



› FOR SOCIETY

Dialogue tool

BOUNDARY SPANNERS IN LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

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DIALOGUE TOOL: BOUNDARY SPANNERS IN LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

This dialogue tool is designed to:

- Reflect on your role as a boundary spanner in learning and development, and/or
- Facilitate discussion about your role with colleagues, boundary spanners or your manager, whether within your team, organization or network.

By using this dialogue tool, you can gain deeper insights into your role as a boundary spanner. It helps you explore three key aspects:

1. Your position,
2. The focus of your role, and
3. The competencies and expertise you bring to the table.

You can either complete this tool on your own or use it as a basis for discussions with colleagues, fellow boundary spanners, or your manager. Additionally, organizational leaders (HR professionals or managers) may use this tool to engage employees in conversations about role performance, professional development, and career profiling.

Before You Begin

Before answering the questions in the dialogue tool, it is important to frame your role and working environment through the following questions:

1. How would you describe your role as a boundary spanner? Summarize this in 3-5 sentences.

2. What is the context in which you work? Briefly describe this in 3-5 sentences.

3. In your role as a boundary spanner, you likely engage with different teams or projects. For this exercise, choose one specific team or project to focus on. Keep this project, task, or collaboration in mind while filling out the dialogue tool.

A boundary spanner is someone who stimulates the learning and development of individuals, teams and/or organisations.

Learning occurs in various forms – both explicit and implicit, individually and collectively, organized and spontaneous, under pressure and at ease, in a wide variety of environments (Ruijters, 2006). As professionals, we continuously and proactively develop our skills throughout life, motivated by opportunities to contribute sustainably to society, our work environment, and our own well-being, both now and in the future (Kuipers & Draaisma, 2020, p.20).

In today's world, learning and development are no longer viewed as individual or isolated processes. Instead, they are seen as collaborative, co-creative, and deeply contextual activities where learning, working, and innovation intersect (Schipper, Vos & Wallner, 2022).

A boundary spanner plays a key role in encouraging colleagues, partners, and other stakeholders to contribute to the ongoing process of learning and development, using his/her expertise and passion.

YOUR POSITION AS A BOUNDARY

SPANNER IN LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Every boundary spanner operates within a team, collaboration or network.

However, the exact position they occupy within the system can vary significantly.

> Where do you see yourself? Briefly describe your position.



YOUR FOCUS AS A BOUNDARY

SPANNER IN LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

As a boundary spanner, you may emphasize different focus areas in your role. Below, you'll create pie charts to visually represent how these focus areas apply to your work.

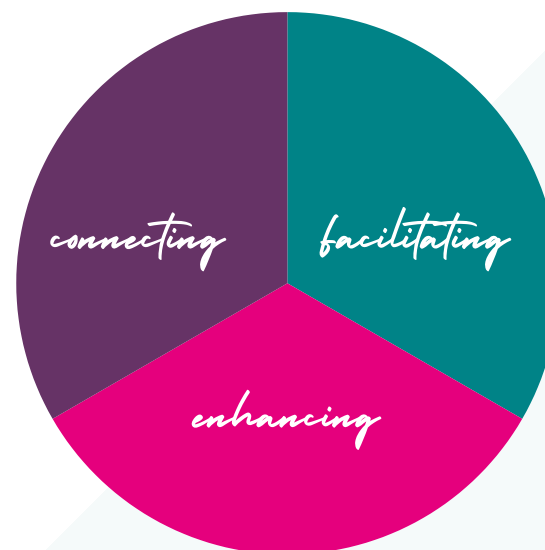
Create a pie chart that reflects the focus areas in your role. Indicate pie slices based on the following focus areas:

- Connecting people and/or organisations
- Facilitating collaboration and/or innovation
- Enhancing knowledge utilization

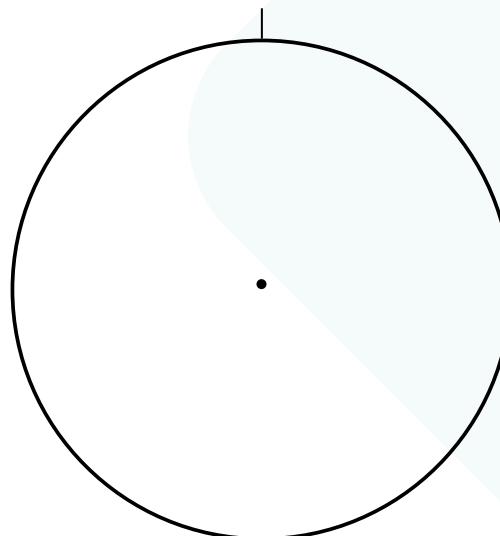
Ensure that the size of each pie slice represents the proportion of your focus on each area. If a focus area does not apply to your role, you do not need to include it in your chart.

> Task:

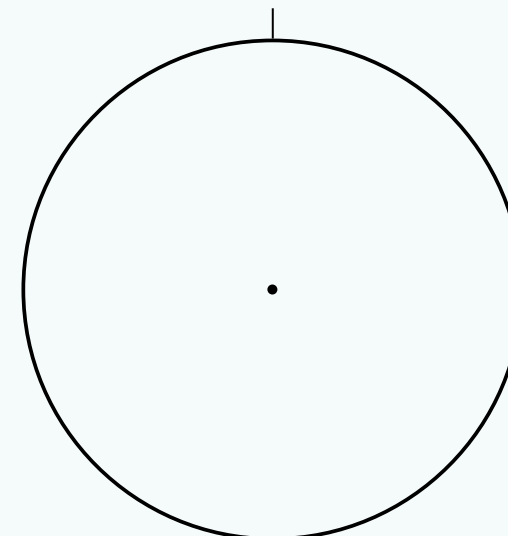
1. **Desired Situation:** Draw and colour a pie chart that represents your ideal focus areas as a boundary spanner in learning and development.
2. **Current Situation:** Draw and colour a second pie chart that reflects your current focus areas in this role.
3. **Reflection:** Compare the two charts. What do you notice? Are there any differences between your desired and current focus? What insights do these differences provide?



Desired focus



Current focus



YOUR STRENGTH AS A BOUNDARY

SPANNER IN LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

A boundary spanner can be described as a T-shaped professional, who has both boundary-crossing competences (horizontal part of the "T"), as well as content expertise and system expertise (vertical part), to stimulate the process of learning and development across individuals, teams and/or organisations, as illustrated in the example to the right.

> We invite you to assess yourself on a scale from 1 to 10. You can record your responses on the next page.

- Rate your [boundary-crossing competences](#), [content expertise](#) and [system expertise](#).
- We have provided a list of common boundary-crossing competences, but you are welcome to add any additional ones relevant to your role (use the empty box provided).
- Evaluate both your current situation (how you perform now) and your desired situation (where you'd like to be).

This exercise is not about right or wrong answers. It's meant to be a personal reflection that can serve as a starting point for dialogue with colleagues, managers, or fellow boundary spanners.

Example

BOUNDARY-CROSSING COMPETENCES						
Signalling	Strategic thinking and acting	Networking	Inspiring	Proactive behaviour	Organizational skills	... *
5	6	9	9	3	5	9

CONTENT EXPERTISE	SYSTEM EXPERTISE
7	6

* Crossing border competencies

Desired situation

BOUNDARY-CROSSING COMPETENCES						
Signalling	Strategic thinking and acting	Networking	Inspiring	Proactive behaviour	Organizational skills	...

CONTENT EXPERTISE

SYSTEM EXPERTISE

Current situation

BOUNDARY-CROSSING COMPETENCES						
Signalling	Strategic thinking and acting	Networking	Inspiring	Proactive behaviour	Organizational skills	...

CONTENT EXPERTISE

SYSTEM EXPERTISE

Getting started!

To wrap up, let's take a closer look at your strengths and the areas where you'd like to challenge yourself further in your role. The questions below are designed to give you deeper insights into where you are and where you'd like to grow.

> What do you notice?

Are there any differences between your current and desired situation? What do these differences reveal about your strengths and areas for growth?

Goal setting

What goals do you want to set for yourself? Consider the goals that will help you improve your role as a boundary spanner.

From tomorrow, I will start working on...

Which small steps or actions can you take tomorrow to start working toward your goals? Identify simple, manageable activities that will help you move forward.

GLOSSARY

Connecting people and/or organisations

Bringing together people and/or organisations from various disciplines or sectors.

Facilitating collaboration and/or innovation

Setting up and guiding partnerships or innovative efforts.

Enhancing knowledge utilisation

Creating a shared language between different disciplines or sectors to maximize the application of knowledge and improve practice.

Signalling

A boundary spanner actively observes and listens to various stakeholders, identifying what's happening, recognizing opportunities, and addressing resistance in the learning and development process.

Strategic thinking and acting

A boundary spanner understands the bigger picture, recognizes patterns, identifies opportunities and challenges, and translates them into focused actions.

Networking

A boundary spanner possesses deep knowledge of the network and uses it to establish and maintain connections with key individuals or organizations.

Inspiring

A boundary spanner motivates others, fostering enthusiasm and encouraging action in learning and development, thereby ensuring support and commitment.

Proactive behaviour

A boundary spanner takes initiative, assumes responsibility, and embraces innovation without hesitation.

Organizational skills

A boundary spanner facilitates and coordinates the learning and development process, often by bringing the right people together.

Content expertise

Specialized knowledge and expertise in the specific field where the boundary spanner operates, such as business administration, education, nursing, or health promotion.

System expertise

An understanding of the system in which the boundary spanner works, including its culture, structure, norms, and values.

COLOPHON

Eindhoven, 2024

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This dialogue tool is part of the research project: Boundary spanners of learning and development.
Conducted by the Fontys Knowledge Centre for Lifelong Development.

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Alternatively, visit the website of the knowledge centre by scanning the QR code.

