; or more correctly that JUG had developed into a whole of government model over time. Christensen and Laegreid (2007) defined it quite broadly (as noted above), but it was interpreted in Australia early on as relating specifically to cross-portfolio working and pursuit of objectives which cross boundaries (Management Advisory Committee, 2004). However, this definition has stretched over time to include inter-organisational, inter-jurisdictional, and inter-sectoral working (Australian Public Service Commission, 2007).

Working Across Boundaries: (Some) Enablers and Barriers

In previous sections we have provided an overview of three main questions: what do we mean by 'working across boundaries'? Why has this approach emerged? And what does it involve? In this section we point to several important enablers and barriers of working across boundaries. This helps us to address the question of *how* this phenomenon works, or not. For us, many of these factors are both potential enablers and potential barriers so we will deal with in this way; but first we highlight some of the clusters of enablers that have been identified.

Clusters of enablers
Several writers have identified clusters of enablers to make different forms of working across boundaries effective. Ling argues that successful joining-up relies on aligning "organizations with different cultures, incentives, management systems and aims" (Ling, 2002:616). Linden (2004:5) pointed to a set of necessary but not sufficient conditions for collaborating across organisational boundaries: a shared purpose or goal that parties care about but can't achieve on their own; a desire (not a direction) to pursue a collaborative approach; having the right people at the table (i.e. those with the ability to speak for their organisation); an open, credible process for the principals

11

to use; and a champion for the initiative – someone with the clout and credibility who can make the collaboration a high level priority.

Writing specifically on JUG, Pollitt (2003) pointed to three "must-haves": *long-term* relationships to facilitate skill development, trust building, participation; a *selective* approach to ensure JUG is used where potential benefits outweigh risks and costs, or where issues are significant and specific; a *cooperative* approach, not imposed from the top. Bardach (1998) identified five main tasks for those designing inter-agency collaborations: developing a high quality operating system (flexible, accountable, performance-linked financial exchanges); acquiring resources; creating a steering process; and develop a culture of trust and joint-problem-solving. In his study of official guides to JUG, Ling (2002) pointed to five commonly cited requirements: goal-setting; accountability; networking and alliances; skills and learning; and time and money. In a summary of international experience, the Victorian State Services Authority identified five critical success factors: clearly defined, mutually agreed shared goals; systems to measure and evaluate progress toward the goals; sufficient and appropriate resources; strong leadership to direct relevant parties towards to goals; and a sense of shared responsibility (p.5). Drawing on a series of seminars with practitioners, Parston and Timmins (1998:29) identified a series of nine components required for joined-up management to work:

1. Those responsible for implementation should be involved in design;
2. The focus should be on outcomes, and they should be measurable;
3. Genuine feedback and communication is required for those working toward common outcomes;
4. Greater clarity on the role of government, what it can be expected to do, and what it expects from delivery agencies;
5. A consensus to operate, or 'break the rules' between public service organisations and government, with freedom to experiment and innovate to achieve agreed outcomes;
6. Explicit accountability and responsibility for delivery, ideally vested in an individual given power to deliver;
7. New incentive and reward structures, coupled with tolerance for failure and learning systems to avoid major problems;
8. Ongoing community consultation based on engagement, education and capacity-building;
9. Mechanisms for highlighting success, sharing good practice and to learn from mistakes – communities of practice.

Formal structures
There is no doubt that structures matter for working across boundaries. As discussed previously the enduring commitment that many governments have to arranging on the basis of function is seen to be a major impediment to more constructive cross-boundary working. In a major Australian government report (Australian Public Service Commission, 2007) it was noted that "existing public sector institutions and structures were, by and large, not designed with a primary goal of supporting collaborative inter-organisational work" (p.17). Perri 6 (1997) argues that this remains the major blockage because attempts to work against functionalism "cuts against the grain" and that "Few gain in career terms from questioning the interests of their

department. Few are promoted for cutting their own budgets. Few are thanked by their ministers for negotiating away any of their power" (Perri 6, 1997:22). He goes on to argue that functionalism pushes people into "departmental cages", "defensiveness about functional turf" (p.18-21). However, we also know that any other principle of organisational design will create new and different boundaries; boundaries do not disappear: "Simply removing barriers to cross-cutting working is not enough; more needs to be done if cross-cutting policy initiatives are to hold their own against purely departmental objectives" (Cabinet Office, 2000:5). Creating new structures can help in enabling more effective working across boundaries. Perri 6 (1997) discusses at length a range of organisational design principles that may enable governments to better deal with cross-cutting issues.

Commonality and complexity
An important enabler/barrier is commonality. With a sense of shared goals or outcomes, for example, working across boundaries can be enabled; a lack of commonality can undermine such attempts. Parston and Timmins (1998) argue that cross-boundary work needs agreement on what the problem or mischief is and also an outcomes-focus. Outcome agreement can then foster agreements on what each party will do to contribute to the achievement of them, including designing a range of outputs to feed into the outcomes. Much of the work on collaborative approaches highlights the importance of shared or common goals as an enabler of effective working across boundaries.

Commonality can sometimes be more easily engineered in times of crisis or when confronted with complexity (i.e. the wicked problems imperative). Lundin (2007) found that inter-organisational cooperation was both reasonable and beneficial in situations where there was significant task complexity. Conversely it was both costly and unhelpful when applied to simply tasks. Complex inter-organisational approaches should be contingent, not panacea-like. As Huxham (1996) has argued in relation to collaboration: "Most of what organizations strive to achieve is, and should be, done alone" (p.3). Head (2004) agrees: Selection of inappropriate structures and processes can be a recipe for frustration among participants, and ensures under-achievement of goals" (p.3). Put more succinctly: "don't work collaboratively unless you have to" (Huxham and Vangen, 2004:200). Applying collaborative approaches in the wrong setting may create long-term resistance to working across boundaries as it can incur major costs and effort for little return.

People, culture, and leadership
There is an expansive literature which considers the various aspects of working across boundaries which we might bring together under the heading of people and leadership. At some level we might consider that working across boundaries inevitably hinges on the people that carry out this cross-boundary work. The success (or otherwise) of working across boundaries is partially attributable to the individuals that are called on to operationalise these notions, their ability to collaborate across hard and soft structures. This 'people issue' then raises the question of what enablers and barriers are related. There is much written here – from the skills and competencies required, to the performance management systems constructed to assess them. Here we pick up on some of these points to highlight these points, rather than to address the core concerns.

Many terms have emerged for the individuals that enact working across boundaries: Many terms have emerged for this role; networkers, brokers, collaborators, civic entrepreneurs, boundroids, sparkplugs and collabronauts (Williams, 2002: 107). In describing the skills, competencies and behaviours of competent boundary-spanners, Williams (2002) set out several critical aspects that are bundled together: *building and sustaining relationships* (communicating and listening; understanding, empathizing and resolving conflict, personality style and trust); *managing through influencing and negotiation* (brokering solutions, diplomacy, persuasion, networking); *managing complexity and interdependencies* (making sense of structures and processes, appreciating connections and interrelationships, interorganisational experiences, transdiciplinary knowledge, cognitive capability); *managing roles, accountabilities and motivations* (managing multiple accountabilities). Such skills develop outside technical or knowledge-based expertise; successful boundary spanners "will build cultures of trust, improve levels of cognitive ability to understand complexity and be able to operate within non-hierarchical environments with dispersed configurations of power relationships" (Williams, 2002:106). Williams argues that even the most basic level, public servants are required to develop boundary-spanning skills to facilitate inter-agency cooperation. Others talk more broadly about the creation of boundary roles; those positioned on the boundary between an organisation and its environment which carry out functions related to information processing and external relations (Aldrich and Herker, 1977). Such roles may be a little more conservative to those set out by Williams (2002), yet they play a critical role in enabling or blocking cross-boundary working.

When public managers are encouraged, or required, to work across boundaries they must balance the risk of sharing the achievement, cost and risk of broader cross-boundary outcomes and being held to account for the narrower, more focused requirements of their own agency: "This requires visionary and daring approaches" (Parston and Timmins, 1998:23). Further, it is argued that to counter this risk a complex mix of rewards, incentives and freedom to achieve outcomes is required – again, pointing to recalibration of Human Resource Management (HRM) systems.

As well as being prime enablers of cross-boundary work, individuals face considerable challenges and barriers in attempting and undertaking this work. Membership of a single organisation creates identify and focus for individuals, whereas creating and sustaining commitment to cross-cutting and cross-boundary objectives may be more challenging (Centre for Management and Policy Studies, 2001 cited in Pollitt, 2003:39) Managing multiple memberships, for example, can pose a serious challenge for individuals and organisations. This can be "volatile, elusive or confusing" because "navigating in more than one world is a non-trivial mapping exercise. People resolve problems of marginality in a variety of ways" by passing on one side or another, denying one side, oscillating between worlds, or by forming a new social world composed of others like themselves" (Star and Griesemer, 1989:412). One way of addressing this is to rotate individuals who act in boundary roles to ensure ongoing commitment and integration (Aldrich and Herker, 1977); however this produces issues of continuing and stability in cross-boundary working.

Despite the wide recognition that specific skills and competencies are needed to facilitate these boundary-spanners there is a strong argument that these have not really been cultivated. Parston and Timmins (1998), for example, argue that in the UK there

has been little investment in building up the expertise required to fully realize JUG, despite general recognition it was needed. Further to this is the need to adapt organisational and HRM systems to select, train, appraise and reward for these skills (Pollitt, 2003). HRM systems which fail to adapt to these needs create powerful barriers to cross-boundary working. Parston and Timmins (1998) argued that there needs to be complex mixes of rewards, incentives and increased freedom to enable the achievement of outcomes – all of these factors rely heavily on HRM systems, organisational cultures and leadership.

The enabling (and blocking) potential of culture can also be considered here. It has been argued that major cultural change will be required if cross-boundary working is to be successful, partly to shift people away from a narrow, silo issues and objectives (Christensen and Laegreid, 2007; Management Advisory Committee, 2004). Partly this is because the pressures from functionalism are embedded and intense. Formal structural adaptation is not enough and attention must be placed on cultural change over time. Indeed, Osborne and Brown (2005) argued that informal aspects of organisations are often the greatest barrier to successful change programs (Osborne and Brown, 2005). Others argue that change programs can become 'stuck' if culture is not well understood; this means that there must be considerable effort invested in understanding the underlying assumptions held by people within the organization (Lawson and Ventriss, 1992; Schein, 1985). An understanding of public sector culture is important in working across boundaries and the ability to identify points of instability (i.e. lack of alignment between culture, processes and structure) can give great insight into what enables and blocks working across boundaries (see Hood, 1996).

Leadership, as fluid as it is, also emerges as a critical enabler and barrier in the literature. In the *Public Sector Leadership for the 21st Century* report by the OECD (2001), there was a strong claim that leaders needed the ability to address interconnected problems. Broussine (2003) made the call that in order to solve these complex problems, leaders had to be able to "initiate concerted action not only within their own organizations but among a set of stakeholders with different and competing interests" (p.175). Similar threads emerged from Luke's writing where he claimed that leaders had to "reach beyond their own boundaries and engage a much wider set of individuals, agencies and stakeholders" (1998:xiii), and others have noted that such approaches to working also increase risks for individuals (e.g. accountabilities, sharing achievements and costs) which "requires visionary and daring approaches" (Parston and Timmins, 1998:23). Leaders then are important in enabling cross-boundary work as they can provide the force for operating, and for leveraging resources across boundaries. Thus we can anticipate that poor leadership, or a lack of attention from leaders will provide a serious barrier to working across boundaries. Without the endorsement of those in powerful positions, cross-boundary work is undermined.

Power and politics
Power is, of course a critical issue and one that does not get as much attention as it deserves, particularly in the writing from public policy, administration and management. Working across boundaries may reshape power relations and this may pose a significant barrier to the ability to operationalise this mode of working. As Parston and Timmins (1998) argue, "[w]hile the ideal may be that people should not

care if their organisation is under threat, providing the desired outcomes are achieved, such selflessness will not be easy to achieve" (p.24). In part this is because working across boundaries has the potential to disrupt existing power bases and structures – political and administrative. In effect, this may mean that powerful actors must lend their support to working across boundaries to enable it to work. The counter argument is that these approaches should be cooperative, not mandated or imposed from the top (see Pollitt, 2003). Where this power is used, he argues it should be focused on steering and facilitating, negotiation and persuasion.

The issue of politics and power is linked. It is not hard to see how political endorsements and brokering can enable working across boundaries, or how the lack of it can create incredible barriers. Endorsement is a valuable currency, but as Pollitt (2003) has noted, to make cross-boundary working effect politicians will need to cede some of their traditional authority. Others have noted that "few are thanked by their ministers for negotiating away any of their power", even though this may be critical in enabling working across boundaries (Perri 6, 1997:22). It is politicians that often must break stalemates between competing objectives and feuding administrative groups (Pollitt, 2003), because the administrative machinery was not designed to be collective or collaborative (Wilkins, 2002). It's politicians' that give important signals to public servants about the importance of working across boundaries; they set the priority and signal to civil servants whether or not cross-cutting approaches are valuable (Pollitt, 2003). The challenge comes because ministers have their own turf and power to protect (see Perri 6, 1997), and also because the accountability issues that emerge from this approach may place them at risk either of not gaining kudos for successful outcomes, or for problems that emerge outside their control.

Performance, accountability and budgets
The question of how do assess and account for working across boundaries points us to another important set of potential barriers or enablers. If we consider performance systems first, it is clear that there are tensions between working across boundaries and the developments of the last decade or so which have focused agencies inward onto enhancing *their* achievement of targets and goals. Pollitt (2003) argues that unless these cross-cutting targets, targets that span boundaries are given equal weight (and reward) then they will not get the attention they need. Hence, a failure to reconfigure performance systems, both for individuals and for organisations will create powerful barriers to working across boundaries. Resetting these systems and restructuring incentives within then can better enable cross-boundary work.

Traditional accountability systems can also act as a major impediment to working across boundaries. Christensen and Laegreid (2007) point to accountability and risk management as central tensions: "how we can have WG joint action, common standards, and shared systems, on the one hand, and vertical accountability for individual agency performance, on the other" (p. 1063). A similar point is made by Edwards (2001) who questioned whether they multiple accountabilities and ambiguities in partnering approaches could be tolerated. A major Australian report on tackling wicked problems (Australian Public Service Commission, 2007) questioned whether there was a lack of compatibility between the existing accountability framework – structured around delivering on tightly specified program outputs and outcomes – and a model which seeks to work across boundaries.

Others argue that innovation and flexibility required for effective cross-boundary solutions are hampered by traditional accountability approaches. In part this comes back to functionalism and the inability to allocate risk and reward to encourage cross-boundary work: "How can we hold managers responsible for achieving collective results when they have little or no control over the partner agencies and citizens involved in co-productive delivery?" (Parston and Timmins, 1998:14). In his work on boundary spanners Williams (2002) found those that "slavishly or dogmatically ploughs a representative furrow in partnership arenas and, irritatingly, has to 'report back' everything to the home organization" were considered poor partners. He argued that more effective partners were those that could negotiate within parameters; those that had a good feel for what would be acceptable. Others have argued that accountability requirements need to be relaxed for cross-boundary working to be effective. What is needed here is freedom to break the rules to deliver outcomes – a "consensus to operate" – along with safeguards to identify problems (p.21). However, such ideas don't gel with traditional accountability approaches. Adapting some systems may work; Pollitt (2003) argues that formal agreements can underpin joined-up approaches (although this is not sufficient). On top of this cultures must adapt to a mixture of horizontal and vertical accountability, and external oversight bodies need to consider more complex accountability approaches (Pollitt, 2003).

A complementary area of importance is that of budgets. When we think about inter-organisational models budgets are (for the most part) hardwired into departmental silos and this means that budgets are attached to functions and programs, not outcomes (Perri 6, 1997). It has been argued that this traps departments in short-term ideas, annual spending rounds, and battles of maintaining resources (Perri 6, 1997). To overcome this major barrier and enable more cross-boundary working, some have suggested that budgets should be pooled in pursuit of broader outcomes (e.g. Wilkins, 2002). Perri 6 (1997), for example, has floated the idea of holistic budgets which are tied to outcomes or geographical areas, not functions or organisations. However, the accountability issue emerges here immediately – considerable readjustment of traditional approaches will be needed to accommodate such ideas. In part this is because pooling budgets and effort makes it difficult to own success or assign responsibility for failure.

Boundary objects
There is a fascinating literature which deals with boundary objects as a means of bridging the gap between parties. Effective boundary objects connect parties; they "provide a means of resolving the consequences that arise when different kinds of knowledge are dependent on each other" (Carlile, 2002:443), and they "are shared and shareable across different problem solving contexts" (Carlile, 2002:451). The "boundary" nature of an object is captured by its simultaneous concreteness and abstractness, its specificity and generality, and its customisation and conventionalism; they are often "internally heterogeneous" (Star and Griesemer, 1989:393). Star and Griesemer (1989) tell us that boundary objects have different meanings indifferent worlds, but that they act as a tool of translation, and they are critical to developing and maintaining coherence in intersecting worlds. Boundary objects may fit one of four types (Star and Griesemer, 1989): *repositories* – objects indexed in a standard fashion

or modularised to enable people from different worlds to adopt them for their use (i.e. a library); *ideal type* – an object which abstractly describes the details of something but which is adaptable (i.e. an atlas or diagram) and used for symbolic communication and cooperation; *coincident boundaries* – common objects with the same boundaries but different components cooperating across large geographic expanses. These create a common referent robust enough to enable different perspectives and local autonomy; *standardised form* - objects devised as a means of common communication across dispersed work groups. These objects produce standardised indexes and remove local uncertainties. Examining boundary objects provides another means of considering enablers and barriers, and creating different types of boundary objects can provide a means of working across boundaries more effectively.

A Concluding Call

Working across boundaries is not a new proposition; however the intensity with which it is now promoted as *modus operandi* for government is. In this paper we have provided a broad-brush overview of a series of four questions which are of interest to scholars and practitioners, and which can provide a baseline for our discussions in the panel sessions.

- First, *what* do we mean conceptually by working across boundaries?
- Second, *why* has the working across boundaries imperative emerged?
- Third, *what* does this actually involve?
- Fourth, what are the critical enablers and barriers in understanding *how* working across boundaries can work (or not)?

In doing this we make no claim to have covered the entire field, however we have provided a synoptic overview of key parts of it. In doing so we have sought to open up a discussion on the enduring puzzles and tensions as they relate to working across boundaries.

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