


## Letter to the Editor

## Boundary spanning in the context of academic education

Mohsen Nazarzadeh Zare 

Dep. of Educational Sciences, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, Malayer University, Malayer, Iran

## Article Info



## Article history:

Received 20 Jul. 2022

Accepted 21 Nov. 2022

Published 25 Nov. 2022

## \*Corresponding author:

Mohsen Nazarzadeh Zare, Dep. of Educational Sciences,  
Faculty of Literature and Humanities, Malayer University,  
Malayer, Iran. Email: [Nazarzadezare@malayeru.ac.ir](mailto:Nazarzadezare@malayeru.ac.ir)

## How to Cite This Article:

Nazarzade Zare M. Boundary Spanning  
in the Context of Academic Education.  
J Med Educ Dev. 2022; 15(47): 69-70.

Copyright © 2021, This is an original open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-noncommercial 4.0 International License which permit copy and redistribution of the material just in noncommercial usages with proper citation

The global society, we live in today, is very intertwined and complicated. Hence, an ability to expand organizational and trans-organizational boundaries plays a critical and vital role in educational systems (1). The concept of boundary spanning, which was formed in the fields of behavioral psychology and organizational theories in the mid-1970s (2), is somewhat unknown in the medical and health education system (3). Meanwhile, one of the important approaches and activities that can help the improvement of health and medical education systems is boundary spanning activities (4). The boundary spanning theory, which was formed based on socio-technical and open systems theories (5), is defined as creating a capacity for orientation, alignment, and commitment across the borders of an organization in order to realize the goals and visions of that organization (6). The individuals who are called boundary-spanners play an essential role in boundary-spanning activities (7). In the context of a university system, boundary spanners can include faculty members, staff, and university administrators (8). Therefore, at the level of an academic system, boundary spanners should be aware of the priorities and needs of their academic community, as well as their surrounding environment at organizational and extra-organizational levels (9). On the other hand, faculty members, as one of the important human capital of any university, apart

from the three roles of education, research, and service delivery, perform a fourth role, which is boundary spanning. In this role, the faculty member can act at two organizational and extra-organizational levels. In this regard, at the organizational level, the boundary spanning role of faculty members is the reduction of tensions and environmental complications, as well as making a link among individuals, disciplines, faculties, and academic departments. Moreover, they contribute greatly to the facilitation of knowledge exchange between individuals and academic departments and, subsequently, the enhancement of teaching and learning quality (9-10). In this regard, recent studies have pointed out that in the context of academic education, faculty members' boundary spanning activities have an influential role in teaching and learning. In the role of a boundary-spanner, the faculty members strive to create a bridge among learners of different genders, cultures, and ethnicities by establishing interaction and communication. In so doing, they not only help create a collaborative learning process but also improve the teaching-learning process through sharing and transferring knowledge and information (11). Hence, the faculty members' use of organizational boundary spanning methods in educational contexts contributes greatly to teaching and learning leadership, creating and maintaining key relationships in the teaching-learning process.

Consequently, boundary spanning activities in educational contexts lead to the mutual participation of learners in the teaching-learning process (12). On the other hand, at the trans-organizational level, the role of faculty members is to participate in social activities in order to provide opportunities for direct interaction and cooperation with social institutions, as well as professional and disciplinary associations (10). Thus, a thorough understanding of the role of faculty members at two organizational and extra-organizational levels requires an awareness of the academic culture in which the faculty member works.

In general, boundary spanning activities should be considered from two perspectives. The first aspect is the importance of boundary spanning as a critical characteristic for medical and health education professionals. In this context, boundary spanning facilitates knowledge and information exchange, improves management and teamwork, develops knowledge and innovation, and encourages interdisciplinary and inter-organizational research in this system (4). Therefore, in the medical and health education system, boundary spanners are often striving to create integration between health institutions and medical science (13). The second aspect is the importance of boundary spanning in the university system, especially in academic education. In this context, boundary spanning helps to establish communication and interaction in the teaching-learning process, develop faculty members' professional growth through creating opportunities outside the educational organization (university), and consequently, increases their performance and efficiency in teaching and research.

## References

1. Purcell J, Pearl A, Van Schyndel T. Boundary spanning leadership among community-engaged faculty: An exploratory study of faculty participating in higher education community engagement. *Engaged Scholar Journal*. 2020; 6(2): 1–30. [<https://doi.org/10.15402/esj.v6i2.69398>]
2. Nasir L, Robert G, Fischer M, Norman I, Murrells T, Schofield P. Facilitating knowledge exchange between health-care sectors, organizations and professions: a longitudinal mixed-methods study of boundary-spanning processes and their impact on health-care quality. *Health Services and Delivery Research*. 2013; 1(7): 17–35. [<https://doi.org/10.3310/hsdr01070>]
3. Hunt C. M, Spence M, McBride A. The role of boundary spanners in delivering collaborative care: a process evaluation. *BMC Family Practice*. 2016; 17(1): 1–10. [<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12875-016-0501-4>]
4. Wallace C, Farmer J, McCosker A. Boundary spanning practices of community connectors for engaging 'hardly reached' people in health services. *Social Science and Medicine*. 2019; 232(1): 366–373. [<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2019.05.034>]
5. Jordan J.W, Adams K. R, Mull C.D. Boundary Spanning Roles in Communities & Organizations: Implications for Adult Educators. *Adult Education Research Conference*. 2013. available at: [<https://newprairiepress.org/aerc/2013/symposia/1>]
6. Pryor D, Henley A. Boundary-spanning in higher education leadership: identifying boundaries and practices in a British University. *Studies in Higher Education*. 2018; 43(12): 2210–2225. [<https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2017.1318364>]
7. Cross R.L, Parker A. *The Hidden Power of Social Networks: Understanding How Work Really Gets Done in Organizations*. Harvard Business School Press, Boston, MA. 2004; pp. 134–138.
8. Fisher T. R, Many J. E. From PDS Classroom Teachers to Urban Teacher Educators: Learning from Professional Development School Boundary Spanners. *School-University Partnerships*. 2014; 7(1): 49–63. [<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1034138>]
9. Wegemer CM, Renick J. Boundary Spanning Roles and Power in Educational Partnerships. *ISLS*. 2021; 1(1): 913–914. [<https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584211016868>]
10. Hendrickson R. M, Lane J. E, Harris J. T, Dorman R. H. *Academic leadership and governance of higher education: A guide for trustees, leaders, and aspiring leaders of two- and four-year institutions*. Stylus Publishing, LLC. 2013; pp. 312–313.
11. Martin L, Ibbotson P. Boundary spanning as identity work in university business engagement roles. *Studies in Higher Education*. 2019; 1(1): 1–13. [<https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2019.1688281>]
12. Franz Coldren A, Spillane J. P. Making Connections to Teaching Practice: The Role of Boundary Practices in Instructional Leadership. *Educational Policy*. 2007; 21(2): 369–396. [<https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904805284121>]
13. Lander B. Boundary-spanning in academic healthcare organizations. *Research Policy*. 2016; 45(8): 1524–1533. [<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2016.01.006>]