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Concepts of power in boundary spanning research: A review and research agenda

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Abstract

This meta-analytic review of power-sensitive boundary spanning research provides strong evidence that power enables, broadens and limits boundary spanning practices and outcomes. Boundary spanners use power bases to drive innovation and empower others to maintain cross-cultural collaboration, while altering unequal power relations that hinder learning and knowledge-sharing in organizations. The review further points to avenues for future research on power in boundary spanning processes: future boundary spanning studies would profit from strengthening a relational, social-constructivist understanding of power bases. This encompasses accounting for the power bases of all actors involved, expanding the notion of power bases to demographic diversity of gender, race or class, or showing how the relative importance of power bases is constructed within fields. Boundary spanning research would also benefit from expanding postcolonial and poststructuralist perspectives, which provide tools to detect subtle workings of power in boundary spanning processes. This may alter theoretical and practical implications, for example when boundary objects associated with transparency and freedom may be presented as limiting boundary spanners' field of action.

INTRODUCTION

Why are some boundary spanners more successful than others in driving organizational innovation and building sustainable inter-organizational collaboration? A considerable volume of boundary spanning literature explains their success by their ability to skilfully navigate and combine various boundary spanning activities, such as networking, brokering diverging interests or transferring information between teams and organizations (e.g. Ancona & Caldwell, 1992; Johnson & Duxbury, 2010; Ryan & O'Malley, 2016). However, drawing on particular boundary spanning activities may be insufficient to answer the question; rather, power-sensitive boundary spanning

research requires that scholars also account for power (Hawkins et al., 2016; Lindgren et al., 2008).

This stream of research has shown that boundary spanners frequently require a position of legitimate power or require expert knowledge to convince others to implement new practices (e.g. Ibarra, 1993; Jemison, 1984). In multinational corporations, boundary spanners must furthermore empower themselves and others by skilfully navigating cultural repertoires to enable cooperation (Kane & Levina, 2017; Yagi & Kleinberg, 2011). In doing so, they must tackle power relations of gender, race or class which have been proven to hinder knowledge-sharing in organizations (Qureshi et al., 2017). Despite these manifold insights on the effect of power on boundary spanning,

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there has been as yet no meta-analytic study of this body of research.

In this paper, I review power-sensitive boundary spanning research and illustrate its contributions to understanding key boundary spanning concepts (e.g. boundaries, innovation). To do so, I develop an analytical framework which combines previous categorizations of power concepts (Clegg et al., 2006; Göhler, 2009) in a novel and counter-intuitive manner. Based on this framework, I am able to contrast research insights on power in boundary spanning studies and highlight avenues for future research.

Future boundary spanning studies would profit from strengthening a relational, social-constructivist understanding of power bases. This encompasses accounting for the power bases of all actors involved, expanding the notion of power bases to demographic diversity of gender, race or class, or showing how the relative importance of power bases is constructed within fields. Boundary spanning research would also benefit from expanding postcolonial and poststructuralist perspectives, which provide tools to detect subtle workings of power in boundary spanning processes. This may alter theoretical and practical implications, for example when acts of adaption to boundary spanning processes may be revealed as acts of micro-resistance or when boundary objects associated with transparency and freedom may be presented as limiting boundary spanners' field of action.

The paper is organized as follows. In the next section, I explain how I collected and analysed research articles on power in boundary spanning and how they motivated my theoretical framework. In the following section, I detail the six power concepts of my framework and discuss their applications in boundary spanning research and contributions to understanding boundary spanning processes. Finally, I present avenues for future research.

METHODOLOGY

Organizing the review and motivations of the analytical framework

My review traces how power has been perceived in boundary spanning research since the emergence of the field in the 1970s. These perceptions are shaped by wider scientific discussions on power (Clegg et al., 2006; Göhler, 2009) and reflect the sometimes conflicting research perspectives and paradigms (Clegg & Hardy, 1996; Mumby & Stohl, 1991). It is therefore important to develop an analytical framework for clustering power-sensitive boundary spanning studies which synthesize power concepts and research perspectives.

Scholars have intensely debated the best means to analytically differentiate concepts of power (e.g. Fleming & Spicer, 2014; Haugaard, 2003; Lukes, 2004). Therefore, particular research perspectives, such as critical or functionalist, have significantly shaped how researchers perceive and normatively evaluate power (Clegg & Hardy, 1996). A common distinction, which has also influenced organization and management studies (OMS), is between 'power over' and 'power to' (Göhler, 2009). Broadly speaking, whereas power-over perspectives highlight an actor's relative position in structural power relations, power-to approaches focus on agency (Pitkin, 1972). With explicit reference to normative criteria, socio-critical scholars have also regarded 'power over' as a synonym for domination, whereas 'power to' has been associated with empowerment and emancipation (Pansardi, 2012).

By contrast, other researchers have distinguished between episodic, direct uses of power and systemic forms of power embedded in institutional structures (Lawrence, 2008; Lawrence et al., 2001). These categorizations have been refined into four manifestations of forms of power of varying subtlety: coercion, manipulation, domination and subjectification (Fleming & Spicer, 2007, 2014), yet they do not differentiate between research perspectives. Haugaard (2012) therefore combines them with socio-critical perspectives on power, arguing that all the dimensions can be associated with critical perspectives on domination and emancipation, as both presuppose the same process. Despite the compelling nature of his line of reasoning, I do not entirely support it, especially when it comes to discourse-oriented perspectives on power.

Discourse-oriented, poststructuralist approaches to power have influenced OMS since the late 1980s (Mumby & Stohl, 1991). Also referred to as 'power through' (Spencer & Doull, 2015), scholars of these approaches highlight the generative power of discourses in constituting reality and claim that power permeates society (Foucault, 1975, 1982). As governmentality studies, researchers have been particularly interested in how individuals become subjects through power technologies, which combine self-governance and being governed by others (Foucault, 1988). Poststructuralist research scholars refrain from normative evaluations of particular forms of power as good or bad (Gunn, 2006). Instead, they highlight that actors can only press for other forms of being governed (Foucault, 2007). From my perspective, this contradicts the notion of emancipating oneself from dominating structures and therefore also Haugaard's (2012) argument that all forms of power can be associated with socio-critical research perspectives on domination and emancipation.

Based on the above discussion of power concepts, my analytical framework consists of two important distinctions, as portrayed in Table 1. First, it differentiates

TABLE 1 Perspectives on power in boundary spanning research over time*

Power as... (research perspective)		1970–1979	1980–1989	1990–1999	2000–2009	2010–2019
Power over (structure-oriented)	... resource (functionalist)	Pettigrew (1972), Keller and Holland (1975), Kochan et al. (1975), Powell (1975), Keller et al. (1976), Zeitz (1976), Aldrich and Herker (1977), Whetten (1978), Spekman (1979)	Provan (1980), Hambrick (1981), Tushman and Scanlan (1981), Jackson and King (1983), Astley and Sachdeva (1984), Jemison (1984), At-Twaijri and Montanari (1987)	Finkelstein (1992), Friedman and Podolny (1992), Ibarra (1993), Bacharach et al. (1995), Boyle and Dwyer (1995), Galang and Ferris (1997), Russ et al. (1998), Hallenbeck et al. (1999), Rao and Sivakumar (1999)	Cross et al. (2000), Hislop et al. (2000), Williams (2002), Perrone et al. (2003), Golden and Veiga (2005), Muthusamy and White (2006), Schildt and Laamanen (2006), Stock (2006), Fleming and Waguespack (2007), Ireland and Webb (2007), Luo (2007), Pappas and Wooldridge (2007), Aldrich (2008), Piercy (2009)	Marrone (2010), Weerts and Sandmann (2010), Reiche (2011), Singh et al. (2011), Zhang et al. (2011), Blois and Ryan (2012), Currie et al. (2012), Hult (2012), Medvetz (2012), Williams (2012), Cross et al. (2013), Kroeger and Bachmann (2013), Langan-Fox et al. (2013), Williams (2013), Yoo (2013), Barner-Rasmussen et al. (2014), McNulty and Stewart (2014), Korschun (2015), Huang et al. (2016), Liu et al. (2018), Zhang (2018)

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Power as... (research perspective)		1970–1979	1980–1989	1990–1999	2000–2009	2010–2019
... domination (ideology-critical)					Grimshaw et al. (2005)	
Power to (agency-oriented)	... empowerment (interpretive)				Sapsed and Salter (2004), Levina and Vaast (2005), Santos and Eisenhardt (2005), Fleischmann (2006), Gasson (2006), Kellogg et al. (2006), Montgomery and Oliver (2007), Rothenberg (2007), Levina and Vaast (2008), Ernst and Yip (2009), Spee and Jarzabkowski (2009)	Mishra (2010), Sturdy and Wright (2011), Yagi and Kleinberg (2011), Hsiao et al. (2012), Nicholls and Huybrechts (2016), Smith (2016), Kane and Levina (2017)
	... emancipation (ideology-critical)					Abbott et al. (2013), Levina and Vaast (2013), Ravishankar et al. (2013), Kislov et al. (2017), Qureshi et al. (2017), Soderberg and Romani (2017), Reinecke et al. (2018), Soundararajan et al. (2018), Tøth and Soderberg (2018)
Power through (discourse-oriented)	... objectification (poststructuralist)			Boland and Tenkasi (1995)	Carlile (2004), Thomas et al. (2007)	Barrett and Oborn (2010), Huvila (2011), Hawkins et al. (2016)
	... governmentality (poststructuralist)					Sage et al. (2010)

*Underlined research articles have power as (one of) their primary research topic(s).

between the particular aspect of power a researcher's power concept focuses on (see first column in Table 1): structure (power over), agency (power to/with) or discourse (power through). It further includes research perspectives (see second column brackets in Table 1) and their normative underpinnings regarding the maintenance or alteration of the existing organizational or social order (Deetz, 2003; Sieben, 2007). The resulting six power concepts (see 'power as...' in second column in Table 1) are detailed in the next sections.

My analytical framework advances common differentiations between critical and functionalist research perspectives on power by demonstrating that they may depart from the same concept of power, yet normatively interpret their observations differently. For example, 'power as resource' and 'power as domination' both focus on structural aspects of power in the sense of 'power over', yet 'power as resource' adopts a managerial, functionalist perspective on using power bases to foster innovation, whereas 'power as domination' critiques the reproduction of unequal, societal power relations in boundary spanning processes. As outlined in the final section, the framework facilitates the transfer of research insights across seemingly incompatible research perspectives.

Scope of the review

I collected the 82 journal articles and 13 books and book chapters listed in Table 1 through an online literature search, combining protocol-driven methodology and snowballing techniques (Brown, 2015). First, I used various online databases such as Web of Science or Google Scholar to identify the relevant papers in OMS. These papers had to fulfil two criteria: explicitly name the terms 'boundary spanning' or 'boundary spanner' and mention power at least once. I did not count the mention of power in the articles when referring to words such as 'manpower' or 'powerful research agenda'.

Next, I checked references in the articles to further relevant papers. Additional articles were also included in the analysis when they matched the above-mentioned criteria. Articles in journals outside of OMS were added when referred to by other scholars (e.g. Gasson's, 2006 article in the *European Journal of Information Systems*) or when the authors themselves had previously published on similar topics in OMS journals (e.g. Williams's, 2011 article in the *Journal of Integrated Care*).

The process of data collection revealed that only 21 research articles had power as their primary research topic (underlined in Table 1). My knowledge of different power concepts, as detailed in the next section, cautioned me into maintaining a low-threshold selection process regarding

mentions of power. A rare mention of power may be rooted in a particular understanding of the concept. For instance, agency-oriented approaches regard power as an outcome of collective action. Therefore, they often portray empowering boundary spanning practices without explicitly theorizing power. Excluding these studies would have disproportionately diminished the agency-oriented perspective on power in comparison to structure- and discourse-focused perspectives.

Furthermore, I included articles in my analysis which do not entirely fulfil my selection criteria. For instance, the article by Pettigrew (1972) does not explicitly mention the term boundary spanner, yet I included it in my analysis because it is one of the founding references of boundary spanning research. Equally, the study by Ravishankar et al. (2013) does not explicitly mention boundary spanning; however, it is cited by other power-sensitive boundary spanning studies and is amongst the few studies to provide a critical research perspective on power. In some edited volumes on boundary spanning, only particular chapters provide a power-sensitive perspective on boundary spanning, in which case I solely mentioned these particular chapters in the review. In cases where power was mentioned in several chapters but one in particular seemed to provide an important perspective on the topic, I referenced this particular chapter, for example Grimshaw et al. (2005) in Marchington et al. (2005). My selection process is thus shaped by the aim of this review, which is to portray the nuances of the ongoing academic discussion on power in the boundary spanning literature and how these have contributed to understanding the key concepts in boundary spanning research. Table 2 summarizes the lessons learnt from each perspective on power in boundary spanning research, which I detail in the following sections.

Power over: Structure-oriented power concepts in boundary spanning

Power concepts have varied over the decades in boundary spanning research. Table 1 illustrates how structure-oriented power-over concepts have dominated the research field from the 1970s to the 1990s, understanding power as a positional (or personal) attribute which actors possess and which helps them influence others' practices and behaviour (Pitkin, 1972).

Power-over approaches build on 'the classic Weberian view of power' (Haugaard, 2012, p. 35),¹ which is based on authority and command, highlighting how actors may be in a powerful position to limit others' scope of action (Dahl, 1957), even when done with good intentions (Göhler, 2009). Although command 'remains the litmus test

TABLE 2 Concepts of power and their contribution to understanding boundary spanning processes and outcomes

Structure-oriented perspective (power over)	
Power is a structural and individual resource which can be leveraged to overcome given boundaries and drive organizational innovation. Power is primarily exercised in the form of force/command or persuasion/consent. Boundary spanners' agency is relational, depending on their structural position and skills.	
Power-as-resource	Power-as-domination
<i>Major learning:</i> Boundary spanning activities need to be coupled with power bases (e.g. expert knowledge, management position) to drive innovation. Boundary spanners can increase their power of influence by gaining access to new power bases, combining power bases (also by teaming up with others) or redefining the importance of power bases in a field or organization.	<i>Major learning:</i> Boundary spanning processes and boundary spanners are entangled in societal power relations. Related social boundaries of gender, race or class connected hamper boundary spanning activities of knowledge-sharing and learning in organizations. Often, these obstacles to learning and collaboration remain invisible.
<i>Perspective on boundaries:</i> Boundary spanners use power bases to bridge relatively static boundaries on the individual, organizational or field level – or they uphold them to protect vital information.	<i>Perspective on boundaries:</i> Social boundaries are sticky because they are historically grown and often taken for granted. Dominant groups seek to maintain these boundaries in boundary spanning processes.
Agency-oriented perspective (power to)	
Power emerges in (inter-)action and is a synonym to individual and collective agency. Actors create spaces of collaboration to achieve common ends and empower others to collaborate. Power is not a possession but exists only in its actualization.	
Power-as-empowerment	Power-as-emancipation
<i>Major learning:</i> Boundary spanners need to empower themselves and others to enable collaboration. Jointly created spaces of collaboration serve to improve team performance, product quality and service; as does empowerment through boundary spanning efforts. Boundary spanning success is often a common endeavour.	<i>Major learning:</i> Less powerful actors often stabilize collaboration by skilfully navigating historically grown societal and global power relations. Postcolonial research can help to detect these contributions as well as subtle acts of resistance to boundary spanning activities.
<i>Perspective on boundaries:</i> Individual, organizational and demographic boundaries (e.g. nation states) are perceived as constantly negotiated in the context of ongoing politics and power as actualization.	<i>Perspective on boundaries:</i> Even though social boundaries and global relations have a long history of domination, they can be altered to a certain degree. Thereby, boundary spanning activities may produce ambiguous outcomes from maintaining and altering these boundaries.
Discourse-oriented perspective (power through)	
Discourses (re)constitute the objects they talk about and thus have two powerful effects: objectification and subjectification. Power cannot be located in the position of a powerful actor but rather permeates societies and organizations.	
Power-as-discourse	Power-as-governmentality
<i>Major learning:</i> Boundary objects also play agentic roles in boundary spanning processes. Discourses have reality-constituting effects, also on boundary objects. Over time, these objects become associated with certain possibilities for learning and action. They thereby enable and hinder learning and knowledge-sharing between actors.	<i>Major learning:</i> Boundary objects and boundary spanners are entangled in technologies of governing the self and others. Logics of flexibility and transparency may appear free of power but have various objectifying and subjectifying power effects. They may subtly drive boundary spanners and other actors into self-discipline and self-surveillance.
<i>Perspective on boundaries:</i> Boundaries, in particular language boundaries, are (re)constituted through a web of power–knowledge–discourse. Discourses distinguish boundary objects and processes based on binary logics of legitimate and illegitimate or scientific and common knowledge, and thereby (re)constitute these boundary objects and processes, which in turn enables or hinders learning.	<i>Perspective on boundaries:</i> Boundaries are constantly reified and altered by binary logics based on what is deemed legitimate or rational in a particular context. Boundaries are not external to the individual but constitute the very same individual, which renders it harder to detect the powerful effects of these logics.

of legitimate power' (Courpasson et al., 2015, p. 9), other forms of power must be mobilized for an actor to secure his or her position of legitimate power. Such forms of power have been referred to as 'soft power', which involves social and political skills such as persuasion, agenda-setting or

sense-making (Courpasson et al., 2015; Tourish & Robson, 2006).

There are thus two main methods by which actors can exercise their power of influence in the sense of 'power over': force and persuasion/consent. Depending on their

research perspectives, boundary spanning researchers have been interested in different aspects of these methods for shaping boundary spanning processes. Scholars with a functionalist research perspective have examined how boundary spanners use various structural (and individual) power bases to foster innovation and collaboration in and between organizations (e.g. Ibarra, 1993; Spekman, 1979). Thereby, they have focused on the individual and organizational level of analysis and applied a managerial perspective interested in optimizing performance and driving innovation. Following feminist, philosophical research on power, I label such approaches *power as resource* (Allen, 2016).

By contrast, ideology-critical approaches to 'power over' have shown how unequal societal power structures of gender, race or class hamper learning and knowledge-sharing in organizations (e.g. Grimshaw et al., 2005; Soundararajan et al., 2018). In a critical research tradition (Pansardi, 2012; Sieben, 2007), scholars of these approaches are interested in how powerful societal groups or 'the state' maintain dominance and problematize the (re)production of unequal power structures through boundary spanning processes. Such approaches are referred to as *power as domination* in the context of this paper. Often drawing on the concept of hegemony (Gramsci, 1992), they highlight that dominance is obtained 'by consent rather than force...; and it is attained through the myriad ways in which the institutions of civil society operate to shape, directly or indirectly, the cognitive and affective structures whereby men [and women] perceive and evaluate problematic social reality' (Femia, 1975, p. 31).

Power as resource: Using power bases to cross boundaries and foster innovation

Scholars with a resource-oriented perspective on power view the boundary spanner as a powerful 'gatekeeper' (Pettigrew, 1972) or 'influence agent' (Spekman, 1979) in an organizational environment characterized by uncertainty and contingency. They are primarily interested in how single boundary spanners use structural and personal power bases to reduce this uncertainty and drive innovation (e.g. Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2014; Ibarra, 1993; Spekman, 1979). Therefore, they draw on the theory of power bases proposed by social psychologists (French & Raven, 1959), which represents a classic power-over approach (Fleming & Spicer, 2014). Managers as boundary spanners may, for example, use their influential position in the organizational hierarchy (*legitimate power*) to force others to adopt new organizational practices (*coercive power*). Their powerful position may be particularly beneficial when a quick settlement of negotiations between two organiza-

tions is desired (Jackson & King, 1983); however, these representational roles may be less effective than informational boundary spanning roles or an expert status (*expert power*) when seeking to establish ongoing cooperation between partners (Spekman, 1979; Tushman & Scanlan, 1981).

Research on strategic alliances stresses that exercising coercive power over an organizational partner may even have detrimental effects for the alliance (Muthusamy & White, 2006). Scholars therefore conceptualize trust as a complementary mechanism to coercive power through which 'a firm seeks to promote behaviors in a partner' (Ireland & Webb, 2007, p. 487). For example, when a buyer perceives that a supplier's boundary spanner has considerable autonomy in decision-making, their trust increases, which ultimately stabilizes the collaboration (Perrone et al., 2003). The above examples show that the applied power base influences future interactions (Spekman, 1979).

In line with functionalist research perspectives (Sieben, 2007), resource-oriented boundary spanning scholars have primarily used quantitative methods to test their predefined hypothesis on the influence of power bases on innovation. Thereby, (coercive) power as command resulting from position power has frequently been studied, even with respect to it emanating from an actor's position in the actual, informal patterns of interaction that define a social network (Astley & Sachdeva, 1984; Ibarra, 1993). However soft power, based on skills of sense-making or navigating cultural repertoires, has less frequently been examined (e.g. Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2014), potentially because it may be harder to quantify and measure. Researchers have also discussed the complexity of analytically differentiating power bases, thereby considering and discarding a reduction of differentiations to non-coercive and coercive power bases (e.g. Spekman, 1979).

Which boundaries? Power-as-resource studies regard power bases as a central mechanism to overcome boundaries and drive innovation. They are either interested in how boundary spanners use power bases to bridge boundaries and drive organizational innovation (e.g. Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2014) or how they use them to uphold boundaries and protect vital organizational information (e.g. Pettigrew, 1972). Thereby, researchers have viewed boundaries as relatively stable and given. This is best exemplified by the study of McNulty and Stewart (2014), who use the metaphor of the organizational silo (Diamond et al., 2002) to highlight how actors often experience organizations as fragmented and constrained. They emphasize that boundary spanners draw on power bases to build bridges between these silos and drive others to 'transcend the silo-mentality' (McNulty & Stewart, 2014, p. 530).

Resource-focused research has mainly focused on individual, organizational and field-level boundaries. Many scholars (e.g. Ibarra, 1993; Spekman, 1979) have accounted

for vertical boundaries of organizational hierarchy as expressed in ranks, authority or seniority (Yip et al., 2009). Further studies have included horizontal boundaries, which cross functions and expertise (Lee et al., 2014). For example, power bases related to the horizontal division of labour have been found to be better predictors of technical innovation than those related to the organization's formal hierarchy (Ibarra, 1993). Researchers have also included stakeholder boundaries in their analyses, including relations with an organization's partners or communities (Yip et al., 2009). This highlights how organizations often draw on non-coercive power to build trust and bridge these boundaries (e.g. Ireland & Webb, 2007; Muthusamy & White, 2006).

How are boundaries crossed? From a power-over perspective, agency springs from both 'bases of power, which is a personal or positional attribute, and the enactment of power... defined as the ability to affect outcomes' (Ibarra, 1993, p. 472). Consequently, access to and use of power bases is key to understanding how boundary spanners cross individual, organizational and field-level boundaries. As already outlined, researchers have studied a variety of power bases which boundary spanners use to bridge boundaries, some emphasizing that boundary spanning may be facilitated by combining power bases. For example, boundary spanners 'who possess both cultural and language skills... perform a significantly larger number of functions than those who possess cultural skills only' (Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2014, p. 899).

Most resource-oriented research has focused on single boundary spanners; yet access to and use of power bases can also be a common endeavour. For example, one negotiator may build trust with the other party whereas another may focus on the best outcome and prevent the over-adoption of the other party's perspective (Friedman & Podolny, 1992).

Furthermore, boundary spanners' ability to bridge boundaries by using power bases is highly context-specific. The importance of particular power bases varies by context (Schwab et al., 1985; Williams, 2002) and their effect increases with the uniqueness and importance of the skill for the organization (Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2014). In addition, in a specific field, boundary spanning activities are shaped by the power position of the organization's targeted actor, defined by access to information, hierarchical field position or predictability (Marrone, 2010; Schwab et al., 1985). Organizations may also diminish the boundary spanner's power of influence through the job rotation or routinization of boundary spanning activities to ensure their compliance with the organization's values and goals (Aldrich & Herker, 1977; Russ et al., 1998).

In addition to the access to and use of power bases, some researchers have highlighted a third aspect related to bridg-

ing boundaries and driving innovation: the (re)definition of power bases in a particular field. Boundary spanners can strengthen their influence through acquiring and redistributing field-specific, valued forms of capital, such as social networks, expert knowledge or money (Kislov et al., 2017; Levina & Vaast, 2013). The same applies to entire organizations and their relative power in inter-organizational collaboration. For instance, so-called 'boundary organizations', which mediate the relationships among fields (e.g. think tanks), may greatly influence the conversion rates of different forms of capital between these fields (Medvetz, 2012). It has thus been claimed that an organization's field power can be determined based on its possession of and influence on field-specific forms of capital.

What have we learned? Resource-focused boundary spanning studies have shown that boundary spanning activities must be coupled with power bases to drive innovation. They have primarily focused on single boundary spanners to show that they require access to various power bases, which must also be relevant to a particular field or organization, in order to influence others and implement new ideas. Soft power, such as negotiation skills or trust-building, has rarely been studied in comparison with coercive power (e.g. legitimate power), perhaps because of the quantitative, statistical nature of power-as-resource approaches. Some researchers have emphasized that a boundary spanner's power of influence can be increased by combining power bases (as a single boundary spanner or by collaboration with others) or by redefining the relative importance of particular power bases in a given field.

Power as domination: Societal power relations hamper learning and knowledge-sharing

Domination-critical approaches have, so far, been rare in power-sensitive boundary spanning research. Similar to power-as-resource studies, they view power from a structure-oriented perspective but focus on the structural patterns that shape societies and the global economy. These studies address how unequal power relations in societies or global relations of dominance and exploitation influence boundary spanning practices (e.g. Grimshaw et al., 2005; Soundararajan et al., 2018). Researchers have demonstrated that social boundaries may exacerbate boundary spanning efforts aimed at fostering learning and knowledge-sharing in organizations. For example, gender and caste barriers have been shown to hinder knowledge-sharing in rural communities in India (Qureshi et al., 2017), for example male community members limiting female members' participation in the process of knowledge acquisition. In a critical research tradition, scholars of these

approaches view organizations as political sites characterized by opposition and struggle (Fleming & Spicer, 2007), often politicizing unequal power relations and adopting an explicit socio-critical stance in favour of historically marginalized groups (Sieben, 2007).

When studying relations of domination in boundary spanning processes, some scholars have shed light on global relations of domination from a Marxist capital-labour perspective (e.g. Grimshaw et al., 2005), criticizing research on interorganizational networks for overrating the positive effect of networks on efficiency by overlooking the complex socioeconomic relations these networks are embedded in. Instead, they highlight the influence of 'the contradictory capitalist employment relationship' (Grimshaw et al., 2005, p. 60) on boundary spanning, which shapes dynamics of cooperation and conflict, and thereby network forms. For instance, sourcing agents in the Indian knitwear garment export industry not only work to sustain collaboration between powerful Western buyers and largely dependent Indian suppliers, but also seek to improve working conditions (Soundararajan et al., 2018). When attempting to establish a basis for negotiating working conditions, they must also negotiate a colonial legacy manifested in the scepticism of Indian suppliers towards European efforts to improve working conditions. Grimshaw et al. (2005) therefore argue that researchers must account for the effects of global partnerships and networks on the relational power between employers (capital) and workers (labour), as well as on new inequalities among workers.

Which boundaries? Domination-focused approaches display a rather static notion of power and power relations, which in turn views boundaries as relatively stable and given. The stickiness of the boundaries is explicable by the nature of the studied boundaries: social boundaries and related historically grown power relations. Domination-oriented studies assert that dominant, powerful groups draw symbolic boundaries of binary opposition between themselves and others (Lamont & Molnár, 2002). Over time, these distinctions become taken-for-granted and manifest in social boundaries and unequal power relations of race, class, gender, etc. In turn, social boundaries and power relations may aggravate or even thwart boundary spanning goals of collaboration and knowledge-sharing (e.g. Qureshi et al., 2017; Soundararajan et al., 2018).

Power-as-domination perspectives on boundary spanning further address geographic boundaries of location, distance and region (Lee et al., 2014), scholars stressing that the reification of such boundaries is linked to global inequalities resulting from capitalist labour relations (e.g. Grimshaw et al., 2005; Soundararajan et al., 2018), which are often entangled with postcolonial relations of exploitation and stereotypization (e.g. Reinecke

et al., 2018; Soundararajan et al., 2018). They argue that negotiated boundaries of language, culture or status are embedded in historically grown processes of dehumanization and degradation of the colonized other (e.g. Abbott et al., 2013; Soundararajan et al., 2018).

How are boundaries crossed? Power-as-domination scholars promote a view of binary opposition and differing interests between the dominant and the dominated; the oppressor and the oppressed; or, in boundary spanning terms, between resourceful European buyers and largely dependent Indian suppliers (Soundararajan et al., 2018). They accordingly claim that dominant social groups constantly need to reify social boundaries to secure their power position; that is, their superior access to material and symbolic resources. Therefore, they exclude others from relevant boundary spanning knowledge (e.g. Qureshi et al., 2017), or simply define their way of thinking and managing as the universal norm in cross-cultural boundary spanning. This becomes apparent when European clients subtly enforce their management style as the norm and ascribe the non-conformist behaviour of Indian vendors to their alleged laziness (Søderberg & Romani, 2017). Even though advocates of power-as-domination approaches regard resistance as possible and important, they are aware that changing historically grown power relations and stereotypical images are complicated and tedious (Grimshaw et al., 2005). Rather than providing methods to overcome boundaries, they focus on revealing and scandalizing the persistence of historically grown power relations in and through boundary spanning processes.

What have we learned? Domination-focused studies sensitize boundary spanning researchers to the fact that historically grown power relations of gender, race, class, etc. hamper learning and knowledge-sharing in and between organizations. They thereby broaden the notion of the influence of context in boundary spanning practices and problematize the workings of hegemony as the fabrication of consent through the various taken-for-granted practices and identities which underlie boundary spanning activities. By demonstrating how colonial power relations are embedded into seemingly universal management norms (e.g. Søderberg & Romani, 2017; Soundararajan et al., 2018), they also evaluate boundary spanning practices from the perspective of marginalized groups, instead of or in addition to the managerial perspective.

Agency-oriented power concepts in boundary spanning

Since the 2000s, structure-oriented perspectives on power have been complemented by power-to approaches in

boundary spanning research, which focus on agency and stress an actor's ability to influence practices, behaviour and identities (Pitkin, 1972). German-Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt is one of the most prominent representatives of power-to conceptualizations of power.² In contrast to structure-oriented power concepts, she stresses that:

... power cannot be stored up and kept in reserve for emergencies like the instruments of violence, but exists only in its actualization. ... Power is always... a power potential and not an unchangeable, measurable, and reliable entity like force or strength. (Arendt, 1958, p. 200)

It is therefore unsurprising that the emergence of agency-oriented power-to concepts has coincided with a broadening of research perspectives in boundary spanning studies, from functionalist to interpretive approaches (see Table 1). Scholars have claimed that 'simple' input-output relationships underlying the notion of the hierarchical, bureaucratic organization are no longer applicable in the context of the postmodern organization (e.g. Kellogg et al., 2006; Williams, 2002). Accordingly, cooperation and knowledge-sharing have become important aspects studied in relation to power in boundary spanning processes using qualitative methods and by developing research categories from the data in an interpretive research tradition (Sieben, 2007).

The concept of 'power to' has been prominently applied in feminist contexts based on a critique of 'power over' as a masculinist approach to power (Allen, 2016). It closely links power to collective action, asserting that power 'emerges out of the kinds of actions that we engage in with others when we strive to achieve common ends' (Allen, 2002, p. 138).³ Thereby, 'power to' is often used synonymously with empowerment (Allen, 2016; Pansardi, 2012). Depending on the particular research perspective, a qualitative difference exists between understandings of empowerment. Socio-critical scholars problematize the limited understanding of empowerment in management contexts. Here, empowerment means redefining the role of workers 'in order to enable the organization to achieve new goals and to adapt to a changing environment' (Inglis, 1997, p. 5). Boundary spanning research in this tradition focuses on how boundary spanners empower themselves and others to enable or improve collaboration and performance (e.g. Nicholls & Huybrechts, 2016; Yagi & Kleinberg, 2011). These interpretive approaches frequently adopt a managerial perspective and seek to maintain or improve the existing organizational order, and are referred to in this paper as *power as empowerment*.⁴

By contrast, empowerment can be understood from a socio-critical perspective as a necessary condition for emancipation which also requires 'liberation from ideologies, power relationships, limiting paradigms and constraining epistemologies' (Abel & Sementelli, 2002, p. 260). Emancipation-oriented power concepts often highlight resistance against oppression and control, thereby resonating with critical research perspectives (Sieben, 2007).⁵ In this vein, few boundary spanning researchers have examined subtle acts of resistance against and emancipation from historically grown power structures in everyday boundary spanning practices (e.g. Ravishankar et al., 2013). In this paper, such approaches are referred to as *power as emancipation*.

Power as empowerment: Enabling oneself and others to collaborate

Empowerment-focused boundary spanning researchers have highlighted that the empowerment of *all* actors may be an important precondition for collaboration. They have accordingly traced how boundary spanners empower themselves and others to collaborate (e.g. Nicholls & Huybrechts, 2016; Yagi & Kleinberg, 2011). For example, boundary spanners who embrace their home country's identity tend to empower home country collaborators by teaching missing competencies or connecting them to important stakeholders (Kane & Levina, 2017), thereby also enabling their own boundary spanning activity by skilfully navigating identities and cultural repertoires (Yagi & Kleinberg, 2011). Empowerment-oriented studies have evaluated the outcome of empowerment efforts from a managerial perspective in terms of improving outcome and performance. In the context of internal marketing as boundary spanning activity, Mishra (2010, p. 189) claims that '[a]s companies empower staff to build stronger customer relationships, internal marketing underpins the drive for greater involvement, commitment, and understanding'. Empowerment-interested studies share their managerial perspective with resource-focused research but also stress the value of *enabling* others to collaborate, in contrast to 'getting others to want what you want' (Nye, 1990, p. 167).

Empowerment-focused boundary spanning scholars have further traced how actors jointly create spaces of collaboration; their approach reflecting power as emerging in interaction (Arendt, 1958; Berger, 2005). In addition, they have demonstrated that common efforts to build spaces of collaboration may be particularly important when establishing collaboration under conditions of rapid change and uncertainty (Kellogg et al., 2006). In such contexts, different communities of practice enact a coordination structure

to facilitate learning and adaptability. As a precondition for power as acting together, actors must agree on the general procedures of exchange, while locally and temporally coordinating their actions and addressing their differences in norms and interests only when required.

Which boundaries? Empowerment-oriented power scholars regard politics as ongoing, controversial (public) argument (Arendt, 1958) and stress the value of negotiation and dialogue (Berger, 2005). Consequently, boundary spanning researchers in this tradition view boundaries as constantly negotiated and fluid. When boundary spanners empower themselves and others to collaborate, they must negotiate various types of boundaries and related differences in interests, meanings and norms. Thereby, empowerment-based studies have focused on individual, organizational and demographic boundaries in a globalized world, and how such boundaries are constantly altered and maintained in teams and organizations to expand knowledge-sharing and collaboration (e.g. Hsiao et al., 2012; Levina & Vaast, 2008). These intersecting boundaries have predominantly been approached with interpretive research paradigms, which develop their categorizations *in situ*, often drawing on 'practice-based analysis to understand boundary-spanning behaviours from a particular field of practice' (Hsiao et al., 2012, p. 464f.).

How are boundaries crossed? In this stream of research, boundary spanning has an individual and a collective component. Collaboration and knowledge-sharing are as much the result of individual efforts to foster dialogue and persuade others (e.g. Yagi & Kleinberg, 2011) as they are of common processes of meaning-making and platform-building (e.g. Kellogg et al., 2006). Consequently, empowerment-focused studies have shed light on the contribution of a web of actors to boundary spanning activities and outcomes. Sturdy and Wright (2011) stress that researchers should consider the contribution of *all* actors to creating, maintaining and expanding collaboration. Consequently, they also highlight the 'receiving' end of boundary spanning activities, portraying consultancy clients as active and powerful in a process of management knowledge co-production.

In contrast to resource-oriented boundary spanning research, boundaries and power dynamics are not viewed as disturbing but as a normal part of human interaction. From this perspective, boundaries are not overcome but are constantly altered and/or maintained. For example, actors first must establish a common platform and agree upon its rules to then discuss their differing interests and norms within it. They may not necessarily reconcile their differences but may instead 'juxtapose their diverse efforts into a provisional and emerging collage of loosely coupled contributions' (Kellogg et al., 2006, p. 38).

Some researchers have also cautioned that empowerment-oriented studies may overlook important power aspects when focusing solely on power embedded in observable practices and interaction. These scholars deem it necessary to account for preconditions for action, which power theorist Hannah Arendt regards as an important aspect of 'power to' (Allen, 2002). For instance, boundary spanners may be unable to act when concepts and tasks are highly complex (Smith, 2016) and may therefore be invisible from a research perspective which studies empowerment by observing practices.

What have we learned? Empowerment-based boundary spanning research sensitizes scholars to the preconditions of collaboration and knowledge-sharing, which can be acts of empowering the self and others or of building and maintaining shared boundary spanning platforms. Such scholars highlight the contribution of all actors, in addition to examining empowerment practices of single boundary spanners and beginning to point to silence and passivity as influential boundary spanning processes.

Power as emancipation: Altering societal power relations to foster knowledge-sharing

There are two approaches to power in boundary spanning research which apply a socio-critical perspective: 'power as domination' and 'power as emancipation'. Both approaches are rare and posit that social boundaries may aggravate or even thwart boundary spanning goals of collaboration and knowledge-sharing. Thereby, power-as-emancipation approaches focus on how boundary spanners and other actors *change* social boundaries and related power relations.

Scholars have demonstrated how boundary spanning activities alter the social norms underlying social boundaries and thus lead to increased knowledge-sharing within communities and organizations. For example, rural Indian regions where non-governmental organization moderators intentionally created an inclusive group and encouraged dialogue across gender and caste barriers were more successful in knowledge-sharing than ones without such dialogue (Qureshi et al., 2017). The gender-specific role expertise with regards to the implementation of new harvesting practices, or with regards to the market implications of decisions, can thus be harnessed. Research has also shown that boundary spanners such as middle managers can use their position power to alleviate status differences in cross-cultural boundary spanning (Levina & Vaast, 2008), drawing on their gatekeeper position and prestige to establish a constructive interaction style or

distribute economic capital to provide possibilities for face-to-face interaction.

Which boundaries? Emancipation-oriented studies focus on altering social boundaries, the scholars regarding these boundaries as historically grown and deeply embedded in societies, organizations and individuals. Ravishankar et al. (2013, p. 387) therefore state that '[f]rom the perspective of vendor organizations in India, however, the IT offshoring phenomenon is more than just a business relationship with Western firms. It is also embedded within the context of the longstanding imbalances of power in the relationship between the West and the East'.

Emancipation-oriented scholars have proposed concepts which address boundaries on multiple levels. For instance, Abbott et al. (2013) introduce the concept of creolization in international collaboration which, amongst other aspects, is centred on cultural hybridization and identity multiplicity. The concept cuts across four levels and related boundaries: individual, organizational, national and global. The authors emphasize the benefits of hybridization while warning that it 'may not always be successful and produce positive synergies, and there are times when differences and conflicts fail to be resolved' (Abbott et al., 2013, p. 125). They thereby highlight an important insight offered by emancipation-based power perspectives on boundary spanning: ambiguity.

How are boundaries crossed? Emancipation-oriented boundary spanning research on power claims that boundaries related to social inequalities constantly need to be reified and often serve to maintain hegemony (Abbott et al., 2013). Similar to domination-oriented approaches, they perceive social boundaries as sticky, yet they more prominently highlight the importance of resistance and micro-practices in gradually changing these boundaries. When seeking to alter these deeply embedded power relations, boundary spanners often face ambiguity, as their practices may simultaneously alter and maintain social boundaries. In particular, cross-cultural boundary spanning studies have emphasized these ambiguous boundary spanning outcomes and introduced theoretical concepts which address this dilemma (e.g. Abbott et al., 2013; Ravishankar et al., 2013).

Much like power-as-empowerment approaches, these studies have shed light on the contribution of all actors to boundary spanning processes, particularly relatively powerless actors in cross-cultural collaboration (e.g. Ravishankar et al., 2013; Soundararajan et al., 2018). Researchers, in addition to studying these actors' efforts to stabilize collaboration in a global environment characterized by historically grown power imbalances, have also portrayed their acts of resistance. In an ideology-critical fashion, they have applied postcolonial perspectives to

allow for a counter-hegemonic reading and reinterpretation of the assumed adaptation practices of less powerful actors in international collaboration. For example, Ravishankar et al. (2013, p. 397) categorize the behaviours of Indian vendors as forms of mimicry, whereby they 'underplayed their Indian identity, staged deliberate shows of un-Indianness, and tried to sound and act like Americans'. At the same time, the vendors were aware of their mimicry and the unequal power relations underlying their global interactions. Therefore, their behaviour is 'as an important reminder of the unequal relations which govern postcolonial encounters' (Ravishankar et al., 2013, p. 398). Postcolonial writer Bhabha (1984, p. 129) stresses that mimicry poses a threat to 'the narcissistic demand of colonial authority' because it represents a 'process by which the look of surveillance returns as displacing gaze of the disciplined, where the observer becomes the observed and "partial" representation rearticulates the whole notion of identity and alienates it from essence'.

Emancipation-oriented scholars have also reflected on how to judge the nature of the observed boundary spanning practices and whether or not these practices actually diminish social boundaries. Levina and Vaast (2013) distinguish *transactive* boundary spanning, which maintains institutional relations, from *transformative* boundary spanning, which alters them. Söderberg and Romani (2017) apply the transactive–transformative distinction in the context of a global partnership. Their study shows how a counter-hegemonic reading which is aware of unequal power relations can provide a different interpretation of boundary spanning practices. The strategy of connecting vendors and clients through regular visits to the Indian offshore sites by the Western headquarters can thus be reinterpreted as a form of postcolonial control. Boundary spanning practices reflect the European client's need 'to maintain its advantageous power position and retain its vendor in a predominantly transactional relationship by pressing competition and forms of control' (Söderberg & Romani, 2017, p. 270f.). They conclude that, despite seemingly collaborative boundary spanning practices, this particular partnership has not changed the vendor's alleged inferior status.

What have we learned? Emancipation-oriented scholars have shed light on the influence and efforts of historically marginalized groups in (cross-cultural) boundary spanning processes, thereby highlighting that acts of resistance are often subtle and that researchers must learn to detect and read these acts in their socio-historical context. Otherwise, contributions to stabilizing collaboration and obstacles to knowledge-sharing may be overlooked, in the process missing important starting points for improving boundary spanning processes in multinational companies.

Discourse-oriented power concepts in boundary spanning

Since the mid-1990s, a small group of poststructuralist boundary spanning researchers have taken an interest in the entanglement of power, discourse and knowledge (see Table 1). Poststructuralist power concepts, sometimes referred to as ‘power through’ (Spencer & Doull, 2015), have drawn heavily on the writings of French sociologist Michel Foucault. From a Foucauldian perspective, ‘power cannot be considered a possession or capacity of groups and individuals’ (Geciene, 2002, p. 119). By contrast, he stresses that power pervades societies (Foucault, 1980), is both repressive *and* productive (Foucault, 1975), and is embedded in its structures, cultures and technologies, which are predominantly taken-for-granted, normalized and inscribed in the body (Clegg & Hardy, 1996).⁶

Poststructuralist perspectives in boundary spanning claim that ‘no boundary object [and no actor involved in boundary spanning processes] can be said to be free from power effects and therefore it is necessary to explore the *nature* of these – often hidden – power effects’ (Thomas et al., 2007, p. 30). From a Foucauldian perspective, boundary spanning processes are said to have two power effects: objectification and subjectification (Foucault, 1982). Power is inextricably linked to the production of truth through various reality-constituting discourses, which distinguish, categorize and thereby generate the objects they talk about (Alvesson & Deetz, 1996). In this paper, perspectives examining the reality-constituting, objectifying power effects of discourses on boundary spanning are labelled as *power as discourse*. In this vein, scholars have studied boundary objects as the product of various discourses, enabling and limiting learning and knowledge-sharing in organizations (e.g. Hawkins et al., 2016; Huvila, 2011; Thomas et al., 2007).

The concept of ‘governmentality’ links objectifying to subjectifying power effects. Foucault (1997) developed it ‘to address the specificity of contemporary neo-liberal forms of governance – premised on the active consent and subjugation of subjects, rather than their oppression, domination or external control’ (Clegg et al., 2002, p. 317). Governmentality studies seek to capture how ‘particular ways or styles of ordering, defining and regulating human being have come into being’ (Barrett, 2008, p. 520). Often including a historical perspective, researchers of the Foucauldian tradition study the various techniques of power through which individuals become subjects (Knights & Willmott, 1989). In this paper, I refer to such approaches to power as *power as governmentality*. Thus far, subjectifying power effects have not been (intensely) studied; though some researchers have begun to conceptualize boundary spanning practices as modern power techniques which consti-

tute boundary spanners’ subjectivities through a combination of government of the self and others (e.g. Sage et al., 2010).

Power as discourse: Discourse-constituted boundary objects shape collaboration

Boundary spanning researchers have primarily used discourse-based, poststructuralist approaches to study the productive and restrictive power of boundary objects in shaping learning in organizations (e.g. Boland & Tenkasi, 1995; Hawkins et al., 2016). Boundary objects have been defined as ‘abstract or physical artifacts that reside in the interfaces between organizations or groups of people’ (Huvila, 2011, p. 2528). These objects ‘are plastic enough to adapt to local needs... yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites’ (Star & Griesemer, 1989, p. 393). Huvila (2011) traces the various, sometimes conflicting discursive fields, in which boundary objects and boundary spanners are embedded, and how antagonistic discourses are presentable and presented within the logic of a particular boundary object, such as an archaeological report. The characteristics of particular boundary objects thereby contribute to constituting what can be said and how.

Some researchers have expressed the hope that particular boundary objects may help to smoothen conflicting boundary conditions (Carlile, 2002, 2004; Kellogg et al., 2006). In fact, boundary objects, such as mind maps, have been shown to force actors with differing expertise to reflect on their own and others’ understanding of a topic, allowing for the representation of ambiguous meaning and enabling conversation ‘without enforcing commonly shared meanings’ (Boland & Tenkasi, 1995, p. 362). More static boundary objects may produce converse outcomes. For example, highly standardized project management tools order and constitute reality in a particular way, which may lead to a loss of reflexivity in everyday practice and thus trigger employee resistance to managerial power (Sage et al., 2010).

Which boundaries? Power-as-discourse studies stress that boundaries are not simply given but (re)constructed through a complex web of power–knowledge–discourse. Discourses distinguish boundary objects and processes based on binary logics of legitimate and illegitimate or scientific and common knowledge, thereby (re)constituting these boundary objects and processes. Boundary objects, such as archaeological reports, may require a relatively homogenous structure and presentation style which actors must follow to argue the archaeological value of an archaeological site, which in turn influences the use of a particular land (Huvila, 2011). Highly formalized boundary objects

may signal neutrality and objectivity, whereas they may actually represent a particular discourse (and related set of interests) that functions as the means of constituting an archaeological site.

Researchers' interest in knowledge–power–discourse has been accompanied by an interest in language- and discourse-based boundaries. Carlile (2002, 2004) distinguishes three types of such boundaries. The 'syntactic boundary' addresses the mere transfer of knowledge between two or more actors, which builds on shared, common repertoires of knowledge. Such knowledge-sharing may become difficult to handle when meaning and discourses change. In this case, 'semantic boundaries' are considered, which means that knowledge must be translated or even negotiated to fit others' different frames of perception and interests. When a semantic response fails to help create a shared meaning, researchers must then consider 'pragmatic boundaries'. This type of boundary accounts for differing interests and knowledge in combination with the potential costs they generate for the actors involved. It 'also recognizes the role that shared artifacts and methods play in providing the capacity to negotiate interests and transform knowledge' (Carlile, 2004, p. 559) and thereby highlights the powerful, agentic role of boundary objects in shaping knowledge-sharing and collaboration.

How are boundaries crossed? Power-as-discourse approaches have expanded the notion of agency in boundary spanning studies to boundary objects, in contrast to structure- and agency-oriented approaches which mainly focus on individual and collective human actors. From a discourse perspective, boundary objects are not fixed entities but are instead generated and enriched with meaning through various competing discourses. In turn, their particular characteristics enable and limit processes of learning in and between organizations. Boundary objects thus 'play agential roles in co-generating, bridging and disrupting understandings' (Hawkins et al., 2016, p. 304) and ultimately generate reality. Over time, boundary objects become associated with certain (limited) possibilities for action and learning, which may shift when power relations in socio-material networks alter (Hawkins et al., 2016). Here, researchers are less interested in how boundaries are crossed or negotiated but rather in how boundaries are constituted through various competing discourses, which in turn limit or enable (inter-)action.

Similar to domination-based perspectives, power-as-discourse studies grant actors limited agency. However, this limited agency does not apply primarily to less powerful groups but rather to all actors, because they are all deeply entangled in webs of power–knowledge–discourse (Foucault, 1975). Some scholars have coupled a macro-perspective on discourses with an emancipation-oriented

perspective on unequal power relations and interests to conceptually strengthen agency (e.g. Huvila, 2011; Sage et al., 2010; Thomas et al., 2007). In this vein, Huvila (2011) draws on the discourse theory of postmodern, Marxist theorists Laclau and Mouffe (1992) to study boundary objects. From this perspective, creating and reshaping boundary objects is never a neutral act but is, rather, interpreted as an attempt to dominate a discursive field. Actors with greater access to symbolic and material resources seek to fix and stabilize the meaning of a boundary object (semantic boundaries). Along similar lines, Sage et al. (2010) combine actor network theory with Foucauldian perspectives on power to account for actors' unequal resource access; that is, their unequal agency in shifting boundaries.

In particular, actors in positions of formal authority have been shown to transform interactive and democratic boundary objects into instruments of control and formal coordination to regain power and control (e.g. Barrett & Oborn, 2010; Boland & Tenkasi, 1995; Thomas et al., 2007). Such transformations may inhibit knowledge-sharing between cross-cultural teams, even resulting in reified cultural boundaries and stereotyping (Barrett & Oborn, 2010). However, even in a state where the meaning of a boundary object appears unambiguous, alternative discourses may nonetheless be reactivated to inspire resistance and question existing boundaries.

What have we learned? Power-as-discourse perspectives broaden the notion of agency to boundary objects. The characteristics of these objects enable a particular (re)presentation of competing discourses and related interests, and therefore have powerful effects on meaning-making, knowledge-sharing and collaboration. At the same time, boundary objects are constantly (re)constituted by sometimes competing discourses. By altering particular discourses, boundary spanners (and other actors) may influence the meaning of boundary objects and thus their power effects in boundary spanning processes.

Power as governmentality: Power technologies constitute the boundary spanner

Power-as-governmentality approaches to power differ from agency-oriented perspectives in one important regard: they focus on 'governmentality, the ways governing is conceptualized, rather than governing, the practices of rule' (McKinlay et al., 2012, p. 9). In a similar vein to power-as-domination studies, these researchers are interested in why marginalized groups accept their subordination. However, they approach this question from a different angle: they seek to understand how subordinates are

produced through a combination of various power techniques (Foucault, 1982).

Power-as-governmentality approaches in boundary spanning research have the potential to shed light on the effects of power on the boundary spanner as subject. Boundary spanning practices and research co-create their object of interest (power as discourse) by, for instance, labelling specific persons as a 'gatekeeper' (Pettigrew, 1972). How individuals respond to such discursive distinctions and categorizations can be understood by examining subjectifying power effects. So far, poststructuralist boundary spanning research has only touched upon issues of governmentality when studying the objectifying power effects of boundary objects (e.g. Sage et al., 2010).

Sage et al. (2010) highlight the intersection of technologies of governing the self and the other (Foucault, 1988) by drawing on the notion of the audit society, where monitoring and performance appraisal have become central principles of social organization. The authors emphasize the parallels between the control culture of the audit society and project management: 'In both instances individuals are afforded some flexibility over the practices to achieve targets, yet they are subject to continuous self-disciplining, monitoring and control technologies' (Sage et al., 2010, p. 635). From a power-as-governmentality perspective, they highlight how neoliberal forms of governing individuals and populations operate through freedom, transparency and self-regulation (Lemke, 2002). In addition, they study how a project file is interpreted and used in project management practice, conceptualizing it as a means of governing others and the self through transparency. The authors assume that boundary objects are permeated with power and conclude that the combination of a standardized tool with local adaptability and flexibility has been proven to offer 'a potent mix of non-coherence and invisibility through which power effects were distributed to actors' (Sage et al., 2010, p. 637).

Here, project management is read against the background of the governing logic of the 'audit society' (Power, 1997), in which accounting techniques and values become organizing principles in society as a whole and produce new subjectivities. Prominent examples include performance indicators and benchmarking, which increasingly shape universities and influence academics' behaviour (Shore, 2008). Although a boundary object, such as a project file, may be largely ignored in everyday practice, supervisors and managers can nonetheless use it as a control and punishment mechanism when a project goes wrong (Sage et al., 2010). In turn, individuals may modify their behaviour and performance, potentially resulting in them becoming self-disciplined subjects.

Which boundaries? Scholars of governmentality perspectives on power in boundary spanning research have a similar perception of boundaries as power-as-discourse approaches. They regard them as being constantly reified (and altered) by the binary logics of that which is deemed legitimate or rational in a particular context. They further accentuate that all actors involved in boundary spanning processes are embedded in various, sometimes competing, discourses and governing logics. These discourses and logics are not external to the individual but constitute the very same individual, which renders it harder to detect their powerful effects.

In addition, governing logics in postmodern societies operate through the promotion of freedom and transparency (Lemke, 2002) and seemingly pose no boundaries to practices and behaviour. The workings of power in postmodern societies are therefore rendered invisible, because they appear to be contrary to power in the sense of strict rules and restrictions.

How are boundaries crossed? Power-as-governmentality scholars are not interested in how boundaries are crossed. Instead, they focus on governing logics and reveal how these logics of transparency and freedom constitute, discipline and govern the boundary spanner, and thus subtly enable and set boundaries to an actor's agency. Specific power technologies 'allow people to be known, to know themselves, and the social world to be acted upon' (McKinlay et al., 2012, p. 9). Thus, boundary spanners cannot simply reframe meanings; they can only do so within discursive limits. The illusion of operating under conditions of freedom and transparency further renders the working of power and its effect on agency invisible. It suggests a considerable amount of individual agency while simultaneously driving subjects to self-regulate and self-discipline.

Whereas proponents of emancipation-oriented power concepts proclaim a state of emancipation from oppressing structure, scholars of governmentality studies in boundary spanning research state instead that the boundary spanner can aim only at not being governed so much or in such a way (Foucault, 2007). Their assumption that no external position to power exists has particular consequences for their understanding of agency. Actors involved in boundary spanning processes can only aim to alter the logics of government but not the very fact of their being governed.

What have we learned? A research perspective which highlights the subjectifying power effects of boundary spanning practices has yet to be developed. It has the potential to highlight how boundary spanners are constituted through a variety of power technologies and how logics of transparency and freedom embedded in a neoliberal boundary spanning environment result in self-monitoring and self-discipline. Governmentality-focused studies may thus provide insights into the subtle workings of power,

much like emancipation-oriented research, yet without localizing this power within single actors—instead focusing on the ways in which societies are governed.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Overall, power-sensitive boundary spanning research has provided strong evidence that power enables, broadens and limits boundary spanning practices and outcomes. Based on the sections which outline the lessons learnt for each power concept, I now proceed to discussing potential avenues for future research.

Who is powerful and influential? The contribution of all actors to boundary spanning

Since the emergence of power-sensitive boundary spanning studies in the 1970s, resource-oriented, functionalist perspectives on power have been the most prominent research stream. These studies have provided rich insights into how boundary spanners use structural and personal power bases to influence decision-making and drive innovation (e.g. Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2014; Ibarra, 1993; Spekman, 1979), primarily focusing on the power bases of single boundary spanners. Few scholars have highlighted the benefits of combining power bases and amplifying the power of influence in boundary spanning processes through collaboration with others (e.g. Friedman & Podolny, 1992), and some have emphasized that the power bases of the targeted actors also shape boundary spanning processes (e.g. Marrone, 2010; Schwab et al., 1985). However, even in those cases where the use of power bases has been studied as a common endeavour, the seemingly ‘receiving’ end of boundary spanning activities has been left under-explored (for exceptions, see Hislop et al., 2000).

Resource-oriented boundary spanning studies could thus profit from integrating an empowerment-oriented perspective on power. In the tradition of power-to approaches, these studies view power as emerging in interaction and account for the (powerful) influence of *all* actors on boundary spanning practices of networking, bridging and collaboration (e.g. Söderberg & Romani, 2017; Sturdy & Wright, 2011).

Including the power bases of all actors involved in boundary spanning processes would more closely align resource-oriented boundary spanning studies to an important aspect of their power concept: the relational nature of power bases. Researchers could study how the access to and use of power bases of all actors affects boundary spanning outcomes. For example, Hislop et al. (2000)

highlight how other actors may be able to hinder a management's change efforts by blocking hierarchical decisions, utilizing an established decision-making culture of negotiated consensus to do so. These actors use political power as a power resource to counter managers' position power. Accounting for the power bases of all involved actors potentially requires a greater research effort than studying single actors, but it might further our understanding of why some boundary spanners are more successful than others in a particular context and network of actors.

How to detect the subtle power of influence? Counter-hegemonic reading from a critical perspective

Since the 2000s, empowerment-focused perspectives on power have added a further important contribution to understanding the efficacy of boundary spanning practices. Researchers have outlined that boundary spanners enable cross-cultural collaboration through empowering themselves and others (e.g. Yagi & Kleinberg, 2011), further highlighting the powerful contribution of all actors to boundary spanning outcomes by showing how such actors jointly maintain spaces of collaboration (e.g. Hsiao et al., 2012; Kellogg et al., 2006). Thereby, researchers have primarily applied qualitative methods to study practices and meaning-making. Some scholars have cautioned that a focus on observable practices may result in overlooking how silence and passivity shape collaboration and knowledge-sharing (Smith, 2016).

Emancipation-oriented studies could offer a significant contribution to understanding the complex power dynamics of silence and passivity in boundary spanning processes. Including societal power relations in their analysis, these studies demonstrate that actors may not be allowed or may be afraid to speak and act in a collaborative space because of gender, race or class barriers (e.g. Qureshi et al., 2017). Researchers have therefore developed strategies to reveal acts of resistance and subtle influences in boundary spanning processes (e.g. Ravishankar et al., 2013; Söderberg & Romani, 2017). In the context of cross-cultural boundary spanning, for example, and as mentioned earlier, researchers have detected that Indian vendors seemingly adapted European management and communication styles (Ravishankar et al., 2013). Instead of interpreting their behaviour solely as adaption to European management norms, a postcolonial, counter-hegemonic reading of the practices reveals a different picture. The deliberate staging of European management styles and the downplay of Indian-ness did not happen unconsciously; instead, the Indian vendors were acutely aware of their mimicking behaviour. In postcolonial studies, such behaviour has

been labelled as mimicry, a form of subversion of (colonial) Western authority (Bhabha, 1984).

The few emancipation-oriented boundary spanning studies have highlighted that historically grown power relations influence boundary spanning and may result in ambiguous outcomes regarding collaboration or identity formation. To study these ambiguities, they have drawn on postcolonial studies, which provide a rich conceptual repertoire to address the ambiguities produced by complex, historically grown power asymmetries in a globalized world (see Prasad, 2003). In this vein, Abbott et al. (2013) argue that concepts such as creolization, mimicry and hybridity may help boundary spanning researchers gain a deeper understanding of the complex influences which shape boundary spanning outcomes.

Beyond position power in organizations: Expanding the notion of power bases

Resource-oriented boundary spanning studies have primarily used quantitative, statistical methods to measure the influence of particular power bases on boundary spanning outcomes (e.g. Ibarra, 1993; Spekman, 1979). Thereby, forms of soft power, such as negotiation and meaning-making skills, have remained under-explored (for exceptions, see Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2014), in comparison to position power or expert power, which may be more easily quantifiable. These studies could thus profit from combining quantitative and qualitative methods to trace the use and influence of soft power in boundary spanning processes.

Resource-oriented power concepts have further focused on power bases embedded at the field, organizational and individual level. Thereby, they have seldom examined the societal and global level of analysis and related power bases. So far, aspects of demographic diversity have rarely been included when discussing access to and use of power bases to drive innovation. Even when they have been, age in the sense of seniority, status or cultural differences has been accounted for (e.g. Ibarra, 1993; Levina & Vaast, 2005, 2008), whereas gender, race and class have largely been overlooked. Linking critical diversity studies (e.g. Ahmed & Swan, 2006; Zanoni et al., 2010) to boundary spanning research could therefore be a fruitful starting point for integrating diversity-related power bases. These studies assert that gender, race, class, disability, sexual orientation or age influence the visibility and influence of actors in organizations (e.g. Cox & Nkomo, 1990; Lewis & Simpson, 2012). Transferred to boundary spanning research, this means that social identities and related unequal power relations shape whether and how actors can use power bases to influence decision-making. A black person as boundary

spanner may have to invest more resources to be accepted as a person of authority in a white organization (legitimate power). Equally, in the IT sector, a female boundary spanner may face more difficulty than her male colleagues in proving her competency to mediate between specialists (expert power).

Related to the integration of new power bases are discussions on how the relative importance of power resources is constructed within fields (e.g. Levina & Vaast, 2013; Medvetz, 2012). Such studies combine a resource-oriented with a social-constructivist perspective on power, going beyond a static notion of given power bases. It could be interesting to trace how boundary spanners work to (re)define the value of particular power bases in a field, or how they increase their own symbolic power as female, black and/or disabled boundary spanners in organizations to improve boundary spanning outcomes.

Who acts? Accounting for hidden objectifying and subjectifying power effects

Most power-sensitive boundary spanning studies focus on human actors and their power of influence over boundary spanning practices. Several poststructuralist researchers have expanded the notion of agency in boundary spanning research and included an analysis of the powerful, agentic role of boundary objects in limiting and enabling learning in organizations (e.g. Boland & Tenkasi, 1995; Hawkins et al., 2016; Huvila, 2011). They claim that discourses have objectifying power effects because they create the boundary objects they talk about, such as project management files (Sage et al., 2010) or checklists (Hawkins et al., 2016), and instil them with meaning, which in turn limits collaboration, learning and knowledge-sharing.

Some researchers have also attempted to strengthen the limited notion of agency which results from poststructuralist perspectives on power in boundary spanning processes. Accordingly, they have combined these approaches with critical research perspectives (e.g. Hawkins et al., 2016; Huvila, 2011; Sage et al., 2010). In this vein, Hawkins et al. (2016, p. 306) stress that '[t]he mediated possibilities for action generated by a boundary object are enabled and foreclosed through the shifting power relations that give networks of practices, subjects, and learning their form'. Tracing the generative power of discourses and linking it to the shifting materiality of networks and resources may bring power-sensitive boundary spanning researchers closer to solving the puzzle of what makes boundary spanning a success or a failure.

In addition to objectifying power effects, discourses may also have subjectifying power effects. Governmentality studies on power in boundary spanning have begun to

point to such effects (Sage et al., 2010), emphasizing that boundary spanners may reflect and regulate their activities based on particular boundary spanning tools. Tracing these hidden subjectifying power effects is important to counter the illusion of an absence of (coercive) power, especially in an environment characterized by governing logics and power technologies which operate through freedom and transparency. Overall, governmentality-based research still needs to be developed in power-sensitive boundary spanning studies and promises to reveal the power dynamics embedded in logics of freedom and transparency.

CONCLUSION

Power influences boundary spanning processes and outcomes in multiple ways. This review emphasizes that the applied power concept shapes researchers' answers to the question of why some boundary spanners are more successful than others. Most researchers have stressed that single boundary spanners leverage their position as manager or expert to drive innovation (*power as resource*), whereas others have contended that boundary spanning success is in fact a common endeavour characterized by mutual empowerment and building platforms for collaboration (*power as empowerment*). Some researchers have highlighted that such endeavours may fail or require more effort to succeed because historically grown power relations of race, class, gender, etc. hamper knowledge-sharing and learning in boundary spanning contexts (*power as domination*). Consequently, they have proposed critical research perspectives to detect and understand these change efforts (*power as emancipation*). A small group of poststructuralist researchers have further pointed to the agentic role of boundary objects in enabling and restricting boundary spanning outcomes (*power as discourse*), claiming that even in an environment characterized by transparency and freedom, power still prevails and influences how boundary spanners regulate themselves and their actions (*power as governmentality*).

Examining power-sensitive boundary spanning research through the lens of particular power concepts has revealed overlooked issues, such as the influence of soft power and demographic diversity as power bases in boundary spanning, strengthening a relational view on power bases, or accounting for hidden acts of influence as well as passivity on boundary spanning outcomes. My suggestions for future research demonstrate how researchers can profit from shifting and combining power concepts to gain a more comprehensive understanding of power in boundary spanning processes.

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NOTES

- ¹ German philosopher Max Weber developed his theory of authority during the industrialization of the early 20th century when large, bureaucratic organizations were increasing in numbers (Houghton, 2010). He argued that in this context, traditional authority based on a sovereign position was being replaced by legal authority based on formal structures and rules, often accompanied by the charismatic authority of a visionary entrepreneur (Weber, 1968).
- ² Hannah Arendt developed her understanding of power against the backdrop of the horrors of Nazi Germany. For her, power and violence are antidotes: 'Where power reigns there is persuasion, not violence. And when violence reigns, it destroys power' (Bernstein, 2011, p. 6).
- ³ Perspectives on power, which highlight the values of dialogue and cooperation, have also been labelled as 'power with' (Berger, 2005). Management theorist Mary Parker Follett was an early advocate of power-with approaches in the 1920s. Similar to some feminist theorists, she portrays such power as 'a consensual and intrinsically legitimate instance of power' (Pansardi, 2012, p. 75), and claims that '[c]oercive power is the curse of the universe; coactive power, the enrichment and advancement of every human soul' (Follett, 1996, p. 119). Her words hint at the intimate connection between agency-focused power concepts and empowerment.
- ⁴ Feminist researcher Amy Allen (2016) outlines that understandings of 'power as empowerment' have varied in feminist contexts from individualistic approaches highlighting women's individual choices to approaches questioning patriarchal logics and norms with the aim to fundamentally alter societal structures. In order to distinguish between these approaches, I refine Allen's categorization and use 'power as empowerment' as a synonym for an individualistic perspective on empowerment and 'power as emancipation' as equivalent for a perspective which aims at transforming societal structures.
- ⁵ Such resistance has been diversely studied in OMS, ranging from more visible workers' struggles to more subtle acts of disidentification or mimicry (for an overview from a feminist perspective, see Thomas & Davies, 2005).
- ⁶ In particular, Foucault's (1990) notion of biopower highlights the productive aspect of power. It is a form of power which controls, monitors and optimizes entire populations through statistical normal distribution (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2014). By contrast, disciplinary power focuses on the individual body. The assembly line is a classic example of this form of power and its effect of producing docile bodies (Deetz, 2003). Here, workers are trained to keep up with the line's pace, and their bodily movements are routinized and optimized, reducing the necessity for direct control.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

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