

# Bridging Boundaries in Networked Military Organizations

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**TNO | Knowledge for business**



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# Purpose of the presentation

- What is integration and why is this a problem for networked military organizations?
- Overview of integration mechanisms
- Why is boundary spanning a key enabler to achieve successful results in networked military organizations?
- Boundary spanning research model
- Good liaison practice: Case study
- Implications for practice
- Directions for future research



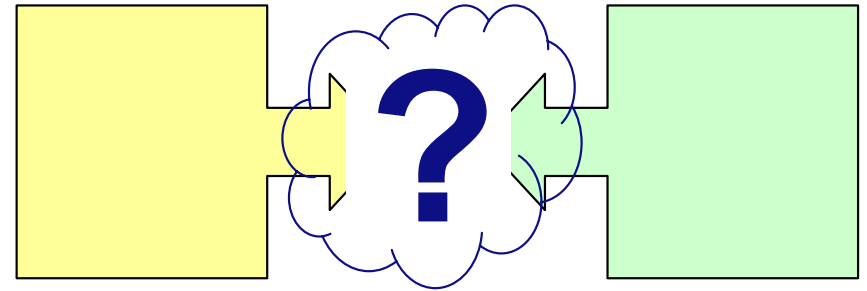


# Our research: Purpose

- Help the Netherlands Armed Forces to manage boundaries and to bridge breakdowns in organization networks (e.g., staffs) that hinder performance
- Literature research, interviews with key personnel, observations during field exercises, and multiteam lab experiments



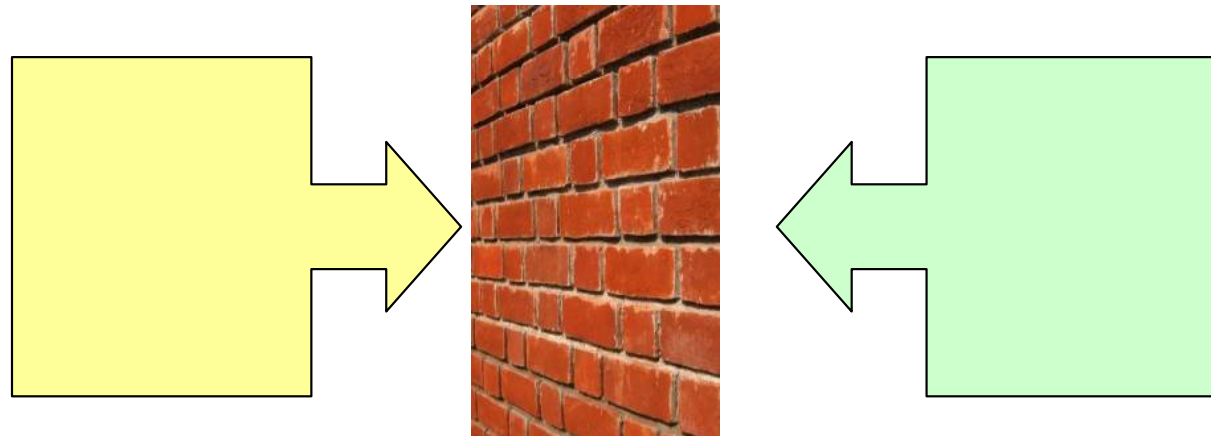
# Our research: Background



- Organizations share the problem of coordinating their internal activities, e.g., with external environment
- How to achieve cooperation and coordination across boundaries in ways that aid performance?
- The Netherlands Army is currently experimenting with new staff concepts and integration mechanisms to bridge breakdowns due to functional specialization leading to stove pipes
- Important questions:
  - What are effective integration mechanisms; and
  - How should they be properly deployed

# Barriers to integration

- Breakdowns in networks:
  - Functional or divisional boundaries;
  - Physical distance (even floors in a building);
  - Hierarchical levels; and
  - Project or key account team lines.



# Integration mechanisms (1/2)

- Organization design and personnel movement
    - Organization structure, team composition, roles, responsibilities
  - Training
  - Interface 'management' groups and integration teams
  - Work procedures and processes
    - Interface contracts
  - Rewarding systems and work rotation
  - Participant and manager mediation (e.g., liaison)
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- Browning, T. R. (1998). Integrative Mechanisms for Multiteam Integration: Findings from Five Case Studies. *System Engineering*, 1, 95-112.

## Integration mechanisms (2/2)

- Improved information and communication technologies



*Which mechanisms are most effective in networked operations?*

# Boundary spanners



- Boundary theory: Crucial role of individuals in establishing and maintaining interorganizational relationships: *boundary spanners*\*
- Boundary spanning: Social behaviors to manage interactions across boundaries and bridge breakdowns
- Several studies have demonstrated the importance of individual communication roles within organizations
- Highly influential in shaping and facilitating network form
  - Help overcome information asymmetries and breakdowns in networks
- \* networker, broker, collaborator, cupid, civic entrepreneur, boundroid, sparkplug, collabronaut, informational intermediaries, and catalysts



# The immigrant, captive, and emigrant

- Immigrant: outsider who joins the group voluntarily
  - Motivations to join may vary from needing another job, to wanting to work with a particular set of people
- Captive: assigned to the group, often despite a desire to be elsewhere
- Emigrant: leaves to team in order to represent it to outsiders
  - The emigrant has strong similarities with military liaisons

# When is boundary spanning successful? (1/2)

- Organizations that:
  - Work in relatively uncertain and demanding environments with diverse components, or
  - Have high interdependency with outside individuals and groups, or
  - Experience high task complexity
- Networked military organizations combine high interdependency, high uncertainty, and multiple forms of interdependence with multiple groups
- >>Boundary spanning is a key enabler to achieve successful results in networked military organizations

# When is boundary spanning successful? (2/2)

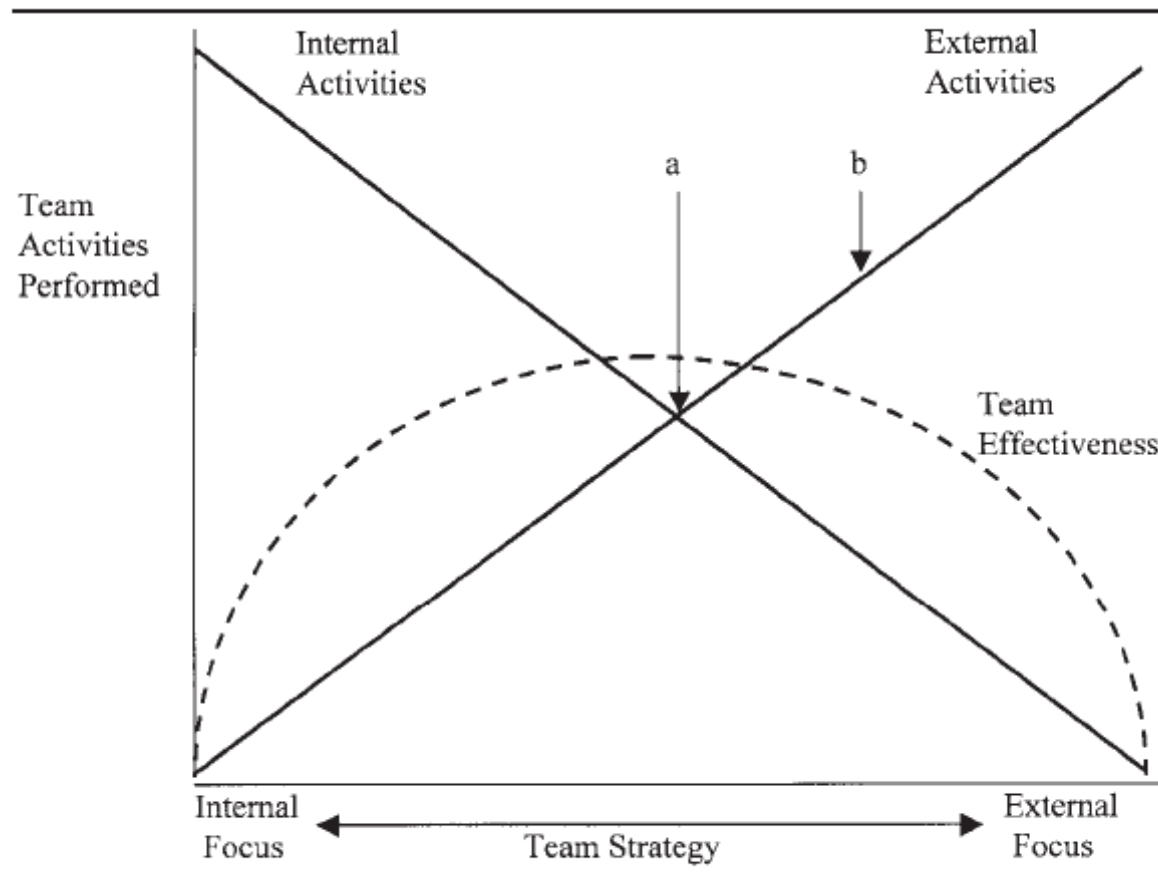
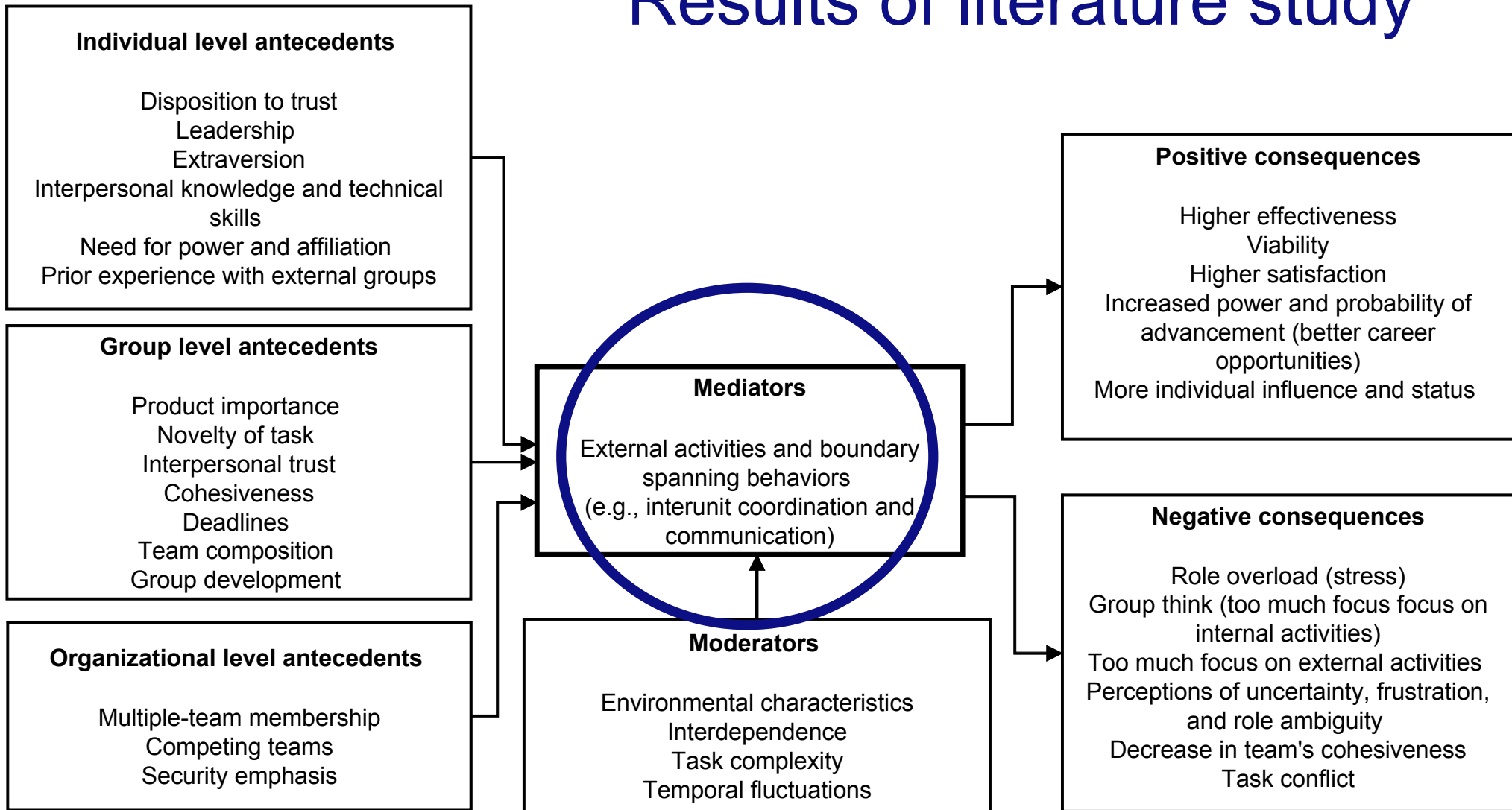


Figure 1: Opposing Process Model of Internal and External Activities

Choi, J. (2002). 'External activities and team effectiveness: Review and theoretical development'. *Small Group Research*, 33, 181-208.

# Results of literature study



## Antecedents and consequences of boundary spanning



# The liaison as integration mechanism

- Boundary spanners are of crucial importance to effective integration in networked operations
- To achieve the best utilization of resources or employment of services of one organization by another
- Usually part of the organization embeds a LNO in another part of the organization to provide face-to-face coordination (emigrant)
- LNO's main task is to make sure that the interaction between parts of the organization are optimal
  - Monitoring, coordinating, communicating, advising, assisting and reporting

# Good liaison practice: Case study

- What are the success factors and consequences of good liaison practice in networked operations?
- Observations and semi-structured interviews with LNOs
  - 2 international headquarters exercises in 2008 and 2009



# Setting: Joint headquarters

- Split up in a forward staff element and a reach back
- Forward staff element situated in the operational environment
  - Direct contact with the actors and key leaders in the field
  - Operational threat was immediate
- Reach back was based at peace time location, working extended office hours
- Geographical and operational separation constituted a large boundary / breakdown in organizational network

# What does a good LNO look like

- Sociable or people-person: externally oriented
  - The danger of being 'glued' to the computer screen
  - Personal face-to-face communication
  - A social network has to be set up at an early stage
- Working experience and domain knowledge
- Adequate rank
- Good in communicating the commanders opinions, interests and intent in the receiving headquarters
- Speaks the language of the sending and receiving headquarters
- Good in transmitting 'off-the-record' and emotional information
  - "Was the decision made instantly or was there a lot of discussion and emotions concerned with it?"





# Other findings

- Coordination role was acknowledged and appreciated
- The role of the LNO was not clear to all
  - Staff personnel misused the LNO for information requests
  - LNOs were often consulted as subject matter experts
- LNOs were not always familiar with the staff, procedures and processes, and sometimes even missed relevant information
- Job openings were found to hamper effective integration
- Boundaries enlarge when while under time pressure

# Some practical implications

- Match boundary spanning to temporal fluctuations
  - Invest in establishing basic relationship
- Keep distance between LNO and commander small
- The organization has yet to find a mechanism to handle stress
- Make clear role and contributions of LNO to staff processes
- LNO is no add-on to the staff
  - LNOs need to be present and preparing with their receiving staff during the preparation phase and beyond
- Make boundary spanning responsibility of all staff members (and not just to LNOs)
  - Mitigates personal costs

# Wrap up and future work

- Integration is a problem for networked military organizations
- Boundary spanning is a key enabler to achieve successful results
- Social integration mechanisms are of great importance, including the role of the LNO
- Instruments are needed to select and train personnel, to monitor quality of integration, and assess effects of interventions
- Mechanisms to handle stress are needed
- Size and impact of antecedents on boundary spanning need to be determined



Thanks for your attention

# Questions?

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