

The Story Behind Boundary Explorer™

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For ten years, CCL conducted two major research projects that provided the content for the book, *Boundary Spanning Leadership*, by Chris Ernst and Donna Chrobot-Mason, which ultimately led to the development of *Boundary Explorer*. The two projects were the Leadership Across Differences (LAD) project and the collection of survey data from 128 senior executives who participated in CCL's Leadership at the Peak program. Between the two studies, over fifty researchers and over 3,000 research subjects were involved.



These studies were undertaken in order to investigate a peculiar paradox. That is, that despite the fact that through improved technology markets are far more globalized with instantaneous access to people, difficulties in relationships between people conducting business in these markets remains a persistent challenge. In fact, in some cases they have deteriorated. Leaders are confronted with seemingly insurmountable boundaries such as rifts between organizational silos, residual bitterness between historical enemies, culture clashes among countries and cultures, turf battles, and generation gaps. Such boundaries invite conflict, impose limitations on performance, stifle innovation, and present critical challenges which leaders are ill-equipped to confront. Thus, researchers set out to assist leaders by providing a way to visualize the problem, identify the specific challenges, and furnish practical solutions.

The goal of the LAD research was to address the following question: What are the leadership processes by which organizations create shared direction, alignment, and commitment across groups of people with very different histories, perspectives, values, and cultures? Data were gathered from six regions: Africa, Asia, Europe, Middle East, North America, and South America. After collection of data, an extensive literature review, and a process of data coding and interpretation, the team ultimately was able to identify the six practices that comprise Cards 14–19 in *Boundary Explorer*.

The second project, involving the Leadership at the Peak participants, allowed us to refine the results of the LAD research. These 128 leaders were surveyed on pressing trends and challenges, the role of leadership in spanning boundaries, and the types of boundaries leaders face in attempting to create direction, alignment, and commitment. Findings from this study informed our thinking in two primary ways. First, it reinforced our belief that leading across boundaries is challenging yet critically important. The other primary finding concerns the identification of the five types of boundaries identified as challenges for leaders. The executives identified a total of 181 examples of

boundaries and out of that, researchers developed the typology of five boundary dimensions — horizontal, vertical, stakeholder, demographic, and geographic. These comprise Cards 6–10.

The book, based on these findings, was published in 2010 by McGraw-Hill Professional. As a practical working adjunct to the book and also as a stand-alone product, Boundary Explorer was developed in order to help anyone who is faced with persistent issues relating to leading across boundaries. We had a precedent in the CCL product called Visual Explorer. This tool facilitates group dialogue through using images to help start conversations and create new perspectives and shared understanding. It uses postcard-size images to spur responses and reflective techniques to absorb learnings. Our goal in developing Boundary Explorer was to apply the precepts of the VE tool, using images and metaphors to drive understanding and apply it to a specific content area. Our goal was to simplify the process and make the card deck a familiar and easy-to-use tool that anyone could master and use successfully.