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A Model for Using Teams as Boundary Personnel

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ABSTRACT: *Entering into a relationship with a new channel partner who speaks a different language and comes from a different culture represents a challenge to an organization's boundary personnel when the position is held by an individual. The complexity of the global business environment requires drawing on the skills of multiple individuals. The need for the skills from multiple individuals drives the need to sue teams as boundary personnel. This article provides a roadmap for using teams as boundary personnel to establish mature, long-lasting international partnerships. The use of teams as boundary personnel challenges the underlying assumption that single individuals occupy the role of boundary personnel.*
Keywords: *Model, Boundary, International, Teams, Business*

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I. INTRODUCTION

This article presents a model for building an international partnership. This model challenges the assumption of a single person serving in the role of boundary personnel found in previous research (e.g., Levina and Vaast, 2005; Yagi and Kleinberg, 2011; Hunt et al. 2000). The complexity of international business (Smith, 2017; Ferdows, 2018; Schotter et al., 2017) calls this assumption into question. "[M]anaging and coordinating across different inter- and intra-organizational boundaries [is] an important capability for the success of global organizations" (Schotter et al., 2017, p. 403). A company should use teams because the "limited understanding of the factors that affect the complexity and effectiveness of the boundary spanning function" (Schotter et al., 2017, p. 403). This complexity drives companies to seek international partnerships, but spanning borders requires companies to deal with the environmental and cultures of other nations and organizations (Kostova, 1999; Marquis and Bettilana, 2009) and needs a roadmap.
The model presented in this article provides this roadmap for companies to follow to use teams as boundary personnel to establish an international partnership.

II. BACKGROUND

Relationships define success or failure for a business. Building these relationships requires a concerted effort, time, and money. Firms need a roadmap for how to use boundary personnel to initiate, build, and solidify relationships to pursue partnerships with other businesses. The literature identifies who serves as the BP as individuals (e.g., Hunt et al., 2000, Roberts and Beamish, 2017; Schotter et al., 2017) or as individuals with "unique personal traits" (Schotter and Beamish, 2011, p. 254). This focus on individuals leads to the assumption that only individuals can serve as boundary personnel. Building complex, valuable, and long-lasting relationships between organizations, however, requires multiple skills which indicates a team is more appropriate to serve as boundary personnel. The model presented later in this article provides a roadmap for firms pursuing international partnerships.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

The growth of cross-border trade as a share of world output has grown from close to 23 percent in 1960 to close to 60 percent in 2015 (The World Bank Group, 2016). "Access to global . . . resources expands alternatives for purchasing and procurement as a whole" (Karlsson, 2003, p. 51)."Not having the globally-best production system creates competitive disadvantages in comparison to other actors who take advantage of best sources" (Karlsson, 2003, p. 49). The "supply chains of many large manufacturing companies are becoming more global every year" (Ferdows, 2018, p. 393). The globalization of supply chains and markets increases the complexity that a company must deal with when pursuing a new international partner. The complexity reveals that establishing a new international partnership involves "an intricate set of tensions, competing demands, conflicts, contradictions, and dilemmas" (Smith et al., 2017, p. 304). The greater the cultural distance (Hofstede, 1980) between two organizations the greater the need for a boundary spanning team that understands the need for an international partnership and the necessity for understanding the complexity associated with panning the boundary between two organizations (Cheng et al., 2015; Ferdows, 1997; Tsoukas and Hatch, 2001; Zhao and

Anand, 2013;).The growth and complexity of the global business environment forces us to consider the use of teams as boundary personnel.

Teams provide benefits that exceed those of an individual (Schmidt et al., 2001). New product development research shows us that development done by teams performs better financially, reduces the costs associated with developing new products, and shortens the time from inception to commercialization (Montoya-Weiss and Calantone, 1994; Eisenhardt, 1995; Cooper and Kleinschmidt, 1994; and Kessler and Chakrabati, 1996). These findings lend further credence to and support for the need to shift from an individual to a team serving in the role of boundary personnel.

A team will be more effective in reviewing the results of the negotiations (Boulding et al., 1997; Whyte, 1991) because "teams will have less of a tendency to escalate their commitment to a failing proposal (Schmidt et all, 2001, p. 578). Teams are more likely than individuals to discontinue with a negotiated agreement than an individual (Whyte, 1991) because of the spreading and sharing for a decision across the team members (Denis et al., 2006; McGrath, 1984; Whyte, 1991). In fact, a cooperative team can derive more creative solutions (Xue et al., 2018) for establishing an international channel partnership than an individual.Teams serving as a boundary spanning personnel team can let their "collective knowledge" (Zhao and Anand, 2013, p. 515) flow for the coordination of activities and negotiations.

The multi-dimensional nature of boundary interactions at the boundary between two international companies requires boundary personnel teams to absorb, process, interpret, and relate pertinent information and data (Au and Fukuda, 2002; Brannen and Thomas., 2010; Yagi and Kleinberg, 2011) to their parent companies and their counterparts on the other boundary personnel team. The multiple dimensions required to create an international partnership require skills that go beyond the knowledge and capability of a single person. It takes multiple individuals to maintain these relationships, and by inference, it takes multiple individuals working as a team to initiate and build these relationships.But, how did these relationships begin? The model provides for companies in initiating these relationships.

A clear definition of success is a necessity for any team (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993). No boundary personnel can truly get started without a clear definition of success because they will not know who to contact in the other organization or what to say to them. Having a clear and measurable definition of success combined with knowing who the intended partner is will guide the initiating company in the choice of people who will serve on the boundary personnel team. This guidance will demonstrate the value of this team to the people serving on the team and to the organization as a whole.

Once the team members understand the value of serving on the boundary personnel team and the common goal, they can work together to refine and clarify their roles and begin to build the trust necessary to achieve their team's purpose (Cha et al., 2015; Katzenbach and Smith, 1993). The clarity of roles and the trust between team members is necessary for the team members to hold each other accountable for their actions in fulfilling the purpose of the team. Katzenbach and Smith (1993) describe these elements of common purpose, trust, and mutual accountability as necessary for team to function well. Establishing a coordinated, focused team is the first step in building a new international partnership.

IV. BOUNDARY SPANNING

The top management of a company must make the goal for the boundary personnel team crystal clear and commit to the team so that they have the time to "develop the cognitive skills and relationships they need to accept and execute the vision" (Roberts and Beamish, 2017, p. 533). Schotter et al. (2017) "define boundary spanning in global organizations as a set of communication and coordination activities performed by individuals . . . between organizations to integrate activities across multiple cultural, institutional, and organizational contexts (p. 4040). The "roles and characteristics of specific individuals as boundary spanners" (Schotter et al., 2017, p. 404) is the focus of many studies (e.g., Roberts and Beamish, 2017; Carlile, 2002; Hsiao et al., 2012; and Levina and Vaast, 2005).

Roberts and Beamish (2017) noted that "[b]oundary spanners are unique individuals" (p. 512) and that the need for communication between boundary personnel and their parent company must build over time to "link external and internal groups[, but] managing knowledge practices across boundaries is often very complex" (p. 513-514)., Multiple individuals are involved in starting and building an international partnership, but previous research does not consider or acknowledge the impact or effectiveness of these individuals working together as a team (Roberts and Beamish, 2017; Zhao and Anand, 2013). Organizations must consider the skills needed to initiate and establish an international partnership, find these individuals, and bring them together with a common purpose for an effective boundary personnel team.

The complexity of the global business environment drives the need for multiple skills to form an international partnership. The multiple skills needed exceed the capability of a single person. Therefore, firms need to use teams comprised of individuals with the needed skills.Teams provide better results than individuals when developing new processes. Companies must bring people with the correct skills together to form the boundary personnel team. The model provides a roadmap for using teams as boundary personnel to establish an international partnership.

Establishing this new international channel member partnership will require a shift in thinking from the boundary personnel as a single individual and an acknowledgement of the additional steps necessary to use teams as boundary personnel. What follows proposes a model to address this situation.

The Model

Based on the previous material in this research, the following are of interest in this model.

- Creation of mature, long-lasting partnership between two international organizations

which requires the

- Flow of information between boundary personnel teams and their respective organizations over time

and the

- Development of communication between boundary personnel teams over time

V. NOMENCLATURE

For clarity in writing and reading the model, the company that initiates the pursuit of an international partnership will be known as Parent Company 1 (PC1) and the Boundary Personnel Team will be BPT1. Their counterparts at the company they approached will be known as Parent Company 2 (PC2), and their Boundary Personnel Team will be BPT2.

The size of the circles indicates the relative importance of a given role in pursuing the international channel partnership. For example, in stage 1, PC1 is of greater importance because it is chartering BPT1 and establishing the common goal. In Stage 2, the circles for BPT1 and PC2 are the same because they are of equal importance in pursuing the international channel partnership at this stage.

Stage 1

To begin using this model, PC1 recognizes a business need to connect with an international partner. For this reason, PC1 charters BPT1. To give BPT1 the best probability for success, PC1 must bring together the people with the correct skills to build the type of relationship they desire. For this to happen, PC1 must clearly define success in measurable terms so that BPT1 can pull together around this common goal. The larger circle around PC1 is appropriate because the actions of PC1 are of greater importance than BPT1 at this stage. The dashed arrow between PC1 and BPT1 reveals that a channel of communication has been established, but it is not yet a solid, mature flow of communication. A coordinated, focused boundary personnel team is the first step in creating a robust, long-lasting relationship with an international partner.

Insert Figure 1 here

Stage 2

BPT1 is established and contacts PC2 to let them know of PC1's interest in pursuing a partnership. BPT1 is of equal relative importance as their parent company, PC1, because they have begun to function on their own and send some communication back to PC1.

Stage 3

If PC2 is interested in exploring a relationship with PC1, then the next step in building this international partnership is for PC2 is to create their own boundary personnel team, BPT2. The flow of communications begins from PC2 to BPT2 but there is no flow of communication from BPT2 back to PC2. The communication channels from PC1 To BPT1 have matured, are strong, and flow in both directions.

BPT1 moves to take the lead role in building this new relationship and its relative importance of BPT1 in pursuing this new international channel partner is now greater than that of PC1. No flows of communication occur between the boundary personnel teams at this stage. Since PC2 is staffing BPT2 and giving them their purpose for existing, BPT2 is not prepared to engage with BPT1 at this stage.

Stage 4

Stage 4 shows BPT2 rising to prominence equal to BPT1 in the pursuit of this international partnership. They begin their own communications independent of their parent companies. This initial contact starts their communication that will flow in both directions and serve as the venue to present their initial positions. At this stage, these teams are figuring out how best to communicate and interact with each other. This inter-team communication relies on individuals on each team confirming who their counterpart is and making their own initial communication connection.

Stage 5

BPT1 and BPT2 retain their prominence in the negotiations and solidify their channels of communication at this stage. Once individual team members reach an agreement with their counterpart, they have to take their results back to the rest of their respective teams to make sure the results of each individual's negotiations mesh together properly to meet the teams' overall goal as set forth by their respective parent companies. This stage can require extended time because of these separate channels of communication of the individual team members. If all the separately negotiated pieces do not mesh appropriately, the teams have to return and negotiate these points of disagreement. Then, members return to their respective teams to see if their re-negotiated terms better fit the team's goals. When one or both teams return with issues to the negotiating table, however, the previously agreed upon terms may shift out of alignment and agreement. This cycle will continue until a settlement is reached between the two boundary personnel teams or the negotiations fail. This cycle can greatly expand the time necessary to reach an agreement.

Stage 6

It is at this stage that the relative importance of the parent companies and boundary personnel teams are—once, again—equal. As the boundary personnel teams work through the previous stages to come to an agreement, they relay their progress to their respective parent companies. If the parent companies agree with the tentative arrangement reached by their respective boundary personnel teams, the boundary spanning teams will start bringing the parent companies together. The boundary personnel teams will provide the initial introductions between the parent companies. At this point, the people from the parent companies will need to establish their relationships with their counterparts. Part of this communication will be to confirm they have the same understanding of the tentative agreement from their respective boundary personnel teams.

Stage 7

The parent companies rise back to the prominent roles at this stage and work to confirm the negotiated agreement from the boundary personnel teams to establish the international partnership. BPT1 and BPT2 shift to supporting their respective parent companies as PC1 and PC2 build the communication channels for a fully functional international partnership. Since the focus of building this partnership shifts to the parent companies, the need for communication between the boundary personnel teams decreases, and we see the corresponding reduction in the communication channels between the boundary personnel teams.

It is at this stage that the parent companies will sign an agreement that formalizes the international partnership. With these connections between PC1 and PC2 fully established, BPT1 and BPT2 have fulfilled their purpose and will be disbanded at the end of this stage.

Stage 8

PC1 and PC2 move to the operational stage of their international partnership. Full and robust communication flows between their organizations.

VI. CONCLUSION

Teams serving in the role of boundary personnel represent the best probability for successfully creating a relationship with another company to establish a new international partnership. This challenge to the assumption of a single individual serving as boundary personnel and model provides a roadmap for arriving at a mature relationship with an international partner. When a company follows this roadmap, they will experience detours and backtracking, but this roadmap gives companies the greatest probability of establishing a successful relationship.

The model presented here for creating an international partnership using a team as boundary personnel illustrates the necessary steps versus a single person serving as boundary personnel (see Hunt et al, 2000). The additional steps will correspond to additional time needed to form the boundary personnel teams, for the teams to establish multiple intra- and inter-team lines of communication, negotiate the details of the partnership, and return the proposed details of the partnership to the respective parent companies. Top management accepting the additional time for using teams as boundary personnel will provide a company with a more robust, long-term partnership.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Quantitative research is needed to confirm the model presented in this research. Further research is needed to determine how to identify the best people to serve on boundary personnel teams. After determining how to identify the people to serve on a boundary spanning team, research is needed to determine how to bring together these people who are identified as best to serve on a boundary personnel team.

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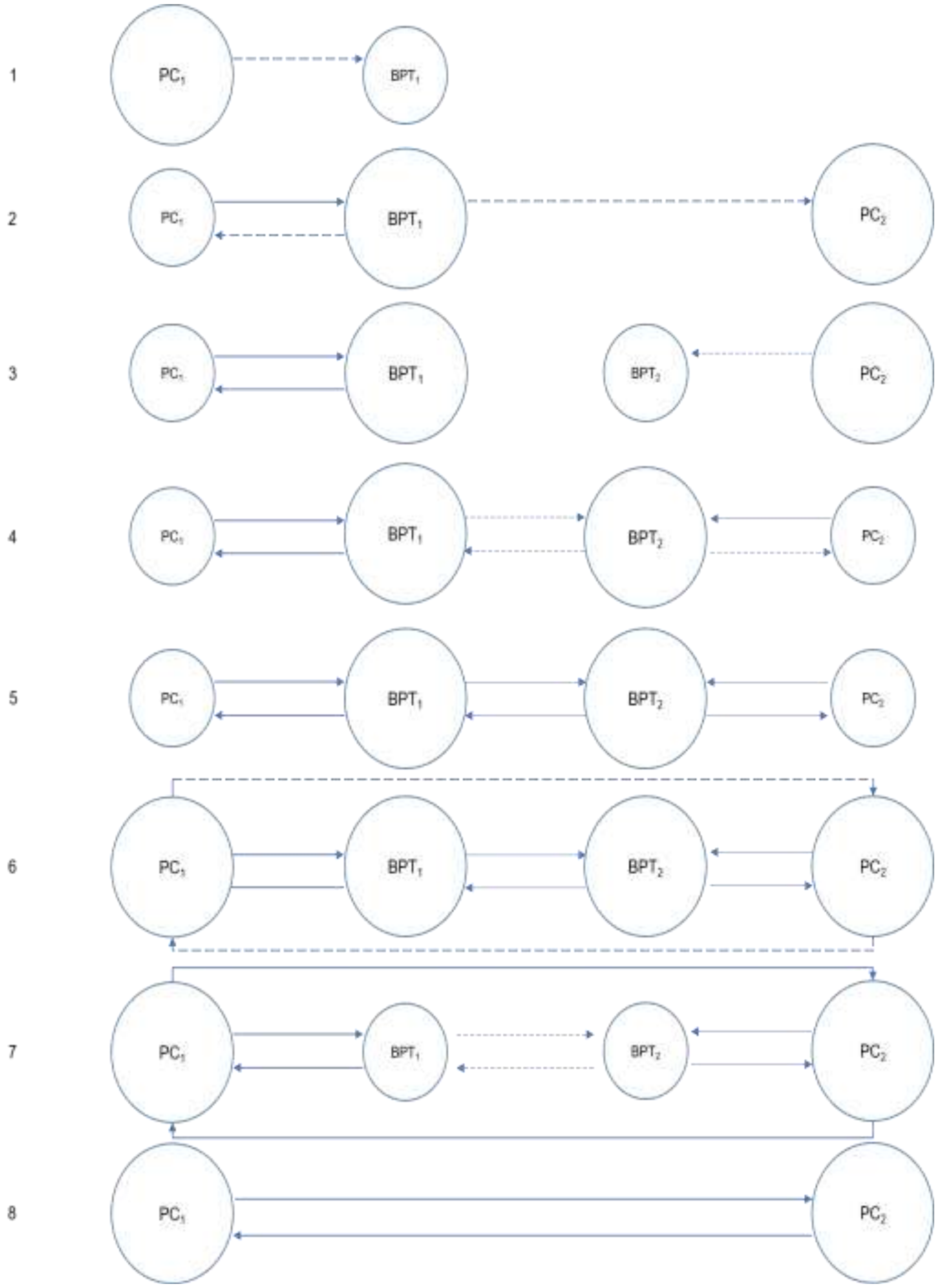

Figure 1: Model for building an international partnership using teams as boundary spanning personnel

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