



Journal of World Business

A Special Issue on

“Lateral Collaboration Across Multinational Enterprise Structures”

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Overview

The process of achieving lateral collaboration benefits across Multinational enterprise (MNE) structures has always been elusive (Doz et al., 2000; Maznevski & Chui, 2013; Schotter et al., 2017). Increasing environmental complexities suggest that less hierarchical and more agile global collaboration is critical for organizational success. This special issue seeks research that investigates socio-structural mechanisms, social systems, and individual actors who drive commitments to ‘lateral’ interdependence across intra-organizational boundaries in MNEs.

Background

MNEs are traditionally structured as systems of routines embedded in geographically distributed hierarchies. They are separated into divisions and subsidiaries to organize expertise and responsiveness around functions, geographies, and products. MNEs coordinate across boundaries by escalating through hierarchies and/or by synchronizing and integrating through formal communications systems. MNEs seek to enhance lateral collaboration with flatter or even no hierarchies and broader reporting spans for quicker and more dynamic communication, and matrixed (“dotted-line”) relationships with mandates for coordination across units. However, these systems fall far short of modern day MNEs’ lateral collaboration needs due to boundaries created for the differentiation of activities across the global context. MNEs are being challenged by dynamic, evolving business eco-systems (Cano-Kollmann, et al., 2016), creating new configurations such as complex orchestrated global value chains. Today’s coordination routines cannot keep pace with the dynamics and magnitude of environmental changes, let alone achieve aligned visions across dispersed global organizational sub-units. The high levels of interdependence, ambiguity, and speed of change in the business environment require more

dynamic and agile coordination, often emergent in nature, than the traditional hierarchy and matrix organizations allow.

In practice today, leaders fly around the world attempting to coordinate people across hierarchically lateral units but dispersed locations, and frequently becoming overwhelmed and exhausted. As a result, they often prioritize compliance, and therefore are unable to drive innovation and synergistic value creation. Leaders who are stuck in such coordination overload cannot systematically leverage the opportunities of global connectedness. Organizations and their leaders need new ways of enabling lateral collaboration.

We suggest that the barriers to collaboration are not just with formal organizational systems or technology. The collaboration fostering mechanisms themselves, both within MNE boundaries and across their alliance, value chain and ecosystem partners, have not yet been sufficiently developed, nor has the research on these topics advanced enough.

Context

Lateral collaboration (across MNE sub-unit boundaries) occurs when a group of hierarchically independent people commits to rely on each other to achieve something together and thus become constructively interdependent. Our observations of lateral collaboration suggest it is fruitful to examine structural interdependence – formal commitment to rely on each other – as an outcome of behavioral interdependence – social interaction (Maznevski, 2016; Maznevski & Chui, 2013). However, we are not aware of studies having examined structural interdependence in the MNE context in this way. Structural interdependence can emerge from team members' joint behaviors and commitments and thus appears critical for collaboration within globally dispersed organizations (Maznevski & Chudoba, 2000).

Previous research on coordination and interdependence in MNEs focuses on explicit mechanisms for influence and authority, leadership behaviors for global contexts (Mendenhall et al., 2012), teams with formal mandates to deliver joint outcomes, and structural solutions such as equity arrangements. Research has not yet explored adequately the implicit dynamics of lateral collaboration within the MNE, across its internal boundaries.

Boundary-spanning. Organizations inevitably have boundaries between departments, divisions and teams. Coordination requires individual leaders to connect people, knowledge and action across boundaries, managing friction and resolving tensions (Schotter & Beamish, 2013). Several streams of research provide insights into boundary spanning for lateral collaboration (e.g. Schotter et al., 2017). Vora and colleagues (2007) demonstrated that the boundary spanner role is often implicitly attached to functions in organizations, such as to regional managers in MNEs but that boundary spanning performance is dependent on individuals' actions, not on their function or formal role itself. In fact, experienced cross-cultural managers have been observed to act as boundary spanners without having such a formal role. With the wide variety of studies and contexts for boundary spanning, we still lack clarity regarding how individuals actually span boundaries. The need for lateral collaboration implies the need for more effective boundary spanning in many roles.

Objectives of the Special Issue

This special issue promotes research identifying how organizations can achieve high quality collaboration across intra-MNE boundaries to align for synergies of internal efficiencies and better interfaces between sub-units, and to innovate for high value creation. We seek research that focuses on socio-technical systems: examining elements of the relationship among organizational structures (both formal and informal), social dynamics, and leader behavior in increasing collaboration across different parts of an MNE. We especially encourage research that goes beyond using structural or role indicators as proxies for collaboration. For example, we challenge research that generally assumes that the existence of an “international alliance” or a “joint venture” is a proxy for collaboration, or that “expatriate manager” is a proxy for a boundary-spanner, without uncovering the actual collaborative and boundary spanning activities performed. We emphasize the importance of looking at both formal and informal mechanisms, and encourage research that examines the two together.

Submissions are encouraged from scholars using different theoretical, empirical, and experimental approaches to understand international management from different perspectives, including (but not limited to) organizational behavior, organizational theory, leadership, strategy, and general management.

Illustrative Topics

While not exhaustive, the following list suggests but not limits possible topics and research questions that would be appropriate to address in this special issue.

1. What are the social organizational dynamics that elicit strong commitments to lateral collaboration in MNEs? For example
 - 1.1. What barriers and opportunities do social differences such as cultural and language present for lateral collaboration?
 - 1.2. What are the roles, nature and form of trust in lateral collaboration, and which elements of trust are most important to its development?
 - 1.3. How can collaborative arrangements best combine social and technological mechanisms to empower collaboration?
2. What are the competences and characteristics of the boundary-spanners who enable such collaboration? For example,
 - 2.1. Are the competences for boundary-spanning leadership the same as the ones for global leadership in general?
 - 2.2. Among leaders with the right competences, what organizational or other variables predict their propensity to use those competences for boundary spanning?
 - 2.3. Do multicultural leaders (leaders with two or more sources of cultural identity) tend to engage in boundary-spanning activities more than mono-cultural leaders? And more successfully?

3. What are specific models and the context of lateral collaboration, considering teams, leadership, and the global business domain? For example,
 - 3.1. Do lateral collaboration requirements differ for different types of tasks such as innovation relying on multiple centers of excellence or managing global key accounts?
 - 3.2. Do lateral collaboration requirements differ for different organizational arrangements, such as joint ventures, alliances, and fully owned subsidiaries?
 - 3.3. What role do external stakeholders – such as customers, suppliers, and regulators – play in driving internal collaboration?
4. What are possible diagnostic tools and interventions for leaders and companies to increase collaboration across globally dispersed intra-organizational boundaries? For example,
 - 4.1. What are the most relevant development experiences for boundary-spanning leaders?
 - 4.2. How can leaders intervene to create more lateral collaboration, rather than remaining as the hub of a set of disconnected spokes?

Submission Process

Between October 1st and October 30th, 2019, authors should submit their manuscripts online via the Journal of World Business submission system at: <https://www.evise.com/profile/#/JWB/login>. To ensure that all manuscripts are correctly identified for consideration for this Special Issue, it is important that authors select ‘SI: Leading Collaboration Across Multinational Enterprise Structures’ when they reach the “Article Type” step in the submission process. Manuscripts should be prepared in accordance with the Journal of World Business Guide for Authors available at www.elsevier.com/journals/journal-of-world-business/1090-9516/guide-for-authors. All submitted manuscripts will be subject to the Journal of World Business’s double-blind review process.

Manuscript Development Workshop

The editors of the Special Issue anticipate holding a manuscript development workshop and conference from TBC at the Ivey Business School in Canada. The conference will create important dialogue and energy around the topic, and will help authors increase their ability to address this important research area. Authors of manuscripts who receive an invitation to revise and resubmit for a second round of review will be invited to attend this workshop. Presentation at the workshop does not guarantee acceptance of the paper for publication in JWB, and attendance is not prerequisite for publication in the special issue.

Research Data

Research data forms the backbone of research articles and provides the foundation on which knowledge is built. Researchers are increasingly encouraged, or even mandated, to make research data available, accessible, discoverable and usable. Although not mandatory, the journal encourages authors to submit their data at the same time as their manuscript. Further information can be found at: www.elsevier.com/authors/author-services/research-data.

For more information, please contact the guest editors

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A Sample of Relevant Work

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