Stream 10

Friction at the Interface: Rethinking Organizational Boundaries

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Stream conveners

**Peter Fleming**
Queen Mary, University of London,
Email: p.fleming@qmul.ac.uk

**Christina Garsten**
Score, Stockholm University,
Email: christina.garsten@socant.su.se

**Axel Haunschild**
University of Trier,
Email: haunschild@uni-trier.de

In the wake of globalizing forces (social, financial, political), organizational boundaries are being transcended, re-drawn, as well as erected. The rise of project-based forms of organizing, new career patterns, flexible forms of employment and hybrid organizational forms (e.g. alliances, networks) have lead to changing organizational boundaries. It is common understanding that organizational boundaries have become 'fluid' and more complex (Leng/Dahles 2005) or 'blurred' (Marchington et al. 2005). Some authors have even declared the 'boundaryless organization' (Kerr/Ulrich 1993; Nelson 1997).

From a theoretical perspective the notion of ‘blurred’ or ‘blurring’ organizational boundaries (and certainly that of ‘boundaryless’ organizations) itself appears to be somewhat blurred. A look at Marchington et al.’s intriguing and seminal edited book on the topic, for example, reveals that most contributors prefer to talk about ‘boundary-spanning’ or ‘crossing organizational boundaries’ rather than blurredness, which confirms rather than questions the existence of (howsoever defined) organizational boundaries. Nonetheless the identification of organizational boundaries has become more difficult – for managers, workers, as well as scholars of organization studies, but also for legal practitioners and regulating authorities. This is evinced, for example, in the fragmented political authority which has given rise to transboundary accountability standards in the area of CSR.

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1 The conference will be held on the AUT University’s Central City Campus.
But, one could also argue that organizational boundaries have never been as clear as we tend to believe. Bureaucratic organizations are characterized by membership rules and law codifies the social invention of corporate actors with rights, responsibilities and accountability. However, the lifeworlds of organizational members have always had an impact on organizational practices (Sandberg/Dall’Alba 2009; Warhurst et al. 2008), and the life ‘inside’ organizations is not clearly separable from that outside organizations; see, for example, communities of industrial workers, emotional labour, management policies that put demand on workers to be authentic (Fleming 2009) or organizational demands to align private lives with organizational requirements (Land/Taylor 2010). There is much to suggest that it is at the very interface of organizations, in the friction zone of differential influences, that much negotiation as to the boundaries of the organization(s) is taking place.

With this stream we aim at bringing together organizational studies scholars who are interested in theoretically and empirically exploring further what constitutes organizational boundaries, how they are negotiated and enacted. Beyond contributions to these broader questions the following topics are of interest for the stream, but the list is not exhaustive:

- How do general accounts of societal developments, such as ‘liquid modernity’ (Bauman), ‘risk society’ (Beck) or ‘reflexive modernity’ (Beck/Giddens/Lash), relate to our conceptualizations of organizational boundaries? How helpful are metaphors such as ‘liquidity’ or ‘fluidity’ for such conceptualizations?
- Are there other, so far neglected, social theories or philosophies that can help enhancing our understanding of organizational boundaries?
- What are the important dimensions of organizational boundaries and how can they be studied empirically?
- How are organizational boundaries related to societal inclusion and exclusion, i.e. who can define boundaries? And for whom are boundaries transgressable and for whom not?
- How is identity construction connected to organizational boundaries and what impact do changing organizational boundaries have on individuals’ identities today?
- What role do organizational responsibilities and accountability play for conceptualizations of organizational boundaries? Does the growing importance of third actors, NGOs, intermediaries etc. change our understanding of organizational boundaries?
- How exactly do new forms of work organization and employment change the social construction of organizational boundaries?
- How are workers’ and managers’ lifeworlds and organizational practices connected? How are the boundaries between work and life enacted and negotiated – by organizations and by individuals? Do individuals develop strategies of resistance against too clear-cut or too loose boundaries between work and the rest of their lives?

We are looking forward to receiving your contribution!

**Key words:** organizational boundaries, accountability, networks, work-life boundaries

**Submission:** Abstracts should be about 1000 words in length (including references), set in A4 page layout, single spaced and in 12 point font. They should be sent by email to p.fleming@qmul.ac.uk by April 1, 2011. Full papers for inclusion in the Conference Proceedings are due by October 30, 2011.
KEY READINGS


BIографICAL NOTES

Peter Fleming is Professor of Work, Organization and Society at Queen Mary, University of London. His research focuses on critical approaches to work, organization and society. The emphasis is on power, conflict and resistance in emerging organizational forms, as well as theoretical unpacking of such concepts. Over the least few years he has conducted research around power and resistance in call centres that have culture management programmes. His other interest includes business ethics and the social dynamics of corporate corruption. He has published in journals such as Journal of Management Studies, Organization and Human Relations. Recent books are Contesting the Corporation: Struggle, Power and Resistance in Organizations (with A. Spicer; CUP, 2007) and Authenticity and the Cultural Politics of Work: New Forms of Informal Control (OUP, 2009).

Christina Garsten is Professor and Chair at the Department of Social Anthropology (Stockholm University) and Research Director at Score (Stockholm University and Stockholm School of Economics). Her research interests are in the anthropology of organizations and markets, employability, careers and community in changing worlds of work, processes of globalization, and emerging forms of regulation and accountability in the labour market and in transnational trade. She has published a number of articles on high-tech organizational culture, flexibilization of employment, and corporate social responsibility. Recent co-edited books are Ethical Dilemmas in Management (Routledge, 2008), Workplace Vagabonds (Palgrave, 2008), Organizing Transnational Accountability (E.Elgar, 2008), and Transparency in a New Global Order (E.Elgar, 2008).

Axel Haunschild is Professor of Work, Employment and Organization at the University of Trier, Germany, and Visiting Professor at the School of Management, Royal Holloway, University of London. His research interests include changing forms of work and organization, creative indus-
tries, the institutional embeddedness of work and employment, CSR from an industrial relations perspective, organizations and lifestyles, and organizational boundaries. He has published in journals such as *Human Relations, International Journal of HRM* and *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, and recently co-edited *Work Less, Live More? Critical analysis of the Work-Life Boundary* (Palgrave, 2008).