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Abstract

The complexity of global organizations highlights the importance of members' ability to span diverse boundaries that may be defined by organization structures, national borders, and/or a variety of cultures associated with organization, nation-based societal and work cultures, industries, and/or professions. Based on ethnographic research in a Japan–US binational firm, the paper describes and analyzes the boundary role performance of the firm's Japanese members. It contributes toward theory on boundary spanning by introducing a "cultural identity negotiation" conceptual framework. We show boundary spanning as a process shaped through the interplay of the contextual issues that make a boundary problematic; an individual's multiple repertoires of cultural knowledge; and the individual boundary spanner's "negotiation", through interaction with others, of his/her cultural identities – the sense of "who I am" as a cultural being that is fundamental to an individual's self-concept. At the same time, we make transparent the epistemological and methodological foundations of an interpretive ethnographic approach, demonstrating its value for understanding complex organizational processes. Research findings have practical implications for the selection and training of an organization's employees, particularly of persons who may be considered "bicultural".

Keywords:

INTRODUCTION

In response to the growing impact of globalization on organizational complexity, scholars have called for more attention to boundary spanning in global organization settings (Au & Fukuda, 2002; Beechler, Søndergaard, Miller, & Bird, 2004; Brannen & Thomas, 2010; Thomas, 1994). As companies reorganize the value chain globally, organizational boundaries become increasingly permeable (Steger, 1998). Internally, vertical forms of organizing dependent on centralized decision-making and large-scale coordination between functions make way for more flexible, decentralized arrangements, conducive to faster decisions and flows of communication, products, and services. Externally, boundaries blur as companies engage in a variety of strategic

alliances. Combined with more rapid and accessible communication technologies, these changes necessitate dense and interactive processes of coordination that cross a variety of boundaries. As Beechler et al. (2004) point out, interpersonal networks, with boundary spanners at strategic junctures, are especially important for holding together today's geographically dispersed, internally differentiated, and culturally diverse organizations. Collaboration, communication, and trust-building are more important than ever before, and the role of spanning boundaries is more critical.

This paper offers an unprecedented detailed description and analysis of individuals in a global organizational setting as they span various organizational, cultural, and national boundaries to accomplish day-to-day demands of work. Based on a long-term ethnographic study of a Japanese subsidiary company in the US, our analysis illuminates the critical boundary-spanning role of the company's Japanese members. It addresses the call for more research on the boundary role played by persons who are "bicultural" – on how they manage their oft-felt cultural "in-between-ness" psychologically, and how, in their interactions with others, they switch among culture-specific cognitive schemas to facilitate work (Brannen & Thomas, 2010; Hong, 2010). Our interpretive ethnographic approach gives new insight into the nature and complexities both of the relevant boundaries and of factors influencing the way an individual spans these boundaries, with particular emphasis on the implications of culture.

The contribution of the paper is twofold. First, the conceptual framework that emerged through our analysis of the "lived experience" of individuals in their boundary-spanning role, a "cultural identity negotiation" framework, contributes to international cross-cultural management theory relating both to boundary work and to culture. We show boundary spanning as a process shaped through the interplay of the contextual issues that make a boundary problematic; the individual's multiple repertoires of cultural knowledge, including but transcending that knowledge associated with national culture; and the individual boundary spanner's "negotiation", through interaction with others, of his/her cultural identities – the sense of "who I am" as a cultural being that is fundamental to an individual's concept of self. Second, we make transparent the epistemological and methodological foundations of the interpretive ethnographic approach from which our development of theory proceeds, showing the value of the approach for understanding organizational processes (Kostera, 2007; Neyland, 2008; Ybema, Yanow, Wels, & Kamsteeg, 2009).

The paper is organized as follows. In the first section, we clarify the social constructionist perspective that lends cohesion to our study of boundary spanning. We do so by briefly reviewing the boundary-spanning literature and then locating our study among several bodies of relevant research, giving particular attention to concepts of culture, identity, the contextual negotiation of sense-making, interpretivism, and ethnography that variously inform the research. The second section describes the research site and our research process. This is followed by an ethnographic account of the research findings in section three. And, finally, the fourth section addresses the implications of the research for international management theory and practice.

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF BOUNDARY SPANNING

Boundary Spanning and Boundary Spanners

The literature on boundary spanning considers the role to be multidimensional. Functions commonly attributed to it include information processing, representing the organization externally, acquisition and disposition of resources, and acquiring and acting as an agent of influence for the organization (Aldrich & Herker, 1977; Thomas, 1994). Most researchers, however, emphasize the importance of the role for processing information – a complex enterprise, as the role occupant does not simply transmit factual information. As described by Aldrich and Herker, boundary spanners filter, summarize, interpret, draw inferences from, store, and selectively act on information. In their words, "expertise in summarizing and interpreting information may be as important to organizational success as expertise in determining who gets what information, depending upon the uncertainty in the information processed" (1977: 219). Boundary spanners, through their actions, engage in "uncertainty absorption" (ibid.). To successfully fulfill the role, a boundary spanner must have a deep understanding of the business environment in which an organization operates, as well as the sociocultural, economic, and political influences on that environment (Johnson & Duxbury, 2010).

We see an increase in boundary-spanning research among international business scholars around two interrelated foci. One involves organizational boundaries between units of multinational enterprises (MNEs), often those that exist between a headquarters in one nation and subsidiary operations in a host country. The other is the boundary constituted by national cultural differences. Analysis typically centers on international assignees or expatriate managers, considered the primary boundary spanners (Au & Fukuda, 2002; Thomas, 1994). Issues receiving attention include "antecedents" to individual boundary-role behavior located in the environment, and in the structure of the MNE (Au & Fukuda, 2002; Thomas, 1994); knowledge brokerage through social networks linking home and host units (Reiche, Harzing, & Kraimer, 2009); disagreement over procedural justice among parties in international joint ventures (Luo, 2009); and the emerging boundary-spanning role between clients and vendors of offshore sourcing for technology and services (Mahnke, Wareham, & Bjorn-Andersen, 2008). Where the construct of national culture is conceptually relevant, researchers view it in terms of "cultural distance" (Kogut & Singh, 1988) between persons from two different countries, as reflected in commonly accepted universal dimensions of culture such as an individualism–collectivism continuum, or power distance – the extent to which a society accepts unequal distribution of power in institutions and organizations (e.g., Hofstede, 1980). It is assumed that the greater the cultural difference, the more frequently communication problems will arise (Au & Fukuda, 2002; Thomas, 1994).

While accepting this fundamental idea of what a boundary spanner does, international cross-cultural management scholars in particular point to the need for more nuanced conceptual frameworks that both accommodate the complexity of the boundary-spanning process and give insight into the lived experience of individuals as they engage in boundary-spanning behavior. Such scholars are especially mindful of rapidly expanding cultural diversity in global organizations and potential problems that arise at the interface of cultural boundaries (Beechler et al., 2004; Brannen & Thomas, 2010).

Beechler et al. (2004), for example, note that conventional imagery characterizing boundary-spanning research is relatively static, with its emphasis on "linkages", as links in a chain, between vertical, horizontal, external, or geographic boundaries. Boundary roles generally are seen as embedded in a formal position of the organization. Research therefore reflects the notion of "rigid, traditional boundaries that separate employees, tasks, processes, and places" (ibid.: 125). Conventional treatment of the individual as a boundary spanner also evokes static imagery. Researchers consider how such issues as commitment, role ambiguity, conflicting role expectations, role-related stress, and the relationship between role autonomy and trust relate to role performance. Or they consider the individual competencies and personal attributes that promote effectiveness (see Beechler et al., 2004, for a review of this literature). Based on quantitative analysis of questionnaire survey data, such research is not designed to illuminate the social construction of boundary roles at the individual level.

In comparison, Beechler et al. (2004) offer fluid and more complex imagery of boundary spanning and boundary spanners. Boundary spanning consists of the "conduits or piping system and the information that flows through them" (ibid.: 125). Within an organization, this piping system comprises numerous individuals' evolving and changing interpersonal networks. A boundary spanner does not necessarily occupy a formal position traditionally viewed as a link between organization boundaries. An effective boundary spanner can be anyone who possesses the necessary explicit and tacit knowledge of *how* to do things, *what* to do, *who* to build and maintain a network with, and *why* something is important (ibid.). This knowledge may take the form of mental schemas, which, if widely shared among a group of people with common experience, are considered to be "cultural" knowledge (Beechler et al., 2004; Brannen & Thomas, 2010; Strauss & Quinn, 1997). Thus cross-cultural interaction replaces cultural distance as a relevant concept.

A social constructionist perspective that recognizes people construct their social realities through social interaction (Denzin, 1997), although still nascent among international cross-cultural management scholars interested in boundary work, is evolving. Grounded largely in qualitative research, it focuses on the active and fluid creation of meaning as boundary spanners switch among culture-specific schemas in their interactions with others across a variety of cultural boundaries (Barrett & Oborn, 2010; Brannen & Thomas, 2010; Essers & Benschop, 2009; Hong, 2010; Lauring, 2008; Ybema & Byun, 2009).

Three streams of research are especially relevant to the cultural identity negotiation framework underlying the conceptualization of boundary spanning offered in this paper. Described in the following paragraphs, they center, respectively, on the notions of negotiated culture, cultural identity, and biculturalism.

Negotiating Culture, Identity, and Work across Boundaries

Negotiated culture

 A model of negotiated culture, introduced in the work of Brannen (1994) and Brannen and Salk (2000), grew out of empirical research in binational organizational settings and helps resolve certain conundrums regarding culture that challenge researchers interested in intercultural interaction. For example, the prevailing construct of (national) culture utilized in international research represents it as a collective-level phenomenon consisting of a coherent, static, and enduring set of values that determines individual-level thinking and behavior. This inevitably leads to a conceptualization of intercultural encounters defined by clash (Boyacigiller, Kleinberg, Phillips, & Sackmann, 2004; Brannen & Thomas, 2010). Such a concept of culture is inadequate for understanding what in fact happens when persons from different national cultures come together in the workplace. Disruptive cultural clash is just one possibility.

As several empirical studies show, one outcome of daily intercultural interaction is the emergence of organizational cultures that in some way reflect members' cognizance of national cultural differences (Brannen, 1994; Brannen & Salk, 2000; Clausen, 2007; Kleinberg, 1994a, 1994b, 1998; Yagi, 2007). For example, Kleinberg's (1994a) study of a Japan–US binational organization found emergent organization-wide culture and American and Japanese subcultures. The subcultures, in particular, reflected understandings relating to problematic cultural differences between the Japanese expatriate managers and the American employees. Analysis of one particular work group in the organization, however, surfaced cultural understandings reflecting adaptive accommodation to Japanese and American cultural differences (Kleinberg, 1994b). Other research (Brannen, 1994; Brannen & Salk, 2000; Clausen, 2007) also highlights emergent shared understandings centering on work that ameliorate the disruptive potential of nation-based cultural differences. It should be noted that these studies conceptually distinguish broad Japan and US societal-level national cultures from a subset of national culture – nation-based work cultures more directly relevant to emergent organizational cultures.

Thus the notion of emergent culture accommodates a critical multiple-cultures viewpoint in global organization research. In addition to illustrating the importance of emergent organizational cultures, it opens the way for research that investigates the relevance of cultural boundaries based on industry, organization work units, hierarchy, profession, and so forth. In a given situation, these cultural foci may interact with and even be more important than national cultural interfaces (Boyacigiller et al., 2004; Brannen & Salk, 2000; Brannen & Thomas, 2010; Leung, Bhagat, Buchan, Erez, & Gibson, 2005; Sackmann & Phillips, 2004).

Furthermore, research that explicitly articulates a model of negotiated culture (Brannen, 1994; Brannen & Salk, 2000; Clausen, 2007) offers a conceptualization of culture more amenable to comprehending the process of intercultural interaction than the static conceptualization conventionally employed in international management research. Culture is defined as sets of symbols and patterns of meaning and interpretation that are shared or partially shared among a group of people. Produced and reproduced through social interaction, culture nonetheless is

historically situated, emergent, and shifting – generated in webs of agency (i.e., "minded actions") and power (Brannen & Salk, 2000: 455, citing Ong, 1987).

Culture, therefore, may be negotiated. Like Brannen and Salk (2000), we draw on Strauss's notion of "negotiated order" to help explain the concept of negotiation (Strauss, 1978). Strauss views all social order as negotiated order, subject to continual change because all negotiations have temporal limits – they are renewed or revised or reconstituted over time (Fine, 1984: 242). In Strauss's words: Negotiation is … one of the possible means of "getting things accomplished". It is used to get done the things that an actor (person, group, organization, nation, and so on) wishes to get done. This includes "making things" or "making them continue to work". Necessarily other actors are involved in such enterprises. Indeed, I would draw a crucial distinction between agreement and negotiation (which always implies some tension between parties, else they would not be negotiating). (Strauss, 1978: 11)

We further elucidate the process of negotiation by reference to the basic premises of social interactionism. They include the following: reality as people sense it is a social production; actors constantly influence one another as they interact over time; human beings are capable of minded actions, or self-reflexive behavior (interaction within the individual); as we interact with others and within ourselves, we define what is taking place and decide how to act accordingly; and we use our environment in relation to our goals, rather than simply responding to it (Charon, 2001; Denzin, 1974).

The negotiated culture perspective provides a dynamic view of complex intercultural processes. Consonant with Strauss's emphasis on the micro-politics of negotiated order, key organizational and task-related issues trigger negotiations. Other structural and contextual factors, internal and external to the organization, additionally shape negotiated cultural outcomes (Brannen & Salk, 2000). Research also links the concept of cultural identity to negotiated culture, national cultural identity being the focal issue. From one negotiation situation to another, an organizational actor's "stance", or the degree to which one identifies with common representations of the national culture along a continuum from marginal to hyper-normal, may vary (Brannen, 1994; Brannen & Salk, 2000; Clausen, 2007).

In the next section we clarify the construct of cultural identity reflected in our conceptual framework, and review research that places the notion of cultural identity more central than does the model of negotiated culture.

Cultural identity

We consider cultural identity to be part of what Giddens terms "self-identity", defined as "the self as reflexively understood by the individual in terms of his or her biography" (Giddens, 1991: 244), and draw on the wider body of self and identity literature to flesh out this definition. Self is an individual's idea of who he or she is as a physical, social, spiritual, or moral human being, and is understood in relation to situations and interactions with others (Charon, 2001; Gecas, 1982). Processes of self-evaluation and self-judgment implicate that part of the self-concept we refer to as identity. It is assumed that an individual's concept of self embraces multiple identities that relate to a person's sense of "Who am I?" and "How should I act?" Some are core, others more malleable. Cultural identity links individuals to one or more "collection of ideas and practices

shared or widely distributed in a delineated population" (Hong, Wan, No, & Chiu, 2007: 324) and is just one dimension of self-identity. It is that part of one's self-concept that concerns perceptions of who I am as a cultural being (Sackmann & Phillips, 2004; Yagi, 2007).

While a person's concept of self may remain fairly consistent over time, identity is recognized as a process that shifts and adjusts as it plays out in everyday life. Identities in a person's repertoire vary in importance depending on circumstances. Through a process of negotiation, we work to communicate our identities to others as we continuously label others and attribute identities to them (Charon, 2001; Gecas, 1982).

The idea of cultural identity is not new to international and cross-cultural management scholars. National culture and national identity have long been conceptually conjoined and ascribed to individuals without question or examination (Ybema & Byun, 2009). What is new is an interest in the complex, multidimensional process of identity construction in cross-national, cross-cultural work settings. Taking a multiple-cultures perspective, Boyacigiller et al. (2004) and Sackmann and Phillips (2004) assume that people hold membership in and identify with a number of cultural groups simultaneously. They pose two critical empirical questions: when and under what conditions will a particular cultural identity be triggered, and what are the organizational consequences? In their study of female Muslim entrepreneurs in the Netherlands, Essers and Benschop (2009) develop the concept of "intersectionality" or identity intersections, which helps address these questions. They describe the creative identity work (i.e., negotiation) these women do to reconcile their entrepreneurial identity with expectations associated with their gender, ethnic, and religious identities.

Three recent studies look specifically at identity construction in cross-national, cross-cultural interaction. They are Barrett and Oborn's (2010) study of software development teams straddling Jamaica and India, Lauring's (2008) study of a Danish subsidiary in England, and Ybema and Byun's (2009) study of Japanese firms in the Netherlands and Dutch firms in Japan. This research also illustrates the dynamic, constructed nature of identity making, focusing on how cultural identity is negotiated through discourse and how it is situated in local contexts. It emphasizes that identity construction is inextricably enmeshed with the power dynamics of cross-cultural relations. Lauring, for example, found that language choice – the use of Danish or English – was strategically utilized as a symbolic object in identity making when national groups collided. Ybema and Byun found that differences in the way organization members talked about perceived Japanese-Dutch cultural differences were closely related to specific power asymmetries in various organization contexts, as well as to the person's place in the organizational hierarchy. Barrett and Oborn introduce the term "culturizing" to refer to the process by which negative cross-cultural stereotyping occurs and previously irrelevant cultural boundaries are "reified" when questions about the redistribution of power and authority arise.

Additional insight into cultural identity construction is found in the literature on persons who are bicultural, reviewed next.

Biculturals and biculturalism

Despite the delimiting term "bicultural", researchers focusing on the phenomenon extend the concept to individuals who have deeply internalized the schemas from more than one culture

(Brannen & Thomas, 2010). A bicultural may be multicultural. Nevertheless, the literature to date considers biculturalism in the context of persons bridging two national cultures. Most research aims at comprehending how biculturals manage their dual cultural identities in the face of often conflicting sets of cultural expectations (Benet-Martínez, Leu, Lee, & Morris, 2002; Cheng, Lee, & Benet-Martínez, 2006). Cultural frame switching constitutes a key conceptual construct.

A cultural frame comprises the cultural knowledge that guides the way people think, feel, and behave. As in the negotiated culture model, culture is conceptualized as a flexible social construct. It is characterized as "networks of discrete, specific constructs or schemas" (Cheng et al., 2006), or a "network of associations" (Fu, Chiu, Morris, & Young, 2007). A bicultural calls on one or another cultural frame for processing and reacting to a social situation only when a preceding cultural cue comes to the foreground in his or her mind, and only when it is applicable to social events that involve judgment (Benet-Martínez, Lee, & Leu, 2006; Cheng et al., 2006; Hong et al., 2007). Tadmor and Tetlock (2006: 178) view judgment in terms of "accountability". Individuals feel a need to justify their thoughts and actions to significant others in accord with shared norms, thus avoiding censure.

Research generally assumes a connection between biculturalism and individual cultural identity. Verkuyten and Pouliasi (2006) emphasize the importance of social identity processes, particularly self-categorization theory (Hogg & Turner, 1987). The groups in which we feel membership help shape our sense of who we are as well as our perceptions, attitudes, and behavior. Biculturals acquire fluency in multiple systems of cultural knowledge through the identity-shaping experience of extended and intensive exposure to cultural members (Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martínez, 2000). Brannen and Thomas (2010) point out that biculturals do not necessarily consciously seek to acquire this knowledge, and that the acquisition process, requiring individuals to constantly confront disparate cultural schemas, may generate considerable angst. The psychological impact of cross-cultural knowledge acquisition is such that the knowledge may become crucial to a bicultural's self-image and essential for his or her self-definition (Hong, 2010).

An expanding body of literature addresses two interrelated questions. One concerns how individuals differ, one to another, in the psychological relationship among their various cultural identities. The other concerns how one's psychological construction of cultural identity affects cultural frame-switching behavior and effectiveness. Brannen, Garcia, and Thomas (2009), for example, propose a four-category typology of biculturals that distinguishes the degree to which and the way in which an individual psychologically and behaviorally integrates two cultural identities. A person typed as "Either/Or", for instance, identifies with both cultures, and changes orientation and behavior according to contextual cues. A person categorized as "Neither/Nor", however, may sense two cultural identities, but feel marginalized and not fully part of either culture. Consequently, this person is less likely even to engage in cultural frame switching (ibid.: 209). The construct of "bicultural identity integration" (BII), developed out of experimental research, reflects a continuum along which bicultural individuals perceive two cultural identities to be compatible and complementary (High BII) or oppositional (Low BII). Findings indicate that persons who experience high bicultural identity integration switch cultural frames more

effectively than those who experience low integration (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Benet-Martínez et al., 2002; Cheng et al., 2006).

There is growing interest in the effect that engaging in cross-cultural knowledge acquisition and cultural frame switching has on biculturals' cognitive functioning (Brannen & Thomas, 2010). A number of consequences are proposed. Biculturals, for example, may possess greater empathy than monoculturals (Brannen et al., 2009), and they may exhibit greater mental flexibility (Chiu & Hong, 2005) as well as the ability to integrate ideas more creatively (Leung, Maddux, Galinsky, & Chiu, 2008). With regard to culture, it has been proposed that biculturals hold more cognitively complex cultural representations than monoculturals (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Benet-Martínez et al., 2006) and, in addition, respond with more agility to cultural and other situational cues (Hong et al., 2000). In short, biculturals generally exhibit a high level of "cultural metacognition" – the ability to deliberately monitor one's mental processes and feelings in cross-cultural interaction and regulate them in relation to an objective (Brannen & Thomas, 2010; Thomas et al., 2008).

While research focused specifically on biculturals and biculturalism so far is either conceptual or experimental, much of the empirical research on negotiated culture and cultural identity reflects an interpretive ethnographic approach. Before describing the specific research process for the study presented here, we characterize an interpretive ethnographic methodology.

Interpretive ethnography

In anthropological tradition, ethnography is a methodology as opposed to simply a method for collecting and analyzing data (Kostera, 2007; Neyland, 2008; Wolcott, 1999; Ybema et al., 2009). It is a way of "seeing", a way of viewing human social behavior "that finds its orienting and overarching purpose in an underlying concern with cultural interpretation" (Wolcott, 1999: 67–68). Ethnography thus involves a theory of culture. It is concerned with what culture is, how culture comes into being, the connection between culture and behavior, and how an understanding of a group's culture can be achieved by a researcher (Spradley, 1979).

In our research, we employ a conceptualization of culture borrowed from psychological anthropology that can be described as a "cognitive theory of meaning" (Strauss & Quinn, 1997). "Meaning" refers to an individual's interpretation of objects or events: the way a person identifies with an object or event, expectations regarding it, and the way he or she feels about it or is motivated to respond to it. Meanings are cultural when they are more or less shared by a community of persons with similar life experiences. We think of meaning in terms of intrapersonal mental structures referred to as cultural schemas (or cultural understandings or cultural assumptions). Schemas normally are "implicit" or outside the individual's awareness, but nevertheless "face no resistance in coming to consciousness" (Strauss & Quinn, 1997: 259).

A cognitive theory of meaning rests on the notion of situated cognition. Schemas are not construed as rules that should be followed, such as, for example, "Japanese women must speak more deferentially to a male co-worker than to a female co-worker". Rather, schemas are "networks of strongly connected cognitive elements that represent the generic concepts stored in memory" (Strauss & Quinn, 1997: 6). Elements of schemas are combined and recombined according to the situation. Shared understandings about how Japanese female employees should

speak to male co-workers, then, are but one element in a network of understandings relating to gender relations in the workplace. In a given situation, they may connect with a network of understandings about superior–subordinate relations, or peer relations, and so on. The meaning that an interaction with a male co-worker has for a Japanese woman is context-sensitive, and her behavior is expected to adjust accordingly.

A culture construct based on a cognitive theory of meaning neatly accommodates an interpretive ethnographic approach. Interpretivism as a theory of human action and meaning is well established in the social sciences (Denzin, 1997; Schwandt, 2000). It assumes human action is meaningful – that is, carried out within a system of meaning that enables us to interpret the meaning of our own and others' actions and experience. And it assumes it is possible to grasp the subjective consciousness or intent of an actor in an objective manner. This requires the interpreter, as much as possible, to step outside his or her own historical and cultural frames of reference. The material that is interpreted is socially created "text". A variety of textual forms provide a basis for interpretation, such as recorded and transcribed interviews, notes of observations, transcribed conversations, speeches, and archival documents. Generally, the interpreter relies on some form of thematic, content-based analysis.

The interpretive ethnographer seeks to comprehend the "lived experience" of members of a given group of people, to grasp "insider" cultural knowledge or sense-making that helps guide observed recurrent, patterned cultural behavior. Typically, ethnographers then relate insiders' subjective sense-making to theories and concerns current among the larger community of social science scholars (Denzin, 1989, 1997; Spradley, 1980; Van Maanen, 1988; Wolcott, 1999).

Social scientists who do interpretive ethnography often adopt a "narrative" approach. One of the main ways people give meaning to their experience is to construct a narrative about it (Bruner, 1990; Chase, 2005). Personal experience stories normally have the basic structural elements of plot, setting, characters, and time frame. They usually involve a disturbance or some kind of complicating action, the telling of which reveals character, feelings, explanations, and motivations (Denzin, 1997; Riessman, 1993). Of relevance to our study, stories may knit together several themes that have coherence, and which reflect "structured units of meaning" (Bruner, 1987: 7) that constitute cultural knowledge. People also create their selves and their identities through the stories they construct (Chase, 2005; Denzin, 1997; Riessman, 1993).

An interpretive ethnographic approach is "holistic", emphasizing the importance of the broader contexts that shape sense-making (Denzin, 1997; Van Maanen, 1988; Wolcott, 1999). Thus an organizational ethnographer would reconstruct details of members' immediate work situations, along with the organizational structures, organizational politics, and external influences that affect it. The traditional route to researcher understanding of local sense-making is "fieldwork", ideally of long-term duration (Kostera, 2007; Neyland, 2008; Ybema et al., 2009; Wolcott, 1999). As Denzin (1982) characterizes it, fieldwork is the "method that throws the researcher directly into the life-worlds under investigation and requires the careful recording of the problematic and routine features of that world" (cited in Van Maanen, 1988: 117).

The notion of "representation", written interpretations of others' sense-making, is central to interpretive ethnography. In Riessman's words, "Simply stated, we are interpreting and creating

texts at every juncture, letting symbols stand for or take the place of the primary experience [of the people studied], to which we have no direct access" (1993: 15). Ideally the written ethnographic account reflects both "multivocality" and "reflexivity" (Chase, 2005; Neyland, 2008; Wolcott, 1999). The "voice" of the subjects should be heard and their "social location" identified (Chase, 2005: 657). The researcher's voice also is distinguished, with reflection on how his or her background and intentions influence texts that are created in socially situated contexts of interaction (Chase, 2005; Denzin, 1989, 1997).

Interpretive ethnographic accounts aim for "verisimilitude" or "truth-likeness" rather than provable "truth". Evaluation of an account rests on whether or not the reader feels the research data are realistic, and whether or not the ethnographer has utilized data persuasively, so that representations and conclusions are believable (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993; Van Maanen, 1988). The goal is to demonstrate the "transferability" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the research findings. That is, can they be applied fruitfully to other social settings that have some similar characteristics?

The next section describes the interpretive ethnographic research process that culminated in this paper.
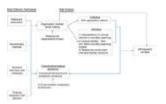

RESEARCH SITE AND RESEARCH METHODS

Our analysis of boundary spanning is based on the study of an organization pseudonymously named Ejima America, Inc. (EAI). Situated in southern California, EAI is the headquarters of a wholly owned subsidiary of the Japanese company Ejima, Inc. (EI). EAI imported technically specialized products manufactured in the parent company's factories in Japan and affiliated companies around the world. The company sold these products throughout North America, EI's primary market. Among EAI's 120 employees, nine were of Japanese descent and fluent in Japanese language and culture. There was considerable ethnic and country of origin diversity among the rest of EAI's members, including "mainstream" white Americans; Asian-, Hispanic-, and African-Americans; and first-generation immigrants from Australia, Bosnia, Germany, India, the Philippines, Poland, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Figure 1 schematically depicts the interpretive ethnographic research process from the point when data collection began to the final construction of the ethnographic account presented here. We begin our description of the process by introducing the principal investigator, who is the first author of this paper, and by describing the initial assumptions and interests that shaped her research. A Japanese citizen, the principal investigator was a manager in the international business division of a Japanese research and consulting firm before coming to the US as a doctoral student in organizational behavior. Her interest in Japan–US cross-cultural business and management issues grew out of this work experience. As is typical of ethnographic research, her dissertation research project initially was guided by an issue suited to ethnographic inquiry (Spradley, 1979, 1980; Wolcott, 1999) – in this case, "What does it mean to be Japanese in this organization?" The question resonated with her personal experiences, but it also addressed an even broader issue of relevance to international cross-cultural management. That is, how does a

group of persons identified by a common national culture and language manage their "in-between-ness" in a binational organization? Sensitized by existing research on negotiated and emergent cultures, she was interested in possible interrelationships among national cultures, organizational or other non-national cultures, and individual self-identity.

Figure 1.

Interpretive ethnographic research process.

Data Collection

Data gathering started before the principal investigator began actual fieldwork in EAI, while she negotiated permission to conduct the study. Access presents one of the main obstacles to doing ethnographic research on complex organizations – members in a position to allow it typically do not want the organization observed (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992; Neyland, 2008). The principal investigator knew it is difficult to gain permission from Japanese corporations, even for limited interviews, if one does not have appropriate connections. Narrowing the list of potential sites to corporations with which she had past contact and which currently had expatriate employees at US operations, she chose a corporation where the president of the US subsidiary was a Japanese businessman she had known through her previous job. He agreed to have her visit the company and talk face to face about the project. A month later, she learned that, in addition to allowing her to conduct research, he would provide her with a part-time job so she could communicate with employees in a natural setting. The only stipulation was that he read her dissertation before her defense of it to ensure protection of corporate secrets and image.

Subsequently, the principal investigator conducted seven months of fieldwork in EAI as a participant observer, from June through December 2003. She worked a half-day as administrative assistant to the president, and spent the rest of the day in research activities. Her job entailed document filing, translation from English to Japanese, and database development. This position gave her a working knowledge of the organization and its business, and the opportunity to interact with people in their work roles. She participated in a wide range of organizational activities, such as meetings and holiday parties, and met informally with employees for lunch or after work. Being a participant observer enabled her to watch interactions, overhear conversations, and engage in conversations herself. What she heard and saw, and her reactions to it, provided the content of voluminous handwritten field notes. Throughout her fieldwork, the researcher collected a variety of archival materials, such as newsletter issues, memos, and organization charts, all of which gave insight into organization structure, strategy, goals, and culture. In addition, she interviewed 54 members of EAI. Among them, nine were Japanese, 18 were white Americans, 10 were Asian-Americans, one was Hispanic-American, and 11 were first-generation immigrants. In total, she conducted 92 in-depth

and semi-structured interviews, each lasting from one to three hours, with employees from all departments and hierarchical levels.

After the main study was completed, the principal investigator communicated frequently with organization members by phone and, in March 2004, returned to EAI for 12 days of follow-up fieldwork. The second author visited EAI twice, once during the main study and once after most data had been gathered. Each trip lasted one week. In total, she conducted 18 in-depth interviews. Interviewees included six Japanese, eight white Americans, three Japanese Americans, and one Polish immigrant. She also met informally with a number of organization members.

A narrative interviewing strategy (Chase, 2005; Denzin, 1989; Riessman, 1993; Søderberg, 2006) was followed, designed to elicit personal-experience stories. Initially, formal but open-ended interviews emphasized "ethnographic reconnaissance" (Wolcott, 1999), aimed at getting to know the interviewee and the organization. Promising confidentiality, the researcher utilized a protocol of questions to elicit concrete biographical information about past work experience, current work position, education, family, and other aspects of the person's background. Nevertheless, organization members were actively encouraged to tell stories as the interview progressed and the researcher discovered topics she wanted the interviewee to expand upon. They were asked to theorize about various life and work experiences in terms of how they felt about them, what meaning they had in their lives. Each interview was tape-recorded and transcribed; those conducted in Japanese were translated into English. As the researcher familiarized herself with EAI and its members, she tracked ongoing, work-related narratives through follow-up interviews and conversations. By the project's end, over 800 pages of transcribed and handwritten text had accumulated.

Throughout data gathering, the principal investigator continually reflected on and tried to correct for biases or other problems stemming particularly from her "Japanese-ness". Being Japanese could be both an asset and a liability. While it enabled her to communicate with Japanese members on a deeper level than with non-Japanese members, her Japanese cultural and linguistic fluency could potentially cause her to see what she expected to see and to miss important insights. On the other hand, being categorized as Japanese, being a non-native English speaker, and being brought into the company by the Japanese president all set obstacles to building trust among non-Japanese organization members. She consciously worked to earn their trust by her behavior over time.

Data Analysis

In interpretive ethnographic research, analysis begins when data gathering begins (Spradley, 1979, 1980). At day's end, the principal investigator identified places in the text of that day's field notes and interviews that appeared relevant to understanding organizational issues and individual sense-making. Prior field notes and interviews were re-read in the light of the ideas and insights that emerged from the current day's work. In this way the researcher gradually and incrementally formulated interpretations and reinterpretations of the lived experience of EAI organizational members.

Initially, the researcher focused on cultural sense-making among organization members, at two levels of analysis (Figure 1). At the collective level, she sought to grasp the shared understandings constituting the particular organization cultures that were reflected in individuals' narratives about their experiences in EAI. At the individual level of analysis, she focused on individual members' interpretations of the various cultures that were implicated in their boundary-spanning activities. Of interest were the particular schemas the individual associated with a culture, be it reflective of an organizational, societal, professional, or some other cultural grouping.

Analysis of cultural sense-making at both the collective and individual levels relied on a kind of content analysis known as "domain analysis" (Spradley, 1979, 1980; Wolcott, 1999). The researcher hand-coded places in the texts of interviews and conversations with organization members, identifying statements that seemed to reflect sense-making shared among other organizational members with common experience. For example, although using different words to express it, members of a particular work group might indicate how the group's members collectively view their group's clout within the organization. If we consider "how members view their political clout" to be a broad knowledge domain, we can expect to find sub-domains of shared knowledge that reflect specific understandings about group-related political issues (Kleinberg, 1994a). Through multiple readings of coded texts, the researcher made inferences about basic units of shared insider knowledge. It is an iterative process that searches for commonality among multiple individual interpretations of cultural knowledge. The building blocks for collective representations of EAI cultures came from comparative analysis at the individual level, but cultures relevant to individual boundary work included non-organizational cultures as well.

A second concern of individual-level analysis was members' notions of cultural identity, as played out in the boundary-spanning role. Researcher representations of an individual's cultural identity profile relied on a more general thematic content analysis. The objective of analysis was to identify patterns of meaning and experience gleaned from narrative segments of interviews or conversations (Chase, 2005; Denzin, 1989). As indicated in the discussion of interpretive ethnography, the deepest insights come from narratives of an instance of cross-cultural discomfort, or some other problematic situation that involves judgment and, often, moral indignation. Take, for example, a Japanese female manager in EAI who depicts with disgust how she was asked by male visitors from the Japanese headquarters to fetch tea. During the interview, and in later conversations, the researcher encourages the employee to analyze her feelings and to tell additional stories relating to the theme of Japan–US differences in gender-based roles. In this way, the researcher begins to formulate an idea of this employee's cultural identity landscape.

Insights gained from the contextually situated analyses of each Japanese member's "culture talk" and "identity talk", combined with comments or stories about the individual provided by co-workers, enabled the researcher ultimately to construct abstracted identity narratives (Figure 1). The narratives merge objective features of the person's life, such as demands of the workplace, with subjective meanings attached to her or his life. In the illustrative example of the Japanese female employee, a subjective meaning might be "I am proud to be an American-style manager."

Several methods were utilized to validate or modify the researcher's emerging interpretations of events, organizational cultures, and individual members' interpretations of culture and identity. First, an analytical "auditor" (Elliott, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999), the second author of the paper who has extensive ethnographic research experience in similar organizations, checked for verisimilitude as research analysis progressed. In addition, within-method (i.e., ethnographic methods) triangulation of findings (Kostera, 2007; Ybema et al., 2009) occurred through comparison of the second author's interpretations gained from site visits with those of the principal investigator. Additionally, member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) conducted by the principal investigator in the follow-up site visit and telephone conversations tested findings with members of stakeholder groups from which data were collected.

Analyses of collective- and individual-level sense-making provided material for broader theoretical and conceptual abstraction (Figure 1). This resulted in the cultural identity negotiation framework and its component constructs that were the focus of first author's doctoral dissertation (Yagi, 2007). The framework evolved through a combination of two kinds of analysis. The first was iterative cross-member comparison of both individual Japanese member interpretations of relevant cultures and the individual member narratives constructed by the principal investigator. The second was a process of abduction (Peirce, 1955), which involves a back-and-forth thought process between theory and field data. It is a dialectical interplay between "experience distant" constructs, such as "culture", and "experience near" constructs particular to the local context, such as researcher representations of insider cultural knowledge (Geertz, 1979). Abduction enables us to see existing theoretical constructions from new perspectives, and to build new theoretical and conceptual models, such as the cultural identity negotiation framework. Later reading and analysis enabled us to apply the cultural identity negotiation framework specifically to the topic of boundary spanning, as presented in this paper.

This paper itself is an ethnographic narrative (Chase, 2005; Riessman, 1993; Van Maanen, 1988). So far we have described the background of the project and ethnographic research methodology. The narrative continues in the following section with analysis of the process by which the Japanese in EAI negotiate solutions to work-related problems across various kinds of boundaries while, simultaneously, negotiating their individual sense of cultural identity.

ANALYSIS OF BOUNDARY SPANNING AND THE NEGOTIATION OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

The dynamic of the linked processes of negotiating organizational, national, and cultural boundaries and negotiating cultural identity is revealed through ethnographic "thick description" (Geertz, 1979). Thick description means analysis is grounded in detailed description of the context in which negotiations take place and of the actions, feelings, and sense-making of boundary spanners. EAI members are referred to by (pseudonymous) first names, because first names normally are used in the company.

We first describe the way Japanese members make sense of their boundary-spanning role. Following this, we illustrate the processes of boundary and identity work depicted in the cases of

several Japanese members. Lastly, we present a model of the cultural identity negotiation framework that emerged from analysis.

Pipe Role and Boundary Complexity

In the course of asking the Japanese to talk about their work in EAI, the principal investigator frequently heard the word *paipu* (Japanese-borrowed English for "pipe") as a descriptor for one important type of activity among Japanese members. As pipe-role stories accumulated, it became evident that pipe referred to a role similar to "boundary spanner" in organizational studies lexicon. But, given its recurrence in Japanese members' discourse, the principal investigator determined that pipe, a "folk term" used only by the Japanese and reflecting shared understandings, was inextricably associated with being a Japanese member of the organization. It clearly warranted examination as a crucial knowledge domain in Japanese subgroup culture. This was a milestone in the ethnographic process of discovery. The particular meanings the term "pipe" held for the Japanese became a major focus of inquiry, for understanding what it means to be Japanese in EAI.

As conceptualized by Japanese members, pipe refers to both role and person in the role. It has four defining characteristics. A pipe:

1. serves as a conduit between two endpoints (i.e., boundaries) signified by the folk terms "Japan" and the "US";
2. involves diffuse action unconstrained by position title (This is reflected in the frequently heard folk term *nandemo-ya*, roughly translated "jack-of-all-trades", but literally meaning "a whatever person");
3. serves as a means of resolving problems, or asymmetries, between Japan and the US that hinder effective communication or task accomplishment; and
4. acts as a cultural insider within both Japanese and US cultural frames, switching between frames (and languages) according to the situational demands.

Japanese subgroup cultural knowledge maps the kinds of boundaries that must be connected by a pipe. Folk terms "Japan" and "US" each represent an encompassing cultural domain with multiple meanings regarding what constitutes the domain. For example, the endpoint "Japan" could signify a person or persons situated in Japan, at the EI headquarters or an EI factory, or situated in a Japanese affiliate in North America. In all instances, persons with whom the pipe connects are Japanese. The endpoint "US" could signify a person or persons within EAI, a US supplier or customer, or a potential partner company in the United States. Persons at this endpoint could be either non-Japanese or Japanese. The negotiation of solutions to a problem of asymmetry often proceeds over time, and necessitates numerous interpersonal interactions across various kinds of boundaries – national, organizational, and/or cultural – and many instances of cultural frame switching.

An excerpt from an interview (translated) with the chief financial officer, Ryoji, illustrates the common conceptualization of a pipe as *nandemo-ya*. Ryoji articulates the *nandemo-ya*'s essential task – to perform *chosei* (alternatively *chosetsu*), meaning a process of "adjusting" or "coordinating".After all, I am a *nandemo-ya*. For example, I would do *chosei* when I am called

by Japan [=EI] that they are having trouble with such-and-such a problem [on the US side]. I'll do the other way around as well. When an American person comes to me and says, "I am having trouble with such-and-such a problem [on the Japan side]. Please help me", then I will contact Japan immediately and do *chosei*. My role is basically a *nandemo-ya*, that includes these arrangements. In a sense, that is a pipe (*paipu*) with Japan.

Obviously, not all of a pipe's boundary spanning involves reconciling problems. Normal, non-problematic information constantly flows through the pipe conduits. But the common association made by individual Japanese between *nandemo-ya* and *chosei* or *chosetsu* indicates the importance of the problem-solving aspect of a Japanese member's conduit role.

The Japanese subgroup culture recognizes two sources of problematic Japan–US asymmetry: (1) differences in respective work cultures, and (2) differing positions on certain sensitive inter- and intra-organizational issues. Regarding concepts of work, for example, the Japanese frequently cited cultural differences in discourse strategies – for instance, how to present information persuasively. Inter- and intra-organizational issues primarily concerned politics surrounding business strategy, allocation of resources, and decision-making power (Yagi, 2007).

Cultural boundaries, however, involve much more than differences in Japanese and US work cultures. Specific understandings regarding the nature of inter- and intra-organizational political issues are reflected, respectively and singularly, in a number of organization cultural groupings in which a Japanese might sense membership and therefore identity with – notably organization-wide, divisional, and work unit cultures within EAI and, possibly, EI. In addition, a Japanese might also identify with a professional culture (e.g., engineer, interpreter) that is implicated in his or her enactment of the pipe role.

In the following section we extract from researcher-constructed narratives of several Japanese EAI members, examining their motivations to perform the pipe role, their role behavior, and their effectiveness, in order to give further insight into the ethnographic research process.

Performing the Pipe Role

The behavior of a person performing the pipe role is shaped by a confluence of task, people, and organizational issues particular to the situation. Our unit of analysis is what we term a "social act" Jackson, 1988), which involves negotiation of a task-related problem that may be resolved in one interaction between the boundary spanner and another person, or multiple interactions over time among a number of persons. The social act can be characterized as the immediate "negotiation context" (Strauss, 1978). The negotiation context, in turn, is influenced by a broader "structural context" (Strauss, 1978), construed as the organizational issue or issues that prompt the negotiating parties to recognize some kind of asymmetry between one another.

In our study, the structural context affecting Japanese boundary spanners was found to involve issues predominantly reflecting asymmetries in power relations between EAI and the parent company; asymmetries in access to resources among work units within EAI; asymmetries in Japanese and US concepts of work, or cultural assumptions about how to get a job done (Kleinberg, 1989); or some mix of the three.

We will use an illustration of pipe role enactment revolving around cultural differences in concepts of work to begin our description and analysis of boundary spanning within a cultural identity negotiation framework. The experiences of two Japanese men are highlighted.

Hidé Yamamoto and Shozo Nakai

Hidé Yamamoto and Shozo Nakai are application engineers in the Main Product Division (MPD). Some products sold by this division are developed through collaboration between an American customer and an EI factory in Japan. A common kind of social act in which Hidé and Shozo serve as pipe involves facilitating the design of product prototypes. Throughout a social act, they connect EAI with the American customer and, at the same time, connect the MPD with an EI factory in Japan that will develop a prototype. Pressure is intense, because the American customer normally pitches its product idea to several competing manufacturers.

Both Hidé and Shozo had extensive work experience in Japan before coming to the United States. Coincidentally, they graduated from the same engineering university in Tokyo, but after this their respective life experiences diverged. Hidé, around 40 years old at the time of fieldwork, had been in the United States 14 years. He first came as an expatriate employee in a US subsidiary of the Japanese company he joined after graduating from university. After three years in the United States, he left this company and worked for three more Japanese affiliates in Southern California before joining EAI. He had been with EAI just under five years. By this time he had given up Japanese citizenship and become a US citizen. Hidé explained his tendency to move from company to company in terms of *tanki*, his tendency toward impatience.… and then I came to Ejima. It will be five years. … To tell the truth, I am intentionally trying to stay with this company as long as possible. … I would like to see what will happen to me if I stay with one company for a long time. I think I am an impatient type of person. I tend to go straightforwardly with a company and try everything I can do with the company. And when I see a dead end with the company, when I start feeling like "There's no reason for me to stay with this company", then I quit. I think it is not a good attitude, that I lose motivation as soon as I find out that I don't have anything to learn from the company.

Furthermore, Hidé described himself by the English term "free agent", meaning he was a professional who contracted with a company that bought his set of skills at a high salary. He voiced pride that he was not a typical Japanese salary man. Rather than seeking the security of lifetime employment, he pursued his ideal of achieving professional development by honing his knowledge and skills through employment in various companies.

Shozo, also in his early forties, had been working in the United States for almost 10 years. But Shozo was a *moto-chuzai'in* (former expatriate employee) of EAI, and all of his work experience was with the Ejima group. After graduating from college, Shozo joined EI and worked for seven years as a development engineer in a company factory in Japan. Then he was assigned to EAI and worked as a *chuzai'in* for eight years. After this time, he relinquished his membership in EI and immediately rejoined EAI as a locally hired employee. Shozo chose to change employment

status because his repatriation to EI in Japan was imminent, and he wanted to continue living in the United States. In his words, "There still are many things I want to learn in the United States."

Structural context

Two distinct but intersecting cultural boundaries provide the structural context for pipe enactment by Hidé and Shozo. The first has to do with asymmetry between EI and EAI organizational cultures as they relate to business strategy. Part of EAI organizational level cultural knowledge was the understanding that EI has a Japan-centric perspective, and views EAI as a dependent "child" company (*kogaisha*) that should do EI's bidding. With respect to product development, this meant that EI analyzes US market data through a lens best suited for reading the Japanese market. In contrast, EAI culture values the development of new products aligned with US market trends and, moreover, assumes EAI is an equal partner with EI (Yagi, 2007).

A second and more critical aspect of the structural context for our present narrative results from Japan–US asymmetry in concepts of work, particularly cultural assumptions about product development.

Shozo, for example, talked about time frame differences. When he worked at the EI factory in Japan, developing a new product typically took two to three years. In contrast, he said, speed was the most important criterion to win a new product development project in the United States. A prototype was expected within half a year. He elaborates on this point:Well, it may depend on the application of the product, but the speed is so fast [in the United States], to the extent that it is unthinkable in Japan. For example, a project that usually takes two to three years to complete should be done in half a year in the United States. … Therefore, you may feel at a loss – what are we doing? – kind of feeling, if you cannot keep up with the speed of development <laughs>. You would say, "We've finished developing a sample at last." And already half a year has passed to make this sample. Then, you would learn that the project itself has disappeared and the next request for a new project comes to you.

Two factors slowed product development in Japan. One was the goal of producing a highly perfected prototype. The other was that, to achieve the desired level of perfection, the engineers needed much detailed information from the customer. Shozo explained that suppliers and customers work together more closely in Japan than in the United States. Japanese customers are more "kind" and "cooperative" than US customers in providing information about the prototype stage of development. US customers typically ask suppliers to sign a nondisclosure agreement, but, even so, the amount of information the supplier can obtain from the potential customer is limited. In exchange for the abundance of disclosed information, Japanese customers demand quality.

Hidé contends that the biggest cultural difference between the United States and Japan regarding product development is the extent to which failure is acceptable. In his view, trial and error is the norm in the United States, "so it is okay that three successful projects are attained out of 10 trials." In contrast, in Japan, "failure is not tolerated; failure is not allowed in product development." The company may engage in only a small number of projects, and a nearly 100% success rate is expected.

Negotiating cultural boundaries and cultural identity

Both Hidé and Shozo adopt an approach to the pipe role that plays down or ameliorates differences between endpoints. It is a harmonizing approach in which the pipe-role enactor absorbs most of the discomfort of cultural asymmetries. Hidé, for instance, tells a story about how he uses his Japan–US bicultural knowledge to adjust differences in communication styles when potential US customers contact EI engineers by e-mail with inquiries about a technological problem. Responses from Japan, normally sent to Hidé, exhibit what he described as a "typically Japanese style of writing". Messages start out with peripheral information surrounding the problem, eventually getting to the main issue. In this case, Hidé does not pass the original Japanese e-mail on to the customer, nor does he ask EI engineers to rewrite the message or try to educate them as to the American style. Instead Hidé himself rewrites the communication so it conforms to American cultural expectations of linear, logical, argument-building communication (Mizutani, 1981; Yamada, 1992).

Cultural differences between Japan and US endpoints with regard to product development pose a more difficult challenge. Because the customer is American, Hidé and Shozo actually seek to change the EI engineers' behavior to expedite production of a new product prototype. As Shozo explains:So, there are both merits and demerits [in the Japanese style and the US style]. In the case of the United States, indeed, customers do not disclose very much information to us. Besides, the speed of development is very fast. However, we need them [the Japanese engineers] to respond to the US situation. Our task is to bring what the customer wants, when they need it. So it is a really difficult job to make the factory people [in Japan] understand it [the difference between Japan and the United States] and to get them to expedite project development. It takes an awful lot of time to do this.

Nevertheless, neither Hidé nor Shozo confronts the Japanese engineers directly, demanding that they submit to the US cultural logic. Such direct confrontation would violate normative patterns of social interaction in Japanese societal and work cultures (Lebra, 1976). We find, however, noteworthy differences in the way they describe how they perform *chosei* or *chosetsu* to speed prototype production. Hidé emphasizes his efforts to negotiate alignment in the goals of the two endpoints:I've been thinking how different ways of explanation are possible for the Japanese people when I explain a particular matter. I'm thinking of the ways of explanation that can demonstrate to the Japanese people that there is an incentive. What information do the Japanese want to know most? What are the things that the Japanese people can put up with? Put another way, what I am doing is *chosetsu* [adjustment].

In contrast to Hide's emphasis on practicalities, Shozo highlights cultural differences and his own crucial Japanese-ness:Because almost all the factories are the Japanese factories – I mean factories run by Japanese people … whether they are located in Taiwan or the Philippines, the managing engineers are Japanese. In that sense, the American way of doing business is totally different. It is advantageous for me to be Japanese because I can *chosei* [or adjust] the difference between the United States and Japan.

We infer from their discourse that, as Hidé and Shozo call on the knowledge associated with various cultures in which they sense membership, their sense of identity with the respective cultures is triggered. It is important to them that internalized schemas from Japanese and American work cultures enable them to be successful conduits of information and successful problem-solvers between Japanese engineers and non-Japanese counterparts. Success in the pipe role hinges, in addition, on technical knowledge associated with an engineering professional culture they have internalized through years of education and work experience, a culture that itself values problem-solving. Their successful use of culturally appropriate behavior brings positive external evaluation or feedback regarding their pipe performance from both Japanese and American sides of the cultural and organizational divides. Success also results in a positive internal evaluation of their respective pipe role performances. Each man experiences positive stances toward salient cultural identities, derived from the fact that the associated cultural schemas have been instrumental in successful pipe role performance.

Cross-comparison of Japanese member narratives led to formulation of constructs we call "anchoring" and "peripheral" cultural identities (Yagi, 2007). An anchoring cultural identity intimately relates to a person's core idea of "who I am" or "who I want to be". An individual has only one anchoring cultural identity, and it is consistently salient and positively valued within and across social acts. The anchoring cultural identity stabilizes and gives direction to a person's pipe role performance. Various peripheral cultural identities, less closely tied to a person's ideal self-concept, might prove efficacious within a given social act, but the boundary spanner may take either a positive or negative stance toward it, depending on circumstances.

Based on Shozo's discourse, we consider Japanese cultural identity to be his anchoring cultural identity. He openly acknowledges his Japanese-ness, and attributes to it his ability to be a good pipe. As he declares in one of the above excerpts, "It is advantageous for me to be Japanese because I can *chosei*." It is noteworthy too that Shozo mentions Japan–US cultural differences much more frequently than does Hidé, and describes in particular detail the expectations of Japanese work culture.

Hidé, in contrast, believes that essential Japanese-ness is not necessary for successfully connecting Japan–US endpoints, nor is Japanese language proficiency. The key to him is a general ability to discern and negotiate cultural differences. He refers to Claude, a fellow MPD engineer whose culture of origin is Polish, to make his point.For example, at [EAI], well, this is a Japanese company, and there are Americans who are the locals, and also there are people of Japanese descent … However, there are people who are connected to neither side. That is to say, people who came from the other countries. For example, there is Claude, who does a job similar to mine, as an engineer. He is Polish.I think that the important things are – the language is one thing, but the other is an ability to coordinate. He [Claude] does not understand the Japanese

language. But he … Put it this way, Japanese people do not understand if you approach them in the US style. And [American people] do not understand what Japanese people say. However, because he came from outside, he can do it skillfully, by applying [what he found as a difference] between him and the Americans to that of him and the Japanese. … Of course being able to speak in Japanese is a benefit, but I don't think it is an absolute necessity.

For Hidé, the cultural identity that anchors his pipe role performance is that of professional engineer. Japanese and other cultural identities are peripheral. He finds common ground among engineers from different countries. With universal engineering knowledge, engineers are able to work together effectively despite language differences and differences in national cultures. As Hidé puts it:Rather, what is important is … an ability to coordinate, and the knowledge about the technology of the product, and the needs of the customer – the core requirements that the customer has regarding the products.

As reflected in their discourse, the boundary work of Hidé and Shozo was not fraught with heavily emotion-laden cultural identity conflicts. The next case we describe does involve such conflict and, additionally, illustrates the strong influence that structural contexts in which organization politics permeate key issues can have on boundary work.

Haruyo Burns

Haruyo Burns holds the formal position of Manager of Marketing Services in EAI's New Technology Division (NTD), a division tasked with developing products that reflect cutting edge technologies. Of the 14 people in the division, Shigeru Kimura is the only other Japanese, and in addition to market support for NTD technology, he does a variety of other jobs for EAI, outside the NTD.

When the principal investigator first interviewed Haruyo and read the position title on her business card, Haruyo chuckled and said, "I think you might find the title very mysterious. … You should think that title includes everything – marketing plus customer service plus sales, and I do translation and interpretation as well". She used the English term "wearing many hats" to describe her job. This, in fact, is a folk term of the NTD culture, whose members take pride in accepting multiple responsibilities (Yagi, 2007). In her early forties at the time of fieldwork, Haruyo was married to an American whom she met in Japan, and had a teenage daughter. She had lived in the United States for four years, the last three of which she had worked at EAI. In Japan, Haruyo worked as a credentialed professional interpreter employed by several US subsidiaries. Thus she acquired knowledge of US work culture from her American supervisors, and knowledge of Japanese work culture from Japanese customers. She said with regard to EAI, "This is the first time for me to work inside a Japanese company. It is much tougher than working with a Japanese company just as a customer".

Structural context

The structural context shaping Haruyo's performance of the pipe role reflected issues stemming from myriad instances of Japan–US cultural differences in concepts of work. Our narrative of Haruyo's boundary spanning emphasizes how these kinds of cultural differences often intersected with another issue in the structural context: the viability of the NTD's future. This issue of the

NTD's continuance threaded through the sagas of intra- and inter-organizational politics, providing the basis for the emergence of cultural schemas in a number of organization cultures. A passage from an interview with an American in the NTD illustrates its prominence.*Ethnographer*: The fiscal year ends this month?*Jared*: End of this month. I don't know whether we'll get another year or not … whether we'll have a job after the first of April.*Ethnographer*: Are you serious?*Jared*: Serious. We've done it every year.

The issue of the NTD's future played out in the context of three dyadic relationships, each perceived as asymmetrical by NTD members. One dyad involved the NTD and the MPD. The other involved the NTD and several counterpart divisions in EI. The cultures of each organizational unit reflected its distinct understanding of the tension. With regard to the NTD–MPD relationship, NTD members believed their projects would secure the future of EAI. By developing new technologies and products that could replace the nearly obsolete products distributed by the MPD, the division could boost EAI's slumping revenues. The MPD, in contrast, viewed the NTD as a money-losing venture; profits earned by the MPD were drained by projects that had yet to contribute to EAI's bottom line. With regard to the relationship between the NTD and its EI counterparts, the NTD considered its technology development efforts equal to or even superior to those of the EI departments. The EI counterparts, according to the NTD members, considered the NTD an annoying and unwanted competitor that had invaded what should be their exclusive area of research and development.

The third dyadic relationship involved the NTD and EAI. The president, Takashi, established the NTD without the support of or permission from the EI headquarters, and he has remained a strong advocate of the division. Yet it is a shared understanding among the NTD members that "we have not had a legitimate position in EAI," largely because product development has been slow. An understanding of the NTD's precarious status is widely shared among EAI members, as is the understanding that EI questions the need for the division.

Negotiating cultural boundaries and cultural identity

 Haruyo, in her pipe role, also endeavored to harmonize cultural differences. We consider first a kind of social act that frequently engaged Haruyo's boundary-spanning skills – being a communication conduit and cultural interpreter between Takashi and non-Japanese members of the NTD.

According to Haruyo, much of the time she works like a "correspondence clerk". Messages from Takashi come to her and then go out from her to other members of the NTD, mostly in person. She is the hub and they are the spokes of a wheel. This is especially true for issues that concern "Japan", invariably infused with political meaning. Other division members, in reverse, communicate business matters to Takashi through Haruyo. She describes her work as follows.Mmm … translation is – I try to escape from translation jobs as much as possible, because I simply don't have time to do that. Rather, it is the aspect of politics that takes much time. Communication does not take much time if it occurs among the persons who are in charge of things at the level of everyday business. But like yesterday, if an issue comes up that involves everyone, like the executives in Japan [i.e., EI], Sakamoto-san [i.e., Takashi] and my boss [i.e., Ryan], then, I am like a correspondence clerk who relays messages between them…Suppose Sakamoto-san is on the road and he cannot catch Ryan, then he calls me up. Well, usually he

calls me up anyway because that is much faster [than communicating directly with Ryan]. So Sakamoto-san comes to me and gives me a message. Then, disseminating his message to everyone becomes my role. He says to me, "Forward this message to Kimura-kun [i.e., Shigeru] and so-and-so." So I give the message to Ryan and Kimura-san. And then I give their return message [to Sakamoto-san].

On the surface the rationale for Haruyo being a conduit between Takashi and other NTD members lies simply in the language gap. Haruyo and other members of the NTD sense that Takashi is not comfortable discussing things in English, even written English. Ryan, the Australian director of the NTD, shows cognizance of how important understanding the nuances of a language is for effective communication. He explains why he utilizes Haruyo as an intermediary between himself and Takashi:… the more informed I can keep Haruyo, it makes it easier for them [the Japanese] to talk to her. And then he [Takashi] gets a big picture very quickly, because she's stuck in it every day. She's immersed in it. And she's able to in a native language paint it much bigger – a picture full of colors and with depth to it, with all the little nuances that I would find it hard to present in English to a native Japanese speaker.

But both Ryan and Haruyo know that being able to word-paint a colorful, in-depth picture of a situation is only part of language fluency. As mentioned already, underlying spoken or written language are cultural assumptions about appropriate discourse strategies and styles. In addition, the specific language itself can acquire powerful symbolic meaning (Lauring, 2008). From Takashi's perspective, utilizing Haruyo as an information conduit helps him maintain his status. We gain this insight from Haruyo's words:For one thing, I understand that Sakamoto-san does not want to type messages in English very much. That's why … it is all about language. … You cannot say as much as you want [in English]. … *For example, you could not argue with Ryan on an equal basis* [emphasis ours]. In such a situation, I guess it must be comfortable for Sakamoto-san to just say to me, "I think this should be like this. Give this message to him."

Ryan attests to the power of the Japanese language when communicating with Takashi. He tells the following story: "Someone told me that Japanese executives here (EAI) will hear something said in Japanese fifty times louder than they'll hear the same things said in English". Given the precarious political terrain, Haruyo's pipe role was critical to maintaining Takashi's support for the NTD.

Haruyo's role in spanning cultural and organizational boundaries between Takashi and her NTD co-workers triggers her identification with both Japanese and US cultural identities. She feels positively toward each identity for the usefulness of its component cultural knowledge as a resource for accomplishing work. Her ability to leverage her knowledge of Japanese and US national and work cultures, moreover, earns approval and respect. Her identification with US work culture is especially strong as she has achieved a valued position of responsibility within the NTD by operating daily according to its norms. She speaks with enthusiasm about her job responsibilities.

Haruyo's discourse concerning the NTD, however, is most notable. It reflects her absolute loyalty to the division, and her feeling of closeness to its members. The NTD cultural identity is her anchor. NTD culture in fact encompassed an understanding that the strategic use of Haruyo is

the best way to negotiate the political minefield, in relations with Takashi as well as in relations with EI members from Japan, whose cooperation was essential to the NTD. The description of one social act in which Haruyo negotiates NTD, EAI, and EI boundaries follows. Haruyo's ability to interpret and respond appropriately to the culturally based expectations EI managers have regarding her as a female employee is highlighted.

Takashi invariably called on Haruyo to be an interpreter during monthly or bimonthly teleconferences with EI. Conference agendas included reports on the NTD's progress, and discussion of technology-related problems. Normally, Takashi, Ryan, and sometimes the NTD marketing support specialist, Shigeru, also attended from the EAI side. Participants from the EI side included general managers and engineers from the departments that developed and produced technologies similar to those being developed by the NTD.

Before the focal teleconference began, Shigeru approached Haruyo and told her she should be present, but would not need to assume her usual job of interpreter. The conference would be held in English, because the specific participants from EI spoke the language fairly well. Then the conference began. As soon as the EI contingent appeared on the screen, one of them declared in Japanese, "*Kyou no kaigi wa, nihon-go de okonaimasu*. (Today's conference will proceed in Japanese.)". Haruyo described Shigeru's surprise when he heard this. She said, however, that it did not surprise her at all. The EI manager's declaration signaled to Haruyo two taken-for-granted expectations. One, the EI contingent expected Haruyo to serve as interpreter. Being female, she was gender-suited to a support role. The other expectation concerned the manner in which she should carry out this task. They expected her to adopt a "low profile". That is, she should not participate as a full member of the EAI team – she should not voice her opinions, but should restrict herself to simply interpreting.

Haruyo's performance as an interpreter harmonizes or plays down the differences between EI and EAI in two respects. The first concerns language differences. Because Haruyo bridges the gap, EI members can express their opinions in their native tongue and feel no disadvantage. Second, Haruyo's low-profile performance enables the EI members to behave as they normally would in a Japanese workplace. They avoid the discomfort of an American workplace environment, in which a woman may be an active participant in business-related discussions. Having to adjust to an unfamiliar situation might put them off their game.

In this social act, Haruyo acknowledges, as well as claims, Japanese cultural identity. When she deciphered the implicit expectations of the EI managers, she consciously utilized her knowledge of Japanese work culture, thus becoming aware of her own Japanese-ness. Haruyo communicated her Japanese cultural identity to the EI managers through her unobtrusive behavior. They, in turn, communicated their recognition of her Japanese-ness, and approbation of her performance, through their behavior of essentially ignoring her.

Her telling of the story reflects both negative and positive stances toward her Japanese cultural identity. A negative stance exists because the EI participants' negation of her responsible managerial position within the NTD violates her identity with US work culture. In addition, her self-effacing role receives no recognition of her lingering but fading cultural identity as a credentialed professional interpreter. Nonetheless, because of the usefulness of her Japanese

cultural knowledge, Haruyo at the same time feels positively toward her Japanese cultural identity.

Strategic considerations linked to the issue of the NTD's survival motivated Haruyo to enact the pipe role as she did. She explained that she could accept the low-profile interpreter task because she wanted to be seen as "neutral" by counterparts in EI. By neutral she meant not to be seen as "too close to Ryan", her immediate boss. This was critical. If they associated her too closely with Ryan, they would become reluctant to disclose information to her in future one-on-one interactions she had with them as a pipe between EAI and EI. Behaving in a more American way during this social act would weaken the feelings of trust Haruyo had fostered with EI members through ongoing conformity to Japanese cultural norms. Her pipe role enactment consistently, from social act to social act, was stabilized and directed by the group in which she found her primary, anchoring cultural identity, the NTD.
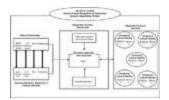
Having provided a sample of the data and mode of analysis typical of ethnographic research, we now summarize the cultural identity negotiation framework that emerged as a product of ethnographically driven theory development.

A Model of the Cultural Identity Negotiation Framework

Our analysis reveals the Japanese in EAI to be active, purposeful individuals whose lived experience at work cannot be separated from who they are as cultural beings. The social construct of cultural identity is fundamental for understanding why and how a Japanese member of the organization enacts the boundary-spanning role of pipe. It is significant that, within an EAI Japanese subculture, "pipe" emerged as a folk term representing a key domain of cultural knowledge. The role of pipe fits comfortably within the frames of both Japanese national and work cultures. Japanese national culture, with its strong moral force to conform to group expectations, provides a source of motivation for individual Japanese to take on the role. Consonant with national cultural norms, the nation-specific subset of Japanese work culture includes networks of schemas that influence the way persons perform the pipe role (Lebra, 1976). In addition, the Japanese nation-specific subset of work culture includes networks of schemas that influence the way individuals perform the pipe role. This is evidenced in Japanese members' willingness to accept the diffuse and diverse responsibilities of the *nandemo-ya* (jack-of-all-trades), and in their efforts to harmonize differences (*chosei* or *chosetsu*) (Kleinberg, 1989; Lebra, 1976). Since much of a pipe's boundary work involves interaction with other Japanese, they are well positioned to succeed in the role.

Figure 2 illustrates the process by which pipe role enactment takes shape, summarizing the points we made in our interpretation of Japanese members' reconstructions of their boundary work.

Figure 2.

Cultural identity negotiation framework.

When working across cultural, organizational, and national boundaries, individuals are confronted with specific issues they somehow must negotiate if work is to be accomplished. We have borrowed from Strauss's (1978) concept of negotiated order to locate these issues in a broad structural context of negotiation. The various issues prompt recognition of asymmetry between negotiating parties. In our study, asymmetry may stem from Japan–US cultural differences in concepts of work, and/or from political differences that are reflected in organizational cultures. In any event, the Japanese member attempts to reconcile asymmetries by strategically utilizing relevant cultural schemas to guide his or her behavior in interactions with persons on opposite sides of a boundary.

Whereas Brannen and Salk (2000) illuminate the process by which issue-shaped negotiation generates new understandings constituting emergent organizational cultures, our model highlights the implications of such negotiation for individual cultural identity. The aggregate of interpersonal interactions that a boundary spanner engages in when solving a particular problem, termed a "social act", constitutes the immediate negotiation context (Strauss, 1978). The individual boundary spanner has a repertoire of cultural identities associated with the sense that the shared knowledge of the respective cultures is part of his or her self-concept. When a particular cultural frame is activated in the course of a social act, the cultural identity associated with the knowledge underlying the frame becomes salient to the boundary spanner.

In the model, the various persons who become involved in the Japanese person's pipe role enactment are called "role set members" (Thomas, 1994: 147). Each, from his or her particular cultural perspective, evaluates the pipe's role performance. To the extent that these "external" evaluations are expressed in outward behavior, they cue the boundary spanner as to how effective his or her efforts to communicate in a culturally appropriate way are in negotiating cross-cultural cooperation or agreement. Thus the responses of role set members help the pipe adjust his or her behavior in order to span boundaries more effectively. Responses from role set members, positive or negative, also affect how the pipe internally evaluates the particular cultural identities triggered in the course of a social act.

The "internal" evaluation of boundary role performance and stance toward a cultural identity is mediated, however, by the boundary spanner's "anchoring" cultural identity, which is closest to the core of the individual's ideal concept of self. The anchoring cultural identity always is salient, and the boundary spanner always has a positive stance toward it. But, as illustrated in the narrative about Haruyo, the stance toward cultural identities "peripheral" to the anchoring cultural identity may be positive or negative, or both at once. One's stance toward peripheral cultural identities does not depend solely on the utility of the underlying cultural knowledge in resolving boundary issues. Stance also reflects the degree to which behaving in the culturally

appropriate way in a particular interaction is compatible with the boundary spanner's other cultural identities – peripheral ones and, most especially, the anchoring cultural identity. The anchoring cultural identity exerts a strong motivating influence on the boundary spanner's cultural frame-switching choices and behavior. Haruyo, for instance, protected her anchoring NTD cultural identity by utilizing her knowledge of Japanese national and work cultures and other EAI organization cultures to help the NTD's standing in both EAI and EI.

It is important to emphasize the fluidity of the cultural identity negotiation process. The boundary spanner switches cultural frames, experiences a differing mix of cultural identities, and experiences varying stances toward any one cultural identity depending on the structural and immediate negotiation contexts. Both boundary-spanning behavior and the meaning enactment of the role has for an individual are functions of the person's particular background and experience.

DISCUSSION

Contributions of the Research

Our analysis contributes toward re-visioning the prevailing conceptualization of boundary spanning as a role tied to key formal positions, enacted through established organizational routines, and concerned primarily with external linkages (Aldrich & Herker, 1977). The analysis indicates that the boundary-spanning role in global organizations is performed by numerous organizational actors in a variety of positions and status levels, and that their performance may involve activities not normally associated with their formal position. It is a person's knowledge, including their knowledge of multiple cultures, and their ability to flexibly utilize that knowledge, that thrusts many into the role. Boundary spanning is improvised action, often engaged in not at a superior's request but because an individual does what is necessary to get his or her job done. The persons with whom the boundary spanner interacts when doing boundary work may be varied and changing.

A related contribution is the insight our analysis gives into the complexity of the notion of "boundary". In particular, it illustrates manifold interrelationships among boundaries defined by culture, by nation, by organization structures, or some combination thereof. For example, Haruyo's boundary spanning often crossed structural units, internal and external to EAI. This boundary work frequently involved harmonizing differences in nation-based cultural concepts of work so that immediate work objectives could be accomplished. But her harmonizing efforts often were aimed simultaneously at furthering long-range goals of her work unit, the NTD, and/or EAI, and implicated organizational cultural boundaries associated with the NTD, EAI, and EI.

Most importantly, interpretive ethnographic research has enabled us to understand boundary spanning as a dynamic and nuanced process. It shows how cross-cultural knowledge of how,

who, what, and why – essential for effective boundary spanning (Beechler et al., 2004) – is used by individuals as a key resource, consciously and unconsciously leveraged, in pursuit of task accomplishment. The cultural identity negotiation framework allows us to see boundary spanning as an individual enterprise involving more than achievement of work goals. Through boundary-spanning actions, as through other work actions, individuals give meaning to their lives. The boundary-spanning role implicates that part of an individual's self-concept composed of his or her cultural identities. The notion of negotiated cultural identities offers a new look at the issue of individual motivation and behavior choices.

In addition, our study advances understanding of the boundary work of biculturals. The Japanese organization members whose narratives we highlighted evidenced deeply internalized identification with Japanese and US cultures, as well as with work unit and/or professional cultures. Stories told by them, and by others about them, intimate that they responded to Japanese and US cultural cues, appropriately utilizing either one or the other cultural frame in their cross-cultural interactions (Brannen et al., 2009). They clearly exhibited cultural metacognition (Brannen & Thomas, 2010; Thomas et al., 2008). Given research on the bicultural integration construct, their effective boundary-role performance predicts a high BII score (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005). Nevertheless, our study shows that cultural identities implicated in boundary work frequently were perceived as incompatible, to the point that a person's Japanese cultural identity, in particular, might be viewed negatively. Haruyo, a respected manager in her US-based organization, did not want to be "Japanese" in the sense of accepting traditional Japanese gender role distinctions. But she performed a traditional gender role when necessary, motivated by her anchoring NTD cultural identity. The cultural identity negotiation framework, with its constituent constructs, is one critical step forward in exploring what it means to be bicultural, by emphasizing the importance of context on shifting stances toward a cultural identity and the existence of an anchoring cultural identity, within a multiple cultures perspective.

While our research contributes specifically toward theory on boundary spanning, a more encompassing theory domain is culture theory as it relates to organizations. Our fine-grained, person-centered account of boundary work shows "how real individuals use, modify, and transmit cultural ideas as they confront the everyday challenge of life" (Mathews & Moore, 2001: 2). The concept of culture we utilize rests on the notion of cultural schemas as networks of strongly connected cognitive elements and on the idea of situated cognition. This enables us to visualize how culture(s) help frame interpersonal interaction in global organizations. The cultural identity negotiation framework contributes toward a "multilevel" theory of intercultural interaction (Chao, 2000) that seeks to understand processes by which intercultural interactions at the individual level are shaped by multiple cultural phenomena at other levels.

Implications for Research

A major objective has been to illustrate the interpretive ethnographic research methodology and demonstrate its value for the study of international management. Many organizations today, especially global ones, exhibit a complexity that Tsoukas and Hatch (2001) characterize by dynamic processes, unpredictability, novelty, and emergent forms. They cite Bruner's (1987) distinction between "logico-scientific" and "narrative" modes of thinking. Prefaced on a search

for linear cause and effect and universal truths, with the goal of producing predictive theory, the former has dominated organization and management studies. Tsoukas and Hatch argue that to comprehend organizational complexity, a "narrative" mode of thinking is needed, prefaced on the search for "likely particular connections between two events", with the goal of producing "a guide for interpretation" (2001: 982; see also Chase, 2005).

As a response to strong student interest, programs in business and management increasingly offer courses on qualitative – including ethnographic – research methods, and organizational ethnography texts are beginning to appear. This is mirrored by the place ethnographers are finding as employees in or consultants to corporations (Kostera, 2007; Neyland, 2008; Ybema et al., 2009). Organizational ethnography is recognized as a way to fill what Fineman, Sims, and Gabriel describe as "a gulf between the lived experience of organizing and being organized by others, with its uncertainty and confusion, and the tidy, rather sanitized, texts on organizational behavior" (2005: ix, quoted in Ybema et al., 2009: 1). An interpretive ethnographic methodology is well established in the study of culture in organizations (Alvesson, 1993, 1995; Czarniawska, 1997; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992; Fine, 1996; Kunda, 1992). And we find growing permeability between the boundaries of organization studies and international management as more scholars use an interpretive ethnographic lens to examine emergent cultures (Brannen, 1994; Brannen & Salk, 2000; Clausen, 2007; Kleinberg, 1994a, 1994b, 1998) and the intersection of culture and identity work (Ailon-Souday & Kunda, 2003; Barrett & Oborn, 2010; Essers & Benschop, 2009; Lauring, 2008; Watson, 2009; Ybema & Byun, 2009).

In today's hypercompetitive, economically integrated world, where a refined comprehension of boundary spanners and their boundary work is essential, there is a clear need for fresh questions and the development of theory that leverages insights from both international management and organization studies. Ethnographic methodology is similar to the methodology of grounded theory, which, if followed rigorously, is accepted in organization studies as a way to generate theory about little-understood phenomena (Gephart, 2004). As Charmaz (2005: 508) describes grounded theory methodology, data are collected and analyzed simultaneously, "each informing and focusing the other throughout the research process". Researchers are encouraged "to remain close to their studied worlds and to develop an integrated set of theoretical concepts from their empirical materials that not only synthesize and interpret them but also show processual relationships" (ibid.). Inductive, middle-range theories evolve through successive levels of data analysis and conceptual development. Ethnography adds the emphasis on cultural processes.

Considering our interpretive ethnographic analysis of boundary work in light of other research on biculturals, clearly much more needs to be learned about how individuals experience bicultural identity integration, and how cultural identity relates to boundary-spanning behavior and effectiveness. We are especially interested in the comparative boundary-spanning behavior and effectiveness of individuals working in binational contexts who:

1. are bicultural;
2. have extensive cross-cultural knowledge, but lack a sense of identification with the "other" culture(s); or
3. lack specific cross-cultural knowledge.

Beyond this, the linked issues of cultural identity and boundary work need to be examined in other kinds of culturally complex settings increasingly characteristic of global organizations (Sackmann & Phillips, 2004).

Research should be approached holistically, taking into account a variety of organizational and personal factors. These individual-level issues need to be extrapolated to intra- and inter-team contexts (Barrett & Oborn, 2010; Hong, 2010), and the impact of processes such as "culturizing" (Barrett & Oborn, 2010) investigated. Interpretive ethnographic research may be utilized in between-methods triangulation (Kostera, 2007; Ybema et al., 2009), as demonstrated in Brannen and Peterson's (2009) study of cross-cultural work alienation that combines the ethnographic methods of participant observation and in-depth interviews with questionnaire surveys. While we recognize the fruitfulness of between-methods triangulation, an interpretive ethnographic account nevertheless has powerful standalone value.

Practical Implications

It is crucial for global organizations to employ persons who can successfully transfer information, knowledge, practices, and technologies across organizational, national, and cultural boundaries. Our research illuminates the potential boundary role of persons working in a binational organization setting who are bicultural with regard to national cultural knowledge and identity. They leveraged their knowledge of Japanese and English languages and of nation-based societal and work cultures to solve problems rising out of cultural differences located in concepts of work or intra- and inter-organizational politics.

Biculturals, in general, have been identified as a new demographic category, evolving over several decades of rapid globalization and consequent movement of people across national boundaries. Nonetheless, organizations do not yet systematically incorporate the concepts of bicultural and biculturalism into their selection, training, and career planning processes. Global organizations should be cognizant not only of the import of persons having specific cross-cultural knowledge, but also of the metacognitive skills that biculturals bring to an organization – their ability to rapidly and accurately sense, interpret, and respond to situations complicated by cross-cultural differences (Brannen & Thomas, 2010; Hong, 2010). If biculturals are actively recruited and strategically deployed, there should be a clear reward system for utilization of their cognitive and intercultural skills in boundary-spanning roles.

Other significant practical implications of our research stem from the holistic perspective it provides on interpersonal interaction at boundary interfaces. Organizations need to appreciate the importance and pervasiveness of informal boundary activity, performed as often by non-managers as by managers. They need to comprehend boundary spanning as a fluid process, involving an individual in shifting networks of people across multiple organizational and cultural boundaries. It is especially important to ensure that organizational members have a nuanced conceptualization of culture, and comprehend how a cultural boundary might manifest itself. This means understanding the concept of cross-cultural frame switching, and also understanding the psychological challenges this adaptive behavior poses for an individual (Molinsky, 2007). Having in mind a conceptual framework that encompasses the notion of multiple cultural identities, and how cultural identity is implicated in the boundary-spanning process, opens a path

to even greater self-awareness that would aid boundary-role performance. Cultural training of this sort can awaken a person's cognizance of heretofore unrecognized cultural resources, and applies to persons who are monocultural with respect to national culture, as well as to those who are bicultural.

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