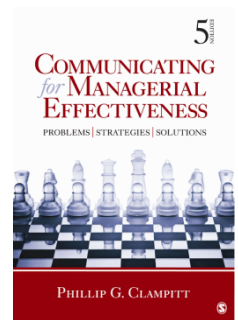


## Chapter 8: Communicating Across Organizational Boundaries

### Chapter Summary

Today's managers are involved in a variety of boundary-spanning activities: supervising units in different nations or cultures, negotiating agreements with offshore partners and working in cross-functional teams. Boundaries inherently create communication challenges that effective managers need to understand and master.



The chapter presents strategies and related tactics that help managers encourage more effective boundary spanning. Examples include: selecting and training the right people (e.g., creating awareness of one's personal culture and focusing on the communicative style of the other culture), implementing error correction processes (e.g., using quizzes and tracking organizational processes), encouraging activities that promote shared experiences (e.g., holding company-wide seminars, developing links between role counterparts) and integrating boundary spanning into the structure of the organization (e.g., supporting job switching and job shadowing, redesigning the physical environment).

### Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, you will be able to:

- describe the nature and potential problems of boundaries
- identify factors that accentuate the inherent problems with organizational boundaries
- identify strategies and related tactics that encourage more effective boundary spanning
- identify a boundary-spanning challenge in an organization and suggest a strategy to improve the situation

## Outline

- I. The Nature of Boundaries
- II. Potential Problems of Boundaries
  - A. Investment losses
  - B. Customer service failures
  - C. Unmotivated employees
- III. Contributing Factors
  - A. Language differences
  - B. Culture
  - C. Use of space
  - D. Structure of rewards and punishments
  - E. The arithmetic/geometric factor
- IV. What to Do?
  - A. Select and train the right people
    - 1. Create awareness of one's personal culture
    - 2. Focus on values and the communicative style of the other culture
    - 3. Foster an anthropological mindset
  - B. Implement error correction processes
    - 1. Use quizzes
    - 2. Track organizational processes
  - C. Encourage activities that promote shared experiences and common goals
    - 1. Hold company-wide seminars

2. Host problem-solving sessions
  3. Develop links between role counterparts
  4. Elevate the voices of boundary spanners
  5. Encourage co-authoring of articles
  6. Show-and-tell
- D. Integrate boundary spanning into the structure of the organization
1. Build boundary spanning into job descriptions
  2. Support job switching and job shadowing
  3. Use cross-functional teams
  4. Redesign the physical environment
- E. Promote a collaborative communication style
1. Advocate a spirit of inquiry
  2. Encourage others to express doubt
  3. Respectfully resolve conflicts
  4. Make use of electronic collaboration tools
- V. Conclusion

### **Case 8.1: Spanning Boundaries**

#### **Purpose:**

The purpose of this case is to learn how to effectively span international boundaries.

#### **Situation:**

You have been invited into Riccardo Bisconi's office, who was recently promoted to a new position as VP of International Development. For three generations this construction,

architecture and design company has grown into a major player in the U.S. market. Bisconi has been tasked with expanding the company into Europe. His first expansion is to open a small new office in Poland. Three architects and two designers who currently work out of the Chicago market will be moving to Poland for a 5-year stint to get the office up and running. They are excited because of their Polish ancestry and the opportunity to work overseas. However, these employees are neophytes when it comes to international business experience: they have only traveled overseas on vacation and they do not speak the language. Bisconi has called you into his office to set up a coaching program for these employees to ease their transition into this new culture. His charge: “You know I’m a big fan of puzzles. I can’t think of a better puzzle than figuring out how to quickly integrate these people into the culture and quickly getting the new division profitable. I don’t want these employees to feel like they are out there all alone like the adventurers aboard the *Endurance*.”

**Your objectives:**

1. Describe the differences between the communicative cultures of Poland and the U.S.
2. Develop a coaching strategy.
3. Suggest some sample tactics that could be used to implement the strategy.

**Case 8.2: Stapling Yourself to an Order**

**Purpose:**

The purpose of this case is to understand the nuances of how information is filtered by different departments.

**Situation:**

You have been asked by the president of a company to “staple yourself to a customer’s order.” Her objective is to get a handle on the bottlenecks and different perceptions of an order as it passes through the various departments. She is particularly interested in:

1. How long does it take to process an order at each stage?
2. How do different departments prioritize orders? What criteria are used?
3. What information is unclear or missing on the order?
4. How does each department handle problems with an order?

5. Do different departments have a sense of the “whole system”?
6. What view of the “customer” does each department have?

Because the president is committed to outstanding customer service, she wonders if the order management cycle (OMC) is effectively serving customer needs. She gave you a copy of a *Harvard Business Review* article (July-August 1992) titled, “Staple Yourself to an Order.” She underlined the following paragraph:

In the course of the order management cycle, every time the order is handled, the customer is handled. Every time the order sits unattended, the customer sits unattended. Paradoxically, the best way to be customer-oriented is to go beyond customers and products to the order; the moment of truth occurs at every step of the OMC, and every employee in the company who affects the OMC is the equivalent of a front-line worker. Ultimately, it is the order that connects the customer to the company in a systematic and company-wide fashion (pp. 113-114).

Based on your data gathering, she would like you to make recommendations.

**Your objectives:**

1. Select an order cycle to explore. There are a variety of different types of OMCs you could explore, including a purchase order at a small local factory, registration procedures at a college, or opening a new account at a bank.
2. Describe the cycle in detail.
3. Evaluate the cycle based on the following:
  - How effective is the OMC?
  - What are the key strengths and weaknesses of the system?
  - How can customer service be improved?
4. Provide recommendations based on your evaluation.