

**BOUNDARY SPANNING ACROSS LEADERSHIP CULTURES:
A LEADERSHIP STRATEGY FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH**

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Abstract

One obvious, challenging and defining quality of the comprehensive approach is the sheer number and diverse nature of organizations engaged in collective effort. Effectively leading a collective effort *across* such a myriad of organizational interfaces requires very different approaches to leadership than those typically practiced *within* large, hierarchical organizations like the military. Thus, a different approach to leadership is called for by the comprehensive approach, one that might be called *boundary spanning across leadership cultures*. In fact, boundary spanning leadership can be thought of as the ideal leadership strategy for the comprehensive approach. Notably, it represents the approach taken by senior Department of Defense (DoD) and State Department leaders in Iraq in seeking ways to build needed capabilities in their teams. This paper will describe the concept of leadership strategy, the nature of boundary spanning leadership, and the kinds of leadership development activities designed to develop it.

**Boundary Spanning Across Leadership Cultures:
A Leadership Strategy for the Comprehensive Approach**

*Army General David Petraeus used an oddly anachronistic painting in speaking with the troops he was soon to take command of what became widely known as “the surge” in Iraq. The painting was *The Stampede*, painted by western artist Frederic Remington in 1908. It depicts a cowboy in the 1800’s riding desperately to survive a stampeding herd of cattle panicked by a thunderstorm. As Thomas Ricks tells the story in *The Gamble*, an account of the surge, Petraeus used the painting to convey to his subordinates his notion of command. “I don’t need to be hierarchical,” he explained. “I want to flatten organizations. I’m comfortable with a slightly chaotic environment. I know that it’s okay if some of you get out ahead of us. Some of the cattle will get out ahead and we will catch up with them. And some will fall behind and we will circle back and we won’t leave them behind ... We’re just trying to get the cattle to Cheyenne.” (Ricks, 2009, p.154).*



The Stampede by Frederic Remington, 1908 (Public Domain)

ACROSS LEADERSHIP CULTURES

The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) was invited to Iraq in 2010 by the Commander of United States Forces-Iraq and the United States Ambassador in Iraq to facilitate a combined vision development seminar, and to mentor and teach boundary spanning techniques. These techniques were in service of implementing effective interdependent practices between two proven but culturally different organizations in order to achieve a common goal for the United States and Iraq. In the intervening months, CCL has continued to receive positive feedback regarding the seminar and its impact.

Non-disclosure and confidentiality prevent us from describing the specific processes and outcomes of the Iraq US Forces and US Ambassador boundary spanning case. Given the nature of CCL's work, we often hold confidentiality agreements with our clients. As such, the comments in this chapter are a general view of the relevant theory, research, and some typical practices, and not a specific commentary on the Iraq case. In our research and applied practice, we have developed a number of insights and questions regarding boundary spanning across cultures within an interdependent world. In this article, we discuss the theory of boundary spanning and the importance and role of developing a leadership strategy for spanning different organizational and institutional cultures.

LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES IN A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

The chaos of a stampede is an apt metaphor for the challenging environments facing many organizations, and certainly those trying collectively to implement a comprehensive approach to global challenges, including stability operations. A comprehensive approach to stability operations is one that integrates the cooperative efforts of the departments and agencies of the United States Government, intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations, multinational partners, and private sector entities to achieve enduring peace and stability following cessation of open hostilities. The leadership challenges inherent in a comprehensive approach become apparent even in a cursory look at the kinds of interactions among diverse parties inherent in the approach. One way to understand the distinctive nature and challenge of a comprehensive approach to stability operations is to conceptualize it as the outermost ring in a set of concentric circles representing increasingly complex and heterogeneous sets of organizational actors. For example, while proficiency in joint operations is itself a notable DoD achievement, more recent efforts to take a whole-of-government approach integrating the work of *all* departments and agencies (i.e., not just military) have taken that challenge to a new level. Further extending the set of organizational actors to include civilian and military agencies from other governments, not to mention other private sector and non-governmental organizations, complicates the process almost seemingly beyond the realm of feasibility.

Needless to say, the leadership challenges inherent in a comprehensive approach are daunting. What's more, the challenges are not only daunting in and of themselves, but likely even more so since they demand perspectives, skills, and practices previously not deemed essential to leadership in a large, hierarchical, and traditional organization like the U.S. Army, for instance. And since they were *not* essential—not “core competencies”—such perspectives,

skills, and practices generally would not have been needed, encouraged, or practiced. But just as with other large, formal, hierarchical, and tradition-laden organizations in government (e.g., the U.S. Post Office) and in the private sector (e.g., automobile manufacturing companies) whose culture and practices may have been well-adapted to competitive environments that were relatively stable and predictable, those same cultures and practices are *not* optimally suited for environments that are highly volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA).

Take the practice of collaboration as a case in point. Collaboration in some form or other is practiced in virtually all organizations, but the phrase “some form or other” proves to be the catch. It turns out that what collaboration means in some settings may be quite different than what it means in other settings.¹ A critical distinction should be made between what has been called simple collaboration and complex collaboration. The distinctions are highlighted in Table 1 below (Mankin, Cohen, & Fitzgerald, 2004; Hughes & Palus, 2005).

With simple collaboration, tasks are routine and well defined. They’re predictable and manageable, and the procedures for addressing them are well understood. On the other hand, complex collaboration is characterized by tasks that are non-routine and highly uncertain. The simplest form of collaboration is between just two people, and more complex when multiple people are involved. Furthermore, it is not just the number of people that impacts the nature of collaboration. Greater diversity among parties also increases its complexity, whether it’s diversity across points of view, personalities, values, loyalties, or other differences. Differences in goals and objectives significantly increase the complexity of collaborative efforts, and it is

¹ We use the term collaboration to mean the *shared work of different parties to achieve a common and challenging goal*. The authors also recognize that a quite different definition of collaboration is *to cooperate treasonably with an enemy occupying one’s country*. Because “collaborators” in WWII helped the occupying Nazis, the term has quite negative connotations to many in Europe. We hope readers will understand that the way the term is used here has nothing in common with the behavior of Nazi “collaborators.”

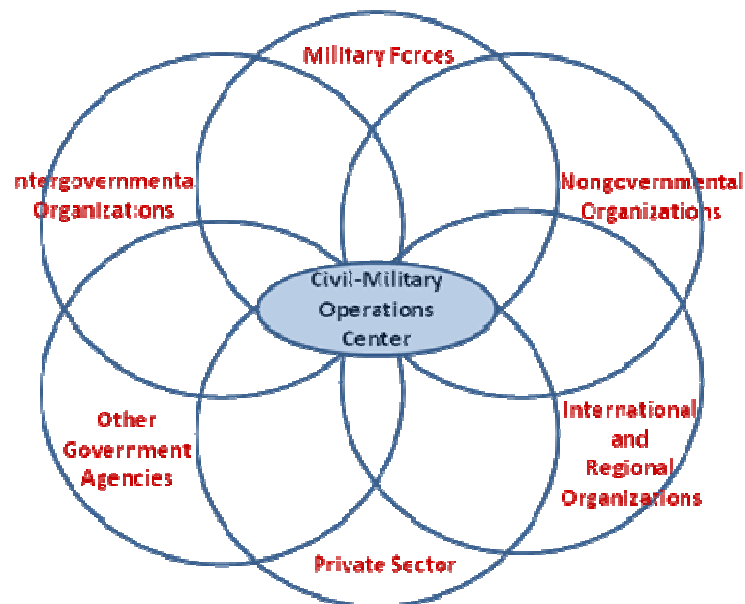
simpler and easier (relatively speaking) when the parties can meet face to face. Collaboration is also obviously more challenging when the very conditions in which the parties are trying to work are themselves in flux.

Table 1
Simple and Complex Collaboration

Simple Collaboration	Complex Collaboration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well-defined task • Two people • With much in common • Common goals • Face to face • Stable conditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High task uncertainty • Multiple people • Diverse • Different goals and agendas • Virtual interaction • Dynamic conditions

In the case of a comprehensive approach, collaboration becomes even more complex because of the sizable number of different *agencies* (not just “multiple people”) having diverse agendas, interests, constraints, and perspectives. That added complexity may be better conveyed with the diagram in Figure 1 than with words (adapted from Stability Operations, FM 3-07, October 2008, p. A-14).

Figure 1: A Schematic Representation of the Comprehensive Approach



Furthermore, the very nature of the comprehensive approach represents rather extreme conditions of all dimensions of VUCA as well. Amid such challenging conditions, there fortunately are fundamental and well-accepted strategic principles that point diverse parties in a desired direction (Guiding Principles, 2009). While developed to serve as strategic doctrine for civilians engaged in peacekeeping missions, these fundamental principles are consistent with official guidance documents on international stabilization and reconstruction missions, and constitute a kind of strategic intent for a comprehensive approach. The principles include:

- *Interdependence*, or the idea that “everything is connected to everything else.” The desired end states for a comprehensive approach are part of an interlocking “systems of systems.” For example, maintaining the rule of law requires assuring a safe and secure environment; that, in turn, requires a sustainable economy, which depends

upon having stable governance, which itself is dependent upon overall social well-being and rule of law; and so on.

- *Cooperation*, the idea that different actors can have somewhat different agendas yet still share a common strategic vision and work together toward the same goal.
- *Prioritization*, because in most societies emerging from conflict there are competing demands that exceed available resources. While priorities must be established, they also must remain flexible.
- *Nesting*, in which short-term objectives are nested in longer-term goals. For example, the need to establish order may require the early engagement of international police, but this should be nested in longer-term objectives for law enforcement ultimately to be the province of local rather than international police.
- *Flexibility of Sequencing and Timing* that is dependent upon context and changing conditions. Constant learning and calibration of strategies are required because the circumstances in any particular country will always be dynamic.
- *Measurement of Progress*, using a system of metrics that helps to translate lofty goals into measurable outcomes.

As noted, these fundamental principles give parties to a comprehensive approach a kind of strategy for their shared work. On the other hand, they provide relatively little helpful direction about *how* these parties should work together in ways that foster collective progress in this shared strategic direction. To put it differently, what does it “look like” when people truly behave interdependently across the boundaries of their different agencies, interests, and perspectives? And what kind of leadership does it take to encourage and enable such diverse

parties to behave that way? These questions make it useful for us now to examine the differences between what has been called business strategy and leadership strategy.

Business Strategy and Leadership Strategy

Let us be clear at the outset that what we mean by the term *business strategy* applies to all organizations, not just those in the private or corporate sector. In that sense, all organizations have a business strategy (not necessarily a good one), including government agencies, military organizations, churches, charities, etc. When most people talk about their organization's strategy, what they have in mind is what we are calling the organization's business strategy. Thus, while it's easy enough to understand that General Motors and General Electric have business strategies, we're also saying that so does the Red Cross, the Central Intelligence Agency, and NATO. The general applicability of the term may be easier to appreciate when we define it more precisely: "*Business strategy* is the pattern of choices an organization makes to achieve sustainable competitive advantage" (Hughes & Beatty, p. 28). In *all* organizations, whatever the sector, strategy involves a pattern of choices reflected in different parts of the overall operation. In the business sector, for example, if being a high-quality provider is a critical element of an organization's strategy, then investments related to quality would be apparent wherever you look. Product design would include high-end features; customer service would be fully staffed with highly capable and knowledgeable workers; the sales force would assure a personal touch with customers, and so on. As we've indicated, it is useful to distinguish the idea of a leadership strategy from that of a business strategy. We will shortly explain why the distinction is so important, but first let us define more precisely what we mean by the term leadership strategy.

“*Leadership strategy* describes the organizational and human capabilities needed to enact the business strategy effectively” (Hughes & Beatty, p. 28). More fully,

“Leadership strategy represents an organization’s strategic intent about leadership, including its philosophy, values, and general approach to leadership and leadership development. Leadership strategy encompasses matters of organizational values and culture as well as the role of systems in facilitating leadership and leadership development throughout the organization. It also includes the organization’s strategy for developing the effectiveness of individual leaders and strategic leadership teams” (Hughes & Beatty, 2005, p. 35; see also Pasmore & Lafferty, 2008).

With this background on *what* a leadership strategy is, we now are in a better position to tackle the question of *why* the distinction between business strategy and leadership strategy is so important. Some of the most dramatic evidence concerning the importance of having a clear leadership strategy comes from those cases where it was absent. On many occasions this was the primary cause of failure in organizational transformation efforts.

The record of successful organizational transformations over the past several decades is fairly dismal—only about one in four are successful (Beer & Nohria, 2000a, 2000b; Hirschorn, 2000; Roberto & Levesque, 2005). An examination of many of these attempted transformations indicates that most involve either exclusive or primary emphasis upon changes in organizational structure, systems, or processes. Typically there is insufficient attention (if any at all) to the leadership and cultural dimensions of transformation (McGuire & Rhodes, 2009). In the corporate sector, for example, such inattention is considered to be the most common reason for the relatively small proportion of mergers and acquisitions which actually performed at levels commensurate with original expectations.

In the business strategies called for in the comprehensive approach, this kind of inattention to leadership and cultural dimensions is also typical. In our experience, it is specifically the *leadership cultures* of the organizations and institutions (communities, etc.) that

must be recognized and compared for fit and function to the business strategy. The leadership culture is the web of shared beliefs and practices for producing effective leadership in a collective of any kind. In a sense this is the “operating system” for leadership; it is the “logic in action” for producing shared direction, alignment, and commitment. Leadership culture tends to be stable over time, as culture tends to be. Leadership cultures vary widely between collectives, and they vary within organizations as subcultures of shared leadership beliefs and practices. When organizations with very different leadership cultures attempt to work together, the result can be conflict and dysfunction, as the operating systems refuse to synch, and the underlying logics disagree.

We believe leadership strategies suited to the comprehensive approach must address this variability in leadership cultures. Such a leadership strategy must necessarily include a greater capability for recognizing and spanning the boundaries of leadership cultures.

Let’s look more closely at the three kinds of culture that are inevitably involved. There is a hierarchy of leadership cultures from Dependent, to Independent, to Interdependent (Figures 2 and 3). Each successive culture is more capable of dealing greater volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity.

It is usually a mistake to reduce an entire organization into a single type of culture. Typically there are many subcultures, representing different leadership logics. For example, even within a dependent leadership culture the typical subcultures range from autocratic to diplomatic to specialist-expert leadership subcultures (McGuire & Rhodes, 2009; Rooke & Torbert, 2005).

Figure 2: Three Levels of Leadership Culture



Figure 3: Three Levels of Leadership Culture and the Production of Direction, Alignment, and Commitment

	Direction	Alignment	Commitment
	How will we decide on a shared direction?	How will we coordinate our work so that it fits together?	How will we maintain commitment to the collective?
Interdependent	Agreement on direction is the result of shared exploration and the emergence of new perspectives.	Alignment results from ongoing mutual adjustment among system-responsible people.	Commitment results from engagement in a developing community .
Independent	Agreement on direction is the result of discussion , mutual influence , and compromise .	Alignment results from negotiation among self-responsible people.	Commitment results from evaluation of the benefits for self while benefiting the larger community.
Dependent	Agreement on direction is the result of willing compliance with an authority .	Alignment results from fitting into the expectations of the larger system .	Commitment results from loyalty to the source of authority or to the community itself.

We often do a simple series of exercises as part of the discovery phase of setting leadership strategy. Using the model in Figure 3, we ask: *Where is your organization overall? (And, where are you personally?) Where does the leadership culture need to be to support the business challenge? How do you (will you) produce shared direction, alignment, and commitment? What are the leadership cultures of the organizations or institutions with whom you must collaborate? How will differences in leadership culture affect the collaboration? How will you span those boundaries?* These questions are, of course, all about leadership and leadership development within a nascent leadership strategy.

As the forms, types, and size of leadership cultures expand within a comprehensive approach, boundary spanning practices become increasingly critical for strategy implementation.

BOUNDARY SPANNING ACROSS LEADERSHIP CULTURES

Boundary Spanning: Art and Theory

Boundary spanning is an approach developing more interdependent organizations and networks of organizations based in a long-term research project at the *Center for Creative Leadership* (Ernst & Chrobot-Mason, 2010). Its premise is that while technology has enabled a truly interconnected world and effectively removed *physical* boundaries as a barrier to effective interaction, our *social* boundaries remain as formidable as ever. The social boundaries by which people naturally separate themselves into groups of “us” and “them” thwart finding effective solutions to problems that can only be solved by groups working collaboratively together.

For example, it has become nearly axiomatic in organizations today that it is important to “break down silos.” In a recent survey, 86 percent of senior executives said that it is extremely important for them to work across boundaries yet only seven percent believe they are very effective at doing so (Yip, Ernst & Campbell, 2009). Building more interdependent organizations and societies requires that boundary spanning be practiced both within and across organizations. A useful starting place for doing so is to recognize that there are two different meanings of the word boundary:

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

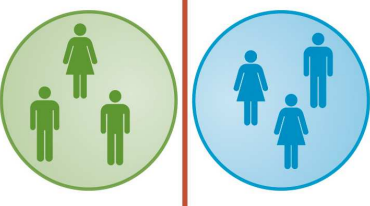
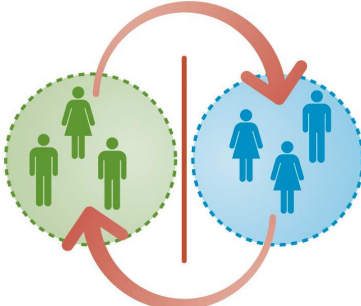
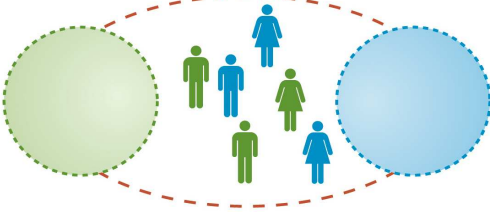
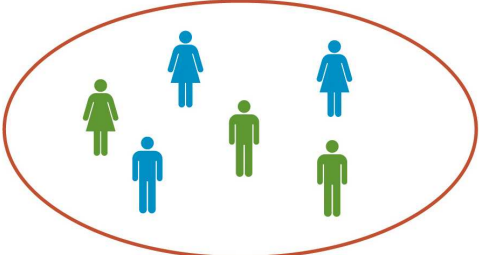
(*Random House Dictionary, 2009*)

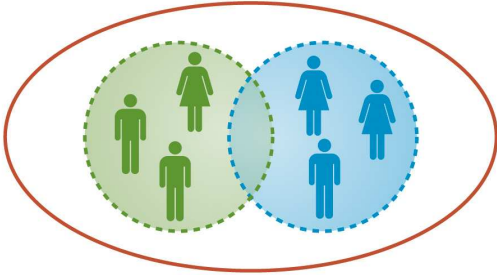
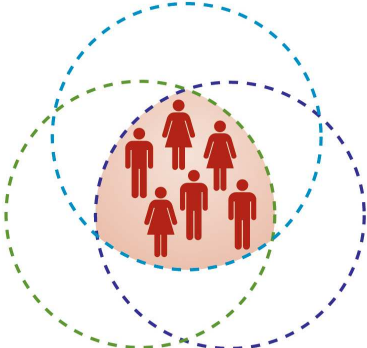
The second definition is the more useful one for fostering greater interdependence in organizations. Boundary spanning leadership can be taught when boundaries are viewed as frontiers and areas of advanced activity. Recent research shows that effective boundary spanning leadership is possible with the right frameworks, strategies, practices, and tactics. There are five kinds of social boundaries to consider (Ernst & Chrobot-Mason, 2010):

- *Vertical*: rank, class, seniority, authority, power, structural.
- *Horizontal*: expertise, role, function, peers, competitors.
- *Stakeholder*: partners, sponsors, constituencies, value chain, communities.
- *Demographic*: gender, religion, age, ethnicity, nationality, culture, ideology.
- *Geographic*: location, region, markets, distance, language.

Effective boundary spanning is accomplished through six social practices within a sequence of three strategies (Table 2). The objective, in leadership terms, is the creation of direction, alignment, and commitment across boundaries in service of a larger vision or goal.

Table 2
Boundary Spanning Strategies and Practices

Strategy	Practices	Definition (with outcomes in italics)
<p>1. Managing Boundaries</p> <p><i>Taps into the power of differentiation and the need for distinctiveness, divergence and uniqueness within groups</i></p>	<p>Buffering</p> 	<p>Monitor and protect the flow of information and resources across groups to <i>define boundaries and create safety</i></p>
	<p>Reflecting</p> 	<p>Represent distinct perspectives and facilitate knowledge-exchange across groups to <i>understand boundaries and foster respect</i></p>
<p>2. Forging Common Ground</p> <p><i>Taps into the power of integration and the need for unity, convergence, and belonging across groups</i></p>	<p>Connecting</p> 	<p>Link people and bridge divided groups to <i>suspend boundaries and build trust</i></p>
	<p>Mobilizing</p> 	<p>Craft common purpose and shared identity across groups to <i>reframe boundaries and develop community</i></p>

<p>3. Discovering New Frontiers</p> <p><i>Taps into the power of simultaneous differentiation and the power of adaptation and transformation</i></p>	<p>Weaving</p> 	<p>Draw out and integrate group differences within a larger whole to <i>interlace boundaries and advance interdependence</i></p>
	<p>Transforming</p> 	<p>Bring multiple groups together in emergent, new directions to <i>cross-cut boundaries and enable reinvention</i></p>

Boundary Spanning Across Leadership Cultures: Examples

Each group, whether inter-organization or cross-organization has its own particular form of leadership culture that achieves outcomes of direction, alignment, and commitment (DAC) (Drath et al, 2008). Methods and logics of achieving DAC vary across leadership cultures, forming social boundaries of differing beliefs and practices that can block collaborative work.

As a practical matter we offer two illustrations that feature culture, the five boundaries, and the strategies and practices of boundary spanning across leadership cultures.

(1) In law enforcement when borders of jurisdiction are crossed by multiple agencies, buffering is triggered. For example after a murder has been committed in a Native American nation, federal interests collide with local and state police as well as with multiple federal agencies—all parties experience vertical, stakeholder, and geographic boundary conflicts. As a

first step in spanning boundaries, all stakeholders can begin by independently practicing buffering, reflecting, and exploring their own vertical hierarchies before connecting and mobilizing. In this illustration, the strategies of managing boundaries and then forging common ground is significantly enhanced where leadership cultures are both *self* aware and *other* aware as they move through the process.

(2) In a post-merger where the process re-engineering of enterprise-wide systems occurs, the primary boundary issues will be horizontal and appear as separate silos of activity. Organizations whose leadership cultures look first to hierarchies for direction will struggle. While the other four social boundaries will likely play a role, without the art of horizontal boundary spanning, these subcultures across the enterprise will resist and sabotage effective collaboration.

Boundary Spanning Across Leadership Cultures: Intervention

In our work at the Center for Creative Leadership, we are frequently asked to bring groups together to help them identify, explore, and span their relevant boundaries. We'll describe here a generic yet still best-practice design for a boundary spanning workshop in which senior leaders from different organizations are engaged. Such a workshop would be customized extensively in any particular situation, but the basic design that follows is a good example of the theory in practice.

The purpose of the workshop design is to enable two fundamentally different leadership cultures to collaborate on some kind of joint objective. Typical objectives in such workshops include:

1. Understanding interdependent leadership culture and boundary spanning concepts.

2. Applying these concepts to develop a shared vision, common language, and unified set of goals and metrics.
3. Accelerating the development of an interdependent environment between our organizations.

This one-or-two day workshop design typically follows the three-part strategy for boundary spanning, with *Managing Boundaries* in session one, *Forging Common Ground* in session two, and *Discovering New Frontiers* in session three.

Prior to the day of the session, there is typically a period of *discovery* that includes interviews and conversations individually and in groups with participants in order to clarify the history, present state, and future desired states and outcomes. An important part of the discovery process is to identify specific difficulties and challenges in crossing boundaries between one leadership culture and another.

In session one, the design focuses on *differentiating* boundaries between the two organizations. The two organizational groups meet in separate breakout rooms. The instructions are the same for both groups: “*Today we begin by meeting in each organization separately in order to clarify and explore your unique organizational needs, cultures, and environments.*” A brief time is spent putting the idea of boundary spanning leadership in a broader set of concepts including organizational transformation, strategic leadership, change management, and types of organizational culture (more specifically, dependent, independent, and interdependent cultures).

The first activity involves creating a shared vision of achievement within each group. Each participant writes a headline of an article they would like to see twelve months in the future highlighting the positive results of their work together. The article could appear in any

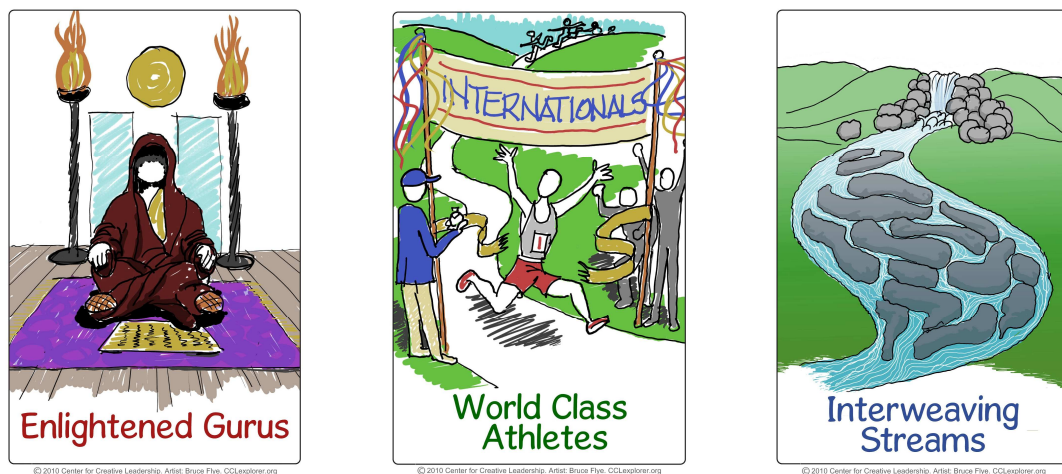
publication of their choice. The headlines and themes are shared and discussed. Later, when the groups come together in the afternoon, the headlines are posted for all to see.

The next activity further defines (“buffers”) each group. We use the Leadership Metaphor Explorer™ (LME) tool to explore the leadership culture each group currently has, and what culture is needed in the future to achieve mission objectives. LME is a deck of eighty-three cards, each one containing a unique metaphor for leadership consisting of a drawing and a label (several illustrative cards are depicted in Figure 4 below). The cards are laid out on a table in the back of the room. Each person is asked to browse the cards and choose two that best represent their thoughts on two different questions:

First card: *What is your leadership culture like now?*

Second card: *What will your leadership culture need to be to achieve success?*

Figure 4
Illustrative Leadership Metaphor Explorer Cards



Groups members share and discuss their “Now” cards, then their “Future” cards. Facilitators then typically create a PowerPoint collage of the thematic card images. Often, the pattern of card selections reflects a desired shift toward more interdependent and collaborative leadership cultures.

Another activity in the managing boundaries session uses a tool from CCL called the Boundary Explorer™. This tool is used to illustrate the concepts, strategies, and practices for working successfully across organizational boundaries. Boundary Explorer is a deck of 21 cards that actively engages participants in understanding and experiencing the boundary spanning leadership model—the five types of boundaries and the strategies and practices shown in Table 2. Participants self-assess their own group’s effectiveness in working across different kinds of boundaries. More specifically, they identified which boundaries they work across *Best*—i.e., vertical, horizontal, stakeholders, demographic, or geographic—as well as those they work across the *Worst*.

Next is the practice of *reflecting*—to understand the inter-group boundary by sharing cross-organizational perspectives. “*Now that we’ve met within the respective groups, it’s time to begin knowledge-exchange and perspective-sharing across groups.*” For this, we often use the technique of fishbowl dialogue. In this technique, the top leader of each group sits in the middle of the room along with a facilitator / interviewer. The focus of their dialogue is on key insights from the morning sessions: *How does each group view themselves and their leadership challenges?* All the others, from both of the groups, sit in an outside circle or semi-circle and practice active listening. After about twenty minutes, the two top leaders finish their dialogue and become listeners, as the dialogue shifts to all those who had been listening. The group talks about what they just heard from their top leaders, how they see themselves, and how each group

now sees the other. It's often quite insightful to debrief the experience of the fishbowl itself: *What was it like for subordinates to talk about what they heard from their bosses, in front of their bosses? What was it like to discuss your own group in front of the other group?*

The next activity deals with the practice of *connecting*—suspending boundaries by building cross-organizational relationships. With the goal of sharing leadership commitments and building relationships, each participant is asked to take out the “Future” Leadership Metaphor card they had selected earlier and *“identify a leadership trait that represents your personal commitment to creating the future leadership culture. What is the type of leadership you will model for others?”* A session of “speed networking” follows in which participants use their card and trait as a way of introducing themselves to ten or so people from the counterpart organization in just ten minutes.

Next is the practice of *mobilizing*—reframing boundaries by crafting a shared vision. Explicit instructions are given to assure that members from the two organizations intermix in where they sit. Each blended table then creates a vision statement about their collaborative work that encompasses the themes and patterns identified from both morning sessions. For reference, the news headlines from the morning are posted around room. Each table group then writes a single headline representing their vision and three metrics of how they would measure success in accomplishing the headline. Table representatives then provide brief reports to the others about their headlines / metrics.

The concluding activity of the session on forging common ground is introduced this way: *“Given your shared headline, what are the challenges that might get in your way? What obstacles are you facing to creating an effective Team of Teams? Write all your challenges on the blank butcher paper (posted on walls)—everything that could potentially get in the way of*

realizing your headlines. Use direction, alignment, and commitment as a frame for the challenges.” Once the challenges are posted, each participant votes (using sticky dots) for the “top three” challenges he or she views as most important. The six challenges receiving the most votes overall become the focus of the next session (the number of challenges and subsequent table groups may be fewer or greater depending on the size of the groups and the nature of the challenges).

The strategy for the final session is discovering new frontiers, and the practice of focus for that session is *weaving*—interlacing boundaries by combining unique experience and expertise in service of solving a joint challenge. The session is introduced with these instructions: *“In this next section, we want you to bring the maximum diversity of your experience and expertise to bear on developing innovative solutions in service of your key challenges.”* In this activity, the top six challenges are posted next to six tables. Participants move to the table that poses the challenge that interests them the most, while also maintaining mixed representation at each table. They write down ideas and innovative approaches to the challenge. In ten-minute rotations, participants “table hop” to build upon and add to the posted ideas—retaining one convener at each table. When time is up, everyone votes on the best near-term and long-term solutions for each challenge and the groups reports the results.

The final practice is *transforming*—spanning boundaries by reinventing external stakeholder relationships. External stakeholders may include, for example, specific customers, suppliers, governmental agencies, NGOs, or partners in a value chain. The senior leaders of each group first get together and identify six (or so) specific external stakeholders on which they want to focus. This activity repeats the previous table-hopping technique, but this time with each table focused on one particular external stakeholder (who are typically not in the room, but, depending

on the design, they could be). It begins with these instructions: *“As a “Team of Teams” what are your challenges in spanning boundaries with these external stakeholders? How could these challenges be transformed into new solutions? Move to a table with the particular external stakeholder that interests you the most.”* Facilitated to ensure mixed groups at each table, participants identify as many challenges as possible that are specific to that stakeholder group. They also identify as many solutions as possible, and a representative from each provides a brief report to all others on their favorite solution.

CONCLUSION

The comprehensive approach calls for groups representing different departments of the U.S. government, allied governments, NGOs, international and regional organizations, as well as from the private sector to work together collaboratively and interdependently. It would be no small thing to work collaboratively and interdependently across the boundaries of multiple organizations that are fundamentally alike in their forms of leadership culture. The challenge of working effectively across organizational boundaries when their respective leadership cultures are markedly different from each other can seem insurmountable.

The theory and methodology described in this paper appears to be a viable and effective approach for helping foster more interdependent and collaborative interactions among representatives from organization with quite different leadership cultures. The numerous and complex boundary spanning challenges inherent in the comprehensive approach suggest that boundary spanning across leadership cultures is a promising leadership strategy for the comprehensive approach.

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