



**UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG
SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, ECONOMICS AND LAW**

**Inter-organizational collaboration projects
between public organizations:
a site of coexisting simultaneously performed
boundary work**

Johanna Gidenstam & Ellen Petersson
SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, ECONOMICS AND LAW

GM0860 Master Degree Project in Management, Master of Science in Management
Supervisor: Sara Brorström
Master Degree Project
Graduate School

Inter-organizational collaboration projects between public organizations: a site of coexisting simultaneously performed boundary work

Johanna Gidenstam

*Master of Science in Management, Graduate School,
School of Business Economic and Law at Gothenburg University*

Ellen Petersson

*Master of Science in Management, Graduate School,
School of Business Economic and Law at Gothenburg University*

Abstract

This study investigates how public organizations engage in inter-organizational collaboration projects, what is done in practice within such collaborations and how this affects boundaries and boundary work performed between the organizations. By conducting a case study of a Swedish infrastructural project, the West Link, we explore what challenges a collaboration between three public organizations might be facing and how these challenges affect boundary work. We find that some of the main difficulties lies in coping with organizational differences, not meeting on equal terms in regards to decision mandate and political governance, how to organize, frame and define the collaboration and what form of entrepreneurial contracts are used. These challenges have affected boundary work, leading to multiple, coexisting and sometimes conflicting forms of boundary work being performed simultaneously. By this study, we contribute to a wider understanding of inter-organizational collaboration projects by illustrating the importance and influence of partner organizations' individual characteristics, roles and objectives on cross boundary collaborative work. We also contribute to broadening the field of boundary work research by illustrating the simultaneous coexistence of multiple forms of boundary work, that emerge from both deliberate and reflexive actions of individuals within the collaboration.

Key words

Collaboration, Collaboration project, Inter-organizational collaboration, Public sector, Boundaries, Boundary work, The West Link, Gothenburg

Introduction

Changing business environments, characterized by competitiveness and pressure for sustainable development, over the past few decades have forced organizations to find new ways to work (Xue, Shen, & Ren, 2010; Sun, Mollaoglu, Miller & Manata, 2015; Kent & Becerik-

Gerber, 2010; Chiocchio, Forgues, Paradis, & Iordanova, 2011). One way in which organizations have dealt with this is by shifting from traditional ways of organizing; instead of gathering all various kinds of expertise necessary under one roof, organizations have reached out to other parties that possess the required knowledge (Kellogg, Orlikowski, & Yates, 2006; Xue et al., 2010; Sun et al., 2015; Kent & Becerik-Gerber, 2011; Chiocchio et al., 2011). This entails that many industries have become multidisciplinary contexts where performance is dependent on effective coordination (Okhuysen & Bechky, 2009; Faraj & Xiao, 2006; Pine & Mazmanian, 2017) and collaboration of multiple actors' different contributions and interdependent tasks (Bygballe, Swärd & Vaagaasar, 2016; Chiocchio et al., 2011; Xue et al., 2010; Sun et al., 2015; Kent & Becerik-Gerber, 2010; Sun & Zhang, 2011). This requires organizations to establish efficient inter-organizational collaborations and practice collaborative work (Xue et al., 2010), something which is critical in order to find solutions to difficult and complex problems, but also to reduce knowledge fragmentation (Comeau-Vallée & Langley, 2019). The incentives to collaborate are thus often based on a need to combine and share resources, in order to achieve a specific assignment that none of the collaborating partners could do on their own (Löfstöm, 2010; Huxham, 1993), as well as sharing potential risks (Maurer, 2010, Huxham, 2000).

Another recent development is that organizations in different sectors have become increasingly 'projectified' (Pauget & Wald, 2013; Canonico & Söderlund, 2010; Jensen, Thuesen & Geraldi, 2016; Bakker, Defillippi, Schwab & Sydow, 2016; Söderlund & Sydow, 2019). As more and more work is conducted through projects, inter-organizational collaborative work often takes the form of so called collaboration projects (Löfström, 2010). Within such projects, the organizations' different structures, financial conditions, competencies, rules and values come together for the intent and purpose of the project (ibid). Thereby, people from different organizations work across multiple organizational boundaries towards a collective project goal. (Löfstöm, 2010; Chiocchio et al., 2011; Pauget & Wald, 2013; Quick & Feldman, 2014)

Collaborative work within projects is thus a way for stakeholders to work together to achieve something in an effective and efficient way (Xue et al., 2010) and a number of researchers have argued for the importance of collaboration among related parties for projects to succeed. (Bygballe et al., 2016; Xue et al., 2010; Sun & Zhang, 2011; Chiocchio et al., 2011; Söderlund & Sydow, 2019; Zhang, Cao & Wang, 2018) Many scholars have also pointed at good communication (e.g. Ramsing, 2009), coordination (Okhuysen & Bechky, 2009; Faraj & Xiao, 2006; Pine & Mazmanian, 2017) and cross-functional collaboration to be of utmost importance for collaboration projects' success (Williams & Parr, 2006; Sun & Zhang, 2011; Zhang et al., 2018; Sosa, Gargiulo & Rowles, 2015; Ramsing, 2009). However, collaborations can also be challenging for the parties involved. The complexity of collaboration projects come with a high risk for conflicts (Lohr, Weinhardt, Graef & Sieber, 2018; Arvidsson, 2009; Huxham, 2000). Differences between collaborating organizations that are brought together, such as organizational structures, cultures, traditions and governance, can create friction (Engwall, 2003; Cicmil, Williams, Thomas & Hodgson, 2006; Bygballe et al., 2016), which in turn can result in creating boundaries between parties (Quick & Feldman, 2014). Boundaries; demarcations that distinguishes one group from another (Comeau-Vallée & Langley, 2019), appear due to the actions of people and, depending on these actions, can both inhibit and enable

collaboration (Quick & Feldman, 2014). Therefore, how collaborating parties handle their differences, and the boundaries they might reveal, is of great importance for a collaboration project (O'Mahony & Bechky, 2008).

From a practical perspective, entering into a collaboration project entails identifying, handling and working with, around and across boundaries, which can be challenging for any organization. However, for public organizations that are traditionally associated with hierarchy, routine and stability, it can be particularly challenging to cope with the discontinuous, innovative and flexible characteristics of a project (Hodgson, Fred, Bailey & Hall, 2019; Jurisch, Ikas, Wolf & Krcmar, 2013) and to modify the organization towards boundaries and structures of a collaboration project. In contrast to private organizations, that generally operate for profit maximization, public organizations are to guard the interests of the public, which in itself is an ambiguous task (Sun & Zhang, 2011; Turner & Zolin, 2012; Giezen, 2012). This ambiguity also expresses itself as public organizations face frequent changes in appointed political governance and political agendas, which results in a high strategic volatility, making it difficult to define clear objectives (Jurisch et al., 2013; Crawford, Costello, Pollack & Bentley, 2003). It is also not unusual that projects initiated by public organizations affects the public society and thus receive a lot of attention, both positive and negative (Sun & Zhang, 2011; Turner & Zolin, 2012; Giezen, 2012). These particular characteristics of public organizations constitutes a complex context for organizations to navigate within when collaborating with others. Collaboration projects between public organizations thus becomes a highly interesting setting to explore.

Söderlund and Sydow (2019:264) state that "...it is critical to highlight new kinds of project collaborative practices and new forms of project contexts.". To study a project involving inter-organizational collaboration between public organizations can thus give insights on how challenges, and practices to handle these, are developed. This is especially important since the use of projects as an organizational form has increased, in both private and public sector, and hence also the need to collaborate with others. (Kellogg et al., 2006; Xue et al., 2010; Jurisch et al., 2013; Sun et al, 2015; Kent & Becerik-Gerber, 201; Chiochio et al., 2011; Söderlund & Sydow, 2019). While inter-organizational collaboration projects have been studied to some degree, there is still a need to look at what different organizations bring in to a project and what people do in practice (Cicmil et al., 2006; Styhre, 2006; Söderlund & Sydow, 2019) within a collaboration. We agree with previous research (e.g. Cicmil et al., 2006; Söderlund & Sydow, 2019) that traditional research on collaborative projects are somewhat lacking in providing practitioners with an accurate picture of the complexities within a project (Pauget & Wald, 2013) and especially in a context of multiple, collaborating organizations between and within public sector.

With this study, we wish to bring attention to what people actually do in practice as they engage in inter-organizational collaboration projects within and between public organizations. A stream of research that highlight how actors engage in boundaries that exists between groups and between organizations is *boundary work*, which has become increasingly important in social sciences and organization studies (Lamont & Molnár, 2002; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010; Bucher, Chreim, Langley, & Reay, 2016; Comeau-Vallée & Langley, 2019). Boundary work as a theoretical concept goes well in hand with studying practices of collaboration projects, as it focuses on the practices people perform in order to, for example,

maintain, create or blur boundaries (Lamont & Molnár, 2002; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010; Bucher et al., 2016; Comeau-Vallée & Langley, 2019). Making use of boundary work as a theoretical lens allows us to study the challenges of inter-organizational collaborations while taking a practice approach to the actions of individuals within the collaboration. Thus, contributing to providing a more accurate picture of what people do within collaboration projects and giving our study a higher relevance for practitioners.

The contribution of this paper is twofold. First, we contribute to a wider understanding of inter-organizational collaboration projects by illustrating the importance and influence of partner organizations' individual characteristics, roles and objectives on cross boundary collaborative work. Secondly, we contribute to broadening the field of boundary work research by illustrating the simultaneous coexistence of multiple forms of boundary work, that emerge from both deliberate and reflexive actions of individuals within the collaboration. This will be done by focusing on the following research questions: *What are the challenges of working across boundaries for different public organizations?* and *How do these challenges affect boundaries between the organizations?*

In order to fulfil the aim of this paper, the report will be structured as follows: we will begin with a short discussion of previous research on inter-organizational collaboration within projects. This will be followed by our theoretical framework where we introduce the concepts and some previous studies on boundaries and boundary work. In the methodology section, we will present the chosen method for our study together with a presentation of our case setting, data analysis and ethical considerations. Our research questions will be discussed in two parts of the paper. In our findings, we will present some of the main challenges of public organizations working across boundaries. This will be followed by our discussion, where the theoretical framework will be used as a lens in order to understand and discuss the second research question. The paper will end with a conclusion of our findings, our main contributions, some managerial implications and potential approaches for future research.

Previous research on inter-organizational collaboration projects

Collaborations are often initiated between parties with a specific purpose and aim in mind and is generally conceptualized as consisting of a number of identified organizations that work together towards a common goal. (Huxham, 2000) However, in practice, the structures constituting a collaboration are very complex. (ibid) In the case of an inter-organizational collaboration project, there is the existence of a temporary organization on the boundaries of multiple permanent organizations (Löfström, 2010; Hodgson et al., 2019) Within the private sector, this may not pose much difficulty as organizations are more prone to engage in project based work even in the permanent organization. In contrast, projects within public sector are generally organized as separate parallel organizations. Projects have their own identity, characteristics and tasks, but are bound to operate in relation to its owner, i.e., the permanent organization. (Löfström, 2010; Brunsson & Sahlin-Andersson, 2000; Johansson, Löfström & Ohlsson, 2007) This coexisting relationship between a separate project organization and a permanent organization can oftentimes become complex and problematic (Löfström, 2010; Sahlin-Andersson & Söderholm, 2002). Permanent organizations are also often more rigid compared to project-based organizations. (Hobday, 2000), viewing time as revolving around the calendar year (Arvidsson, 2009; Lundin & Söderholm, 1995) and defines tasks in terms of

areas of responsibility rather than result and action oriented (Arvidsson, 2009). Evidently, projects within the public sector comprise a difficulty concerning the difference of structures to be jointly functioning.

When joining an inter-organizational collaboration project, individuals from different organizations bring with them different sets of professional and organizational languages, logics, principles, cultures, values and frames of experiences. As these differences are thrown together, the likelihood for misunderstandings, struggles and tensions is high. (Huxham, 2000; O'Mahoney & Bechky, 2008; Löfström, 2010; Arvidsson, 2009) Tensions might also emerge depending on if employees identify themselves with the permanent or the temporary organization (Arvidsson, 2009), and, as the extent of involvement in collaborations also tend to vary between the involved organizations, differing procedures and processes can affect the collaborative work (Huxham, 2000). Altogether, diversities can have major and varied implications on managing collaborations successfully. (Huxham, 2000) It is therefore both important and wise to review and understand each other's assumptions and aims towards a collaboration and identify mutual interests and benefits. This should be done in order to avoid entering collaborative situations with ambiguous and varying expectations about the interorganizational collaboration form. (Huxham, 2000; O'Mahoney & Bechky, 2008)

The structure of these kinds of collaboration projects are often intricate and complex, made up by several layers of committees. (Huxham, 2000) Collaboration projects are also formed and influenced by its surrounding context and status in time. Even if the structures of collaborations may have been thoroughly designed, new structures normally emerge as the collaboration goes through various stages. (ibid) Ultimately, difficult relationships between permanent and temporary organizations, differences between collaborating parties and the complex structures that inter-organizational collaboration projects entail leads to several boundaries that parties need to continuously navigate.

Theoretical Framework

Boundaries

Boundaries exist everywhere in the world, some more apparent than others. There are physical boundaries such as a fence around a property or a counter between a customer and a cashier. Then, there are social, religious and cultural boundaries that might not be as easy to see but clearly separates, for example, one religion from another. Boundaries are all around us and the concept of boundaries has become increasingly important in social sciences and organization studies. (Lamont & Molnár, 2002; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010; Bucher et al., 2016; Comeau-Vallée & Langley, 2019)

Boundaries can be described as “distinction[s] that establish categories of objects, people or activities” (Lamont & Molnár, 2002; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010, p. 191; Bucher et al., 2016:499). They can include anything from physical, to cognitive, to social or symbolic demarcations (Lamont & Molnár, 2002; Comeau-Vallée & Langley, 2019) and are “[...] ambiguous, flexible, historically changing, contextually variable, internally inconsistent and sometimes disputed” (Gieryn, 1983:792). For our paper, we will use a broad and open definition of boundaries that we believe covers all of the above specifications, namely that

boundaries; “consist of any demarcation that distinguishes one group from another” (Comeau-Vallée & Langley, 2019:3).

Though boundaries have been studied across social sciences for many years, there is a tendency among previous research to regard boundaries as tangible, natural consequences of differences (Quick & Feldman, 2014; Comeau-Vallée & Langley, 2019; Langley, Lindberg, Mørk, Bjørn, Nicolini, Raviola & Walter, 2019; Lindberg, Walter, & Raviola, 2017). There has also been a tendency to view boundaries as stable and static which leads to producing simplistic representations of reality (Meier, 2015). However, boundaries do not exist in an essentialist way (Comeau-Vallée & Langley, 2019). They emerge from interactions and are constructed, negotiated, and maintained through the everyday practices of individuals, organizations and institutions (Langley, et al., 2019; Lindberg et al., 2017; Gieryn, 1983). Boundaries are thus multiple and co-existing, possessing the capacity to change in social interactions or over time and may also emerge differently depending on the particular surrounding context (Meier, 2015; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010; Håland, 2012). Therefore, it is desirable to make use of a practice-oriented focus on boundaries, taking into consideration the various ways organizations and individuals engage in boundary work (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010).

Boundary work

The concept of boundary work has its roots in Gieryn’s (1983) study of the demarcation of science from non-science. He used ‘boundary work’ to describe how demarcations between the two was achieved (and maintained) through ongoing rhetoric and discursive strategies. (Gieryn, 1983; Langley et al., 2019; Lindberg et al., 2017) From that point forward, boundary work research has evolved and there are multiple definitions of the concept. Langley et al. (2019:705) define boundary work as “[...] purposeful individual and collective effort to influence the social, symbolic, material, or temporal boundaries; demarcations; and distinctions affecting groups, occupations, and organizations” (705). In more general terms, boundary work can be defined as “any effort aimed at creating, maintaining, blurring or shifting boundaries” (Comeau-Vallée & Langley, 2019:3). What is noticeable from these definitions is that they define boundary work as a purposeful effort, meaning that boundary work is something which is done, and does not simply happen or exist on its own. However, the role of agency, or purposefulness, of boundary work has been varying in previous research (Langley et al., 2019). Some studies show a very high degree of purposefulness where individuals partake in highly deliberate and planned activities to defend or shift boundaries (e.g. Mørk, Hoholm, Maaninen-Olsson & Aanestad, 2012). Others have studied boundary work within everyday work and interactions (Sanders & Harrison, 2008; Ybema, Vroemisse & van Marrewijk, 2012), arguing that boundary work is a mundane performance, carried out without any planned deliberate efforts. Occasionally, people might deliberately engage in activities with the intent of affecting and forming boundaries in some way, often as a response to some form of threat or other external trigger (e.g. Martin, Currie & Finn, 2009). However, even in these cases, the mundane everyday interaction of people will affect boundary work. (Langley et al., 2019) Boundaries are thus enacted through both intentional and reflexive activities. It is however seldom that studies consider both forms, instead they tend to focus on one or the other (ibid).

Boundary work has been studied in a number of different ways. Quick and Feldman (2014) argue that boundaries can be treated either as barriers, enforcing separations between groups, or as junctures that enable connecting and collaboration between groups. Whether boundaries are barriers or junctures are however not a feature of the boundary itself, it is enacted through people's actions, e.g. through boundary work (Quick & Feldman, 2014). Hazgui and Gendron's (2015) study show how a professional audit association created boundaries in the form of barriers, that they actively defended, towards a newly established independent audit oversight organization by, for example, withholding information from them. Farias (2017) show how an alternative community created boundaries towards money by viewing it as a 'dirty' object. When boundaries are viewed as barriers, actors may exercise great efforts to try to control and protect those boundaries. This is evident in Edlinger's (2015) study on Employer Branding Managers' (EBMs) work with creating images of organizations, putting great efforts into protecting and defending those images by using controlling, monitoring, discrediting and intervening tactics.

However, boundaries do not have to be as distinct and separating as the above studies exemplify. Boundaries can also be treated as junctures that enable collaboration (Quick & Feldman, 2014). Apesoa-Varano's (2013) hospital study show how boundaries are flexible and malleable, shifting as working conditions shift. Practitioners' occupational boundaries were found to be negotiated and interpreted in order to make things work at the hospital floor. Caretakers were all guided by an 'ideology of care', making them set aside their differences and find common ground. On a similar note, Meier (2015) demonstrates how healthcare workers created and interpreted their roles on a daily basis, depending on the current surrounding context, through morning meetings. Boundaries were downplayed, by establishing that they needed to collaborate *because* they were different, which created a unity amongst the healthcare workers. Similarly, Ybema et al. (2012) show how organizational actors build and maintain collaboration across social and cultural boundaries by using every day discourse that attempts to ignore, reframe or smooth away differences.

Within the studies of Apesoa-Varano (2013) and Meier (2015), patients could be argued to act as boundary objects, or boundary 'subjects' (Azambuja & Islam, 2019), that help bridge boundaries between groups (O'Mahoney & Bechky, 2008; Allen, 2009). In O'Mahoney and Bechky's (2008) study, boundary objects are put in contrast with the use of boundary organizations. They show how the creation of a boundary organization provides collaborative parties an intermediary organization that reinforces the common interests while still accommodating the individual interests. A boundary organization enables collaboration between parties because it is accountable to both sides. It performs tasks for both sides, using members of both groups, but can still be regarded as its own special entity. Within this boundary organization, parties negotiate their interests and roles to find a way to accommodate the other without damaging their own core values. (ibid)

Three branches of boundary work

Through an extensive literature review, Langley et al. (2019) categorized boundary work research into three branches: *competitive boundary work*, *collaborative boundary work* and *configurational boundary work*. The *competitive boundary work* research refers to how people create (e.g. Farias, 2017; Edlinger, 2015; Greenman, Wright & Marlow, 2011), defend (e.g.

Hazgui and Gendron's, 2015; Martin et al., 2009; Burri, 2008) and contest (e.g. Bucher et al., 2016; Sanders & Harrison, 2008) boundaries in order to distinguish themselves from others, often to achieve some sort of advantage or maintain a dominant position. Competitive boundary work can therefore develop clear separations and demarcations, creating an '*us vs. them*' situation (Langley et al., 2019). While competitive boundary work focusses on how boundaries are maintained and defended, *collaborative boundary work* research focus on the opposite. Here, previous research has focused on the practices of groups, occupations, and organizations working at boundaries. The purpose of this type of boundary work is to develop and sustain patterns of collaboration and coordination where collective goals cannot be achieved by one party alone; "The practices of collaborative boundary work emerge as people work in interoccupational teams, produce services, and construct interorganizational collaboration." (Langley et al., 2019:714). This is done by, for example, negotiating (e.g. Apesoa-Varano, 2013; Kellogg et al., 2006), embodying (e.g. Ellis & Ybema, 2010; Azambuja & Islam, 2019) or downplaying (e.g. Meier, 2015; Ybema et al., 2012; Quick & Feldman, 2014) boundaries to motivate people to get the job done. The third category, *configurational boundary work* (e.g. O'Mahoney & Bechky, 2008; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010), focus on how managers, institutional entrepreneurs, and leaders work from a distance to reshape the boundary landscape of others. These leaders use boundaries to reconfigure patterns of interaction between other parties, often combining both competitive and collaborative boundary work. (Langley et al., 2019)

Previous research has shared a rather dichotomous view of these different forms of boundary work, regarding them as mutually exclusive. This provides a very one-sided picture of boundary work and also does not address any social or contextual factors (Lindberg et al., 2017) that may have an impact on the boundary work being performed. An increasing number of recent studies are however starting to acknowledge the relationship and interconnectedness between the various forms of boundary work (Langley, et al., 2019; Lindberg et al., 2017; Comeau-Vallée & Langley, 2019; Quick & Feldman, 2014; Bucher et al., 2016). For example, Lindberg et al. (2017) illustrate how the establishment of a Hybrid Operating Room required teams to merge, negotiate and integrate different understandings, practices, technologies and materials. Their study shows how boundary work change due to the recursive relationship between practice and boundaries. In their study of 'Climategate', Garud, Gehman & Karunakaran. (2014) examines the multiple forms of boundary work performed in trying to restore credibility and legitimacy of scientists that had been lost due to information leakage. Both Lindberg et al. (2017) and Garud et al. (2014) show the existence of multiple forms of boundary work in a sequential way. However, Comeau-Vallée & Langley (2019) points to the coexistence of opposing forms of boundary work within the same team, stating that competitive and collaborative boundary work may occur simultaneously, something previous research has not discussed to any greater extent. While both Quick and Feldman (2014) and Bucher et al. (2016) present the boundary work practices identified in their studies separately, they acknowledge that these forms often overlapped and were used in conjunction with each other. They do not however, focus any attention on how these coexisting forms might affect or interact with one another. Langley et al, (2019) argue that competitive, collaborative and configurative boundary work are intricately intertwined in practice and that boundary work is almost never wholly competitive or collaborative. Consequently, different forms of boundary work may

occur at the same time in the same context and be practiced by the same people on different boundaries. The authors also argue that there is a need to study boundaries in situ, to consider multiple boundaries at the time and how changes on one boundary might affect another boundary elsewhere. (ibid)

As the aim of this study is to explore and bring attention to the actuality of collaboration projects, we will use the concepts of *competitive*, *collaborative* and *configurational* boundary work as a theoretical lens when analyzing how people respond to challenges facing a collaboration project between public organizations.

Methodology of the study

Chosen Methodology

For this paper, we have conducted a case study of an infrastructure development project involving three collaborating public organizations. We chose to conduct a case study as the aim of our paper is to explore, rather than test hypothesis. We therefore wanted to get close up to the phenomenon and look upon the relationships, practices and associated contextual factors. (Silverman, 2017) Qualitative data is suitable when wanting to analyze the *how* and *why* of a social context and give an insight into the practices of the actors involved (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Silverman, 2017). The benefits of conducting a case study is that it allows us to study a specific phenomenon in a way that is both rich in empirical details and rewarding in itself. (Silverman, 2017). Placing ourselves within the context that is being studied is a good way to develop deeper understandings of different viewpoints and revealed behaviors (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

One obvious limitation with conducting a case study is not being able to make any general claims regarding the phenomenon at large (Silverman, 2017). However, as this is not the aim of the paper, but instead to contribute to the understanding of inter-organizational collaboration projects and the field of boundary work research, a rich, in-depth case study with examples from a specific context will be able to act as a stepping stone for future researchers to depart from.

The case setting

The West Link is part of a multi-billion infrastructure investment package in Sweden, it will constitute an eight kilometers long underground train tunnel, where the largest part will be placed underneath the central areas of Gothenburg city. Discussions regarding implementation of the West Link started around the 00's, the tunnel is supposed to be ready in 2026, whereby the actual construction started in 2018. Under the umbrella of the West Link project lies a number of sub-projects, one of which, the 'Olskroken Planskildhet', will not be included in the scope of this paper as it is not directly part of the tunnel.

The task of realizing the West Link project and constructing the railways was given by the state to the governmentally controlled organization 'the Swedish Transport Administration' (STA). STA has a project organization under the umbrella of STA where the tasks of executing the West Link project is placed. We acknowledge that the project organization is somewhat separated from the rest of STA, and usually referred to as 'the West Link', however, for all intents and purposes, we will refer to the project organization in charge of the West Link as 'STA'. The investment package is financed collectively by the state, the region and the local

community, and all parties wish to partake in the execution of the project. Therefore, STA created a collaboration organization together with, the West Region Public Transportation organization¹ (WRPT) and the City of Gothenburg municipality (CoG) in order to work together to create the West Link. WRPT is the representative of the Region of Västra Götaland. They handle the public transportation in the region and will be in charge of building travel centers for the stations along the West Link, as well as traffic the finished tunnel. CoG is the local representative, responsible for developing and building the city areas surrounding the stations.

The West Link constitute a major billion-dollar infrastructure project in the center of the second largest city in Sweden. This alone, could be characterized as a difficult context. In addition, the collaboration consists of three large public organizations with different perspectives, interests and forms of governance. Through that, they also possess different organizational structures and cultures that are to work together in a common project organization. In addition to inherent complexities and challenges of a project of this magnitude, the West Link project has endured a lot of criticism, hot debates and discussions from the public. For the partners in the collaboration organization, these various differences and challenges means having to work across and on various boundaries to reach the common goal of finalizing the West Link.

Data Collection

The main part of our primary data was gathered through interviews conducted over a two-month period in the spring of 2020. We conducted semi-structured interviews where a list of broad and open questions was used as a guide but not asked in any special order. This method enables the respondent to talk and reason freely about the subject and may uncover aspects and perspectives that might have been missed with a structured interview method (Patel & Davidsson, 2011). We started out with a list of questions such as: *What is your role in the project? How do you view the relationship between the collaborating partners? What kind of challenges have you met? Is there anything that has worked better than expected?* This list was then altered and updated continuously during the study as a response to what the respondents talked about. Additional follow-up questions were also asked throughout all the interviews.

In order to create a fair representation of the case, we sought to interview people with various positions and from different areas within the project. We conducted 28 interviews with 25 respondents from all three organizations (the three project managers were interviewed twice). The respondents were distributed as follows: eight from the City of Gothenburg, eleven from the Swedish Transport Administration and six from the West Region Public Transportation. The difference in number of people interviewed from each organization is due to their differences in size, roles and mandates in the project.

¹ This is a non-official translation of the Swedish name Västtrafik

<i>Respondent Roles*</i>	<i>Number of Respondents</i>
Project manager	3
Program manger	2
Sub-project manager (Geographical work groups)	4
Sub-program manager	2
Communicator	3
Management Coordinator	1
Work group Traffic During Construction	2
Traffic planner/coordinator	3
Work group Art and Architecture	1
Personell manager	2
Support functions	2
*Most respondents had multiple roles within different areas and work groups. This is a compilation of their main roles	

(Table 1. Respondent roles)

The respondents were found through the method of snowballing (Myers & Newman, 2007). We started with the project managers from each organization who then provided us with lists of respondents based on the information we provided. As we wanted to include as many perspectives as possible, our only criteria were that respondents should be from different levels and positions and somehow be involved with, or affected by, the West Link project. As we conducted interviews, we were provided with additional names and areas to look into, which we proceeded to add to our list of respondents.

Allowing the project managers to provide us with names of respondents contain certain risks. For example, one risk lies in being presented with respondents that will only portray a favorable image, thus receiving a skewed picture of reality. However, this was not an issue that we experienced, quite the contrary. We experienced that respondents showed trust in opening up to us, discussing both positive and negative aspects and not portraying some glorified image in anyone's favor. An advantage of having the project leaders provide us with respondents is that they possess better knowledge of the respective organizations and could make sure that we got in contact with people who had the knowledge and experiences enough to fill our research needs.

Most of the interviews were conducted at the office location of the respondent but six were conducted over the phone, due to the outbreak of Covid-19. All interviews were recorded and then transcribed for further analysis. In addition to interviews, we were able to attend one of the coordination meetings between the collaborating partners. The observations from this meeting was used as a complement to the accounts given by the respondents and helped us get a better understanding of the general context. From the beginning, we had planned to attend three to four of these coordination meetings but due to Covid-19, this was not possible.

Data Analysis

When analyzing and presenting our empirical data, we made use of a grounded theory approach. Martin and Turner (1986) argue that grounded theory as a methodology is well suited for analyzing qualitative data gathered from observations, semi structured or unstructured interviews and case studies, making it a suitable choice for our study. The aim was not to

develop a new theory but to use grounded theory as a method of categorizing and thematizing the data for further analysis (Martin & Turner, 1986).

The choice of boundary work as our theoretical lens emerged through an iterative process where the interviews directed our focus. We have made use of an abductive approach in analyzing our data as the theoretical perspective and the coding of data was conducted and developed in parallel. Thus, alternately influencing the outcome of each other.

Interview transcripts were coded and re-coded in order to reveal what aspects and topics that were most frequently discussed during interviews to guide us in defining the complexities, problems and important aspects of this case. We went through each individual transcript and highlighted interesting and relevant parts, giving them a specific code based on the content of the text. The first round of coding resulted in 75 different codes, which were then merged and re-coded into 15 more overarching codes. Some examples of these were: *organizational structure, different roles, contractors, ambiguities, frustration, collaboration, politics* and *time*. We concluded the coding process by combining these overarching codes into six categories that constitute the base of our empirical findings and discussion. These final categories were: *the pyramid, organizational differences, differing roles, STA and CoG, ambiguities* and *the contractors*. We conducted an initial discussion of our findings and their consequences based on our categories, which is presented in our findings. The empirical findings were then discussed through the theoretical lens of boundaries and boundary work, shifting focus from tangible consequences apparent in our findings to a deeper level of trying to understand how and why these consequences appear.

Ethical aspects

Throughout the conducted interviews, we abided by the general principles presented by Silverman (2017); voluntary participation and the right to withdraw, protection of research participants, assessment of potential benefits and risks to participants, respecting the privacy of participants and avoiding deceiving them, obtaining informed consent and avoiding harm. In order to not put our respondents in any awkward position or risk, we have treated all of them anonymously. In order to keep confidentiality, respondents, interview notes and recordings were given a code based on the organization they belonged to and none of the respondents are mentioned by name. Some respondents also expressed a concern regarding use of their title as it would be very easy to find out who holds a specific title, which is why respondents are referred to by their code only. The codes are X for the City of Gothenburg, Y for the Swedish Transport Administration and Z for the West Region Public Transportation.

Within our interview situations, certain ethical aspects needed to be taken into consideration. One was the relationship between us and the interviewees and the creation of trust. Interviews are often referred to as dialogues which is misleading since that implies a mutual interest in a conversation. An interview is mostly conducted for the purpose of solely one part of the two, namely the interviewers, which imposes asymmetrical power relations. (Kvale, 2006) We had this in mind when conducting interviews as we wished to establish trust and mutually interesting conversations. Interviews were conducted at a location chosen by the interviewee, giving them the opportunity to choose an environment they feel comfortable with. We also started every meeting by presenting ourselves and our research which could help establish a sense of trust. By structuring our interview to ask broad questions, we allowed the

respondents to speak freely and thereby transferred power to the respondents to even out the inherent power asymmetries of interviews, creating more of a conversation (ibid). Interviewees was also given the opportunity to proofread the report as this is argued to increase the report's authenticity (Bryman & Bell, 2017).

Findings

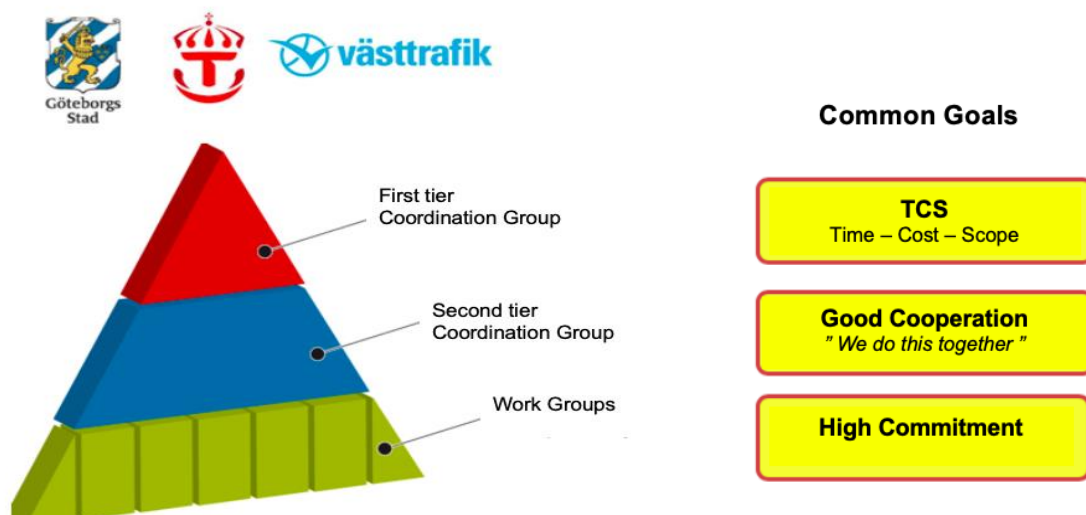
In this section, we will present some of the main challenges of public organizations working across boundaries and how this has affected collaboration.

Organizing the collaboration

In order to coordinate the work and interests of the three organizations (Swedish Transport Administration, City of Gothenburg and West Region Public Transportation) involved in the West Link project, a collaboration organization referred to as "The Pyramid", was created.

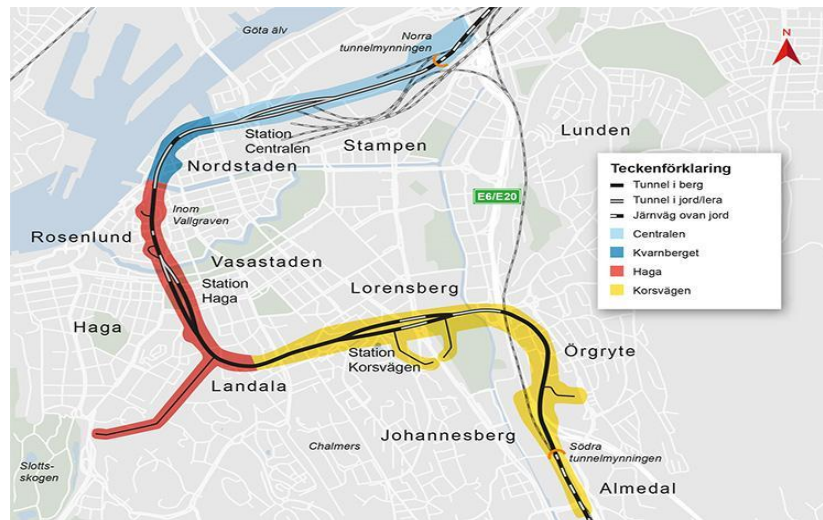
The Pyramid Structure

The pyramid is built up in layers where the base constitutes a number of different work groups, each with a specific area of responsibility. The number of work groups is not consistent over time as the idea is that groups are created for handling a certain area of tasks and then terminated when those tasks are finalized. Some examples of work groups are: Art and Architecture, Traffic During Construction, Trees, and Cultural Environment. Within these groups, there are representatives from all three organizations with specific expertise, e.g. architects, geologists and traffic planners, that are to work together regarding the practical work and details of the project. For example, in the work group Traffic During Construction, practical and detailed work are done concerning how to maintain a functioning traffic, both public and private, in and around the city during the construction of the West Link. If, for some reason, there is a conflict or disagreement that cannot be solved in these work groups, the issue is to be escalated to a coordination group. The coordination group is the next step in the pyramid where project managers and representatives from the three organizations seek to find a solution. If they too cannot agree on a decision, the issue is further escalated to a first-tier coordination group where the three organizations' directors attend.



(Figure 1. Structure of The Pyramid, From: Trafikverket, 2015)

The actual construction of the West Link is conducted via four entrepreneurial contracts. Instead of hiring one contractor to build the entire West Link tunnel, the tunnel has been divided into four construction segments. These segments correspond to geographical areas along the route of the tunnel and are named Centralen, Kvarnberget, Haga and Korsvägen.



(Figure 2. The four segments of the tunnel, From: Göteborgs Stad, 2020)

The segments are organized as individual sub-projects under the umbrella of the West Link project, each with individual project managers and entrepreneurial contracts for construction. These four segments/sub-projects also have corresponding work groups within the pyramid, commonly referred to as the Geographical work groups. These Geographical work groups are on the same level as all the other work groups, the base, and they also have representatives from all three organizations. However, one thing that differentiates the Geographical groups from, for example, Traffic During Construction or Trees is that in the Geographical groups, there is both a project manager from STA, in charge of the West Link construction in that segment, and a project manager from CoG who is in charge of the city development in that geographical area.

Functionality of the pyramid structure

Respondents from all three organizations have expressed similar feelings and experiences regarding the usefulness of the Pyramid. They seem to be in agreement that a project of this size and complexity needs some sort of structure to organize the people working in the project. However, respondents also stated that while they believe the concept of the Pyramid is good, it does not really work in practice. People indicated that when an issue is escalated to the coordination group, it is almost rare that the answer that comes back actually helps or answers the question that was presented in the first place:

I often raise questions... and then 50% will have changed on the way... and then it's discussed there...and people who do not really have knowledge about the question... and then it will be a really weird answer that returns... ah ok, what am I supposed to do with this? (Respondent Y5)

While respondents think it is understandable that the people who sit in the coordination group might not be very familiar with the practical details of the execution, since their role is to manage the project and the collaboration on a general level, it makes the escalation of issues somewhat unhelpful. Respondents argue that simply because a person holds a managerial position, it does not necessarily mean that person has a better solution to a problem. However, respondent Y6 pointed out that, the ineffectiveness of escalating issues might also have to do with how questions have been formulated, as they might lack the necessary information for managers to be able to make a decision. If work groups instead had provided the coordination group with options, rather than issues, the process might have been more efficient.

Another thing respondents have explained as troublesome is that the representatives in the coordination group rarely think differently than their organization's representatives in the work groups:

[...] it is my perception that we escalate something... and their managers of course do not think anything differently than their employees do, and it's like that for all three organizations, so if you're not in agreement in the geographical work group, you're not in agreement in the coordination group either [...] I guess it's just a way to send requests and answers up and down (Respondent Z5)

An idea and possible solution to the escalation problem would be to elevate the Geographical work groups to a level between the other work groups and the coordination group. This was suggested multiple times, by several respondents from all three organizations who believe this would allow issues to be escalated while still being close to the practical work, which might make it easier to solve detailed questions. However, this proposal has not been implemented as it was argued that: "in one or two years there will only be the geographical workgroups left" (Respondent Y9) meaning they will basically be in that position soon enough anyway.

Another issue with the functionality of the pyramid is that people have not been able to embrace it. A number of respondents have explained that they do not really know or understand the structure of the pyramid, despite it seeming to be a recurring discussion among the collaborating partners. Respondents have expressed this in various ways, for instance by saying: "I guess you've heard about the pyramid?" (Respondent Y6) and "He's (PM) known for drawing up the pyramid and explaining it" (Respondent Z1). Confusion about the structure of the Pyramid is obviously a known problem. However, it seems like the root of the confusion is overlooked as the only response has been for the project manager to explain the structure over and over, instead of maybe changing it.

In sum, the three organizations have made a great effort of organizing the collaboration and providing a clear structure of escalation paths. However, the effectiveness of the Pyramid seems to be faltering due to questions being escalated to people who do not possess knowledge of the details and also face the same issue of representing their permanent organizations. The Pyramid then turns into a system of moving questions around. There also seem to be some confusion concerning when, where and how to use the Pyramid, causing frustration among parties as the structure has to be explained over and over but does not seem to reach all the way down. How to organize the collaboration and communicating how to use the Pyramid to everyone involved therefore seems to pose a challenge for the collaboration.

The Contractors

As previously mentioned, the four construction segments have individual entrepreneurial contracts. While the contractors are not explicitly part of the collaboration organization, they constitute a factor that greatly affects all the involved parties and thus the relationship and collaboration between them. The contractors have been procured through public procurement which is nothing new for public organizations. However, what is somewhat different in the West Link project is that the segments use what is called a turnkey contract. In contrast to a general contract, where the contractor works according to specifically stated directions, the contractor in a turnkey contract does not simply carry out the construction, they are also responsible for the projecting part. This means the contractor in a turnkey contract has much more responsibility in the design and planning of the project. Consequently, instead of STA steering the contractors with an iron fist, the construction is an iterative process of design and planning and requires a lot of collaboration between STA and the contractors. As the contractors are not part of the pyramid structure that make up the collaboration organization between STA, CoG and WRPT, STA has explicitly stated that any communication with the contractors should go through them. This has caused both confusion and frustration on the part of CoG and, especially, WRPT as it has not always been clear who to talk to regarding questions concerning the contractors' work:

They have contractors who do the construction and it can be confusing. Is it the contractor we should go to? or the project organization (STA)? ... and the other way around, that the contractor contacts someone here (WRPT) so that it does not go via the Pyramid, it doesn't go through the right channels (Respondent Z2)

The contractors are described by respondents as a frustrating, complicated and ambiguous factor within the project as they, according to respondents from WRPT, often do changes in construction plans that are not in line with previous agreements. Respondents from WRPT brings up an example of how a bus stop was shut down without consulting WRPT because the contractor had taken a look outside and concluded that there were no bus lines using that stop. This was however not the case, as the stop in question was used by multiple lines: "The contractors do not have the same understanding for the underlying agreements... for example regarding the public transportation and how important it is that it stays functioning" (Respondent Z6). In some of these instances, it has happened that WRPT has gone directly to the contractor to complain, something that has frustrated STA: "We (STA) are the ones who gives approval if we think 'this' is ok...to do 'this' restriction or whatever... so Västtrafik (WRPT) shouldn't talk to the contractors at all" (Respondent Y5). Several respondents from WRPT and CoG has expressed a feeling that STA cannot control their contractors and that the contractors sometimes do things that STA are not aware of, causing disruption and frustration between the three collaborating organizations:

Not that they (STA) blame their contractors but it feels like it's procured in such a way that the contractor has pretty much freedom to come up with their own solutions[...]but what I can experience as somewhat ambiguous is that... sometimes

things happen that I feel the Transport Administration weren't really aware of .
(Respondent Z2)

Actually, it is the Transport Administration's responsibility to steer their contractors and communicate to us... they have told us that we are not allowed to meet the contractors on site by ourselves, okay, that's fine [...] but then the Transport Administration also has to make sure to steer their contractors!
(Respondent Z5)

Respondents from all three organizations have expressed different levels of frustration with the contractors and some have questioned the choice of using a turnkey contract form as it removes much of the control from STA: “[...] now it is the contractor who has the control and he's down in his hole...” (Respondent X8). It has thus been argued by respondents that using a more traditional contract form, such as a general contract, would have made it possible for STA to maintain a higher level of control over the contractors and that it might have made it easier for the collaborating parties:

I somehow believe that if STA had been able to control their contractors a bit better, things would have been so much easier for the rest of us since we do not have any direct contact with the contractor. (Respondent Z3)

In sum, using a turnkey contract form when conducting a large-scale collaboration with public organizations seem to have put unnecessary strain on the parties' relationship. As it is, the parties seek to collaborate within the Pyramid but since the contractor is not there, they will have limited knowledge or understanding of any agreements or issues that might have been discussed there. This might have been mitigated if for example the contractors were part of the Pyramid, or if a general contract had been used instead, where no freedom was given to the contractor.

Organizational Differences

As presented in the introduction, organizational differences are one reason for initiating a collaboration but they may also cause tension between collaborating parties. The following sections illustrates some of the individual characteristics of the three organizations that have affected the collaboration.

Structures and processes

The Swedish Transport Administration

The project organization STA is a matrix organization that most respondents from STA, and a few from CoG and WRPT as well, perceive as flat. According to the respondents from STA, it is a short distance from employee to project manager if a higher decision mandate is needed. Most respondents described STA as having fast and clear decision-making processes and overall pointed to the fact that they are a project organization. As a result, STAs focus is very results oriented and their processes revolve a great deal around their budget and time frame. This is described, by various respondents from the other two organizations, as making STA

less sympathetic or understanding of the more complex and longer processes of CoG and WRPT:

The Transport Administration is very: ‘ you just ruin things, you just have a lot of complex administrative chores and you...’ and that is because they are a project, they have a bag with money and can fix and trix a bit like they want... while we are governed by this law. (Respondent X8)

The respondent continues by saying: “The project (STA) does not have that understanding toward the City (CoG)... they do not have respect for the lead times we have...” (Respondent X8) and respondents from WRPT show the same kind of frustration; “Sometimes they do not understand how complex the situation is...” (Respondent Z3)

The City of Gothenburg

CoG was often described by respondents from both STA, WRPT and CoG itself, to be fractured and divided in its structure. The CoG organization consists of a great number of different councils and administrations, all of which has their own area of expertise, interests, goals and obligations. CoG can almost be described as a community of organizations in itself. Respondent X1 stated that “If the city is made up by numerous councils, the opinions within each council are as many”. The fact that all the various councils and administrations handle different areas in the city has posed great challenges for the collaboration. Respondents from both CoG and the other two organizations have stated that the various departments tend to not communicate with each other: “There are quite many who works within their comfort zone like ‘I only work with this area and that is my only concern’, and then you don’t think outside that zone” (Respondent X6).

This poses some difficulties when it comes to a project such as the West Link. Due to the sheer size of the project, everything they do affects a great number of different administrations and councils within CoG. Respondents explain that every decision concerning the project has to be anchored within all the relevant and affected departments within the organization: “You need to collect knowledge and information from various different places and you need to make sure that it is correct” (Respondent X3), which in turn leads to a lot of documentation and protocols. Respondent X1 also stated that: “We are just trying to coordinate everyone with the mandate to decide [...] To make sure all perspectives are met... then you need to involve all departments which takes a lot of time”.

On the plus side, this means that when CoG brings forth anything to the Pyramid, it is very thoroughly anchored within the organization. However, it also leads to long decision-making processes for CoG which seems to often cause frustration within the other two partner organizations, mainly STA. It is also not uncommon that people within CoG have different views and interpretations depending on what department they are from and sometimes give different answers to the same question:

There are so many different (administrations and councils) ... there is a risk that someone within the City (CoG) says yes to something and someone else says no to

something because they (CoG) in turn have... difficulties coordinating themselves.
(Respondent Z1)

This is explained by respondents from CoG as a problem of people from the other organizations historically having contacted just anyone within CoG and not the person in the right position for that question. CoG has strived to solve this issue by creating an internal project program consisting of people representing CoG in the West Link project called VLIS, an abbreviation of what translates to “the West Link in the City”. The purpose of VLIS is to channel all the communication regarding the West Link between CoG and the other two organizations so that CoG speaks with one voice toward STA and WRPT.

The West Region Public Transportation

Much like the project organization STA, respondents from all three organizations perceive WRPT as a flat organization. However, respondents from WRPT state that while they might be a flat organization on paper, there are still some hierarchical, and sometimes unclear, elements in practice:

I mean on paper we have a pretty flat organization but in practice there are a lot of forums and decision makers [...] so it gets a bit unclear where a decision should be made, and who should make the decision and in which forum it should be made.
(Respondent Z2)

WRPT is the provider of public transportation in the region of Västra Götaland. They run their operations in a continuous loop throughout the calendar year and have very long lead times, up to two years. There are a number of reasons for the lead times being this long. For example, planning the routes of all the busses, trams and boats takes time. Another reason is that WRPT staff their routes through contracts with other firms, these firms in turn organizes how many busses they will need based on how the routes are drawn and so on. If WRPT then need to change the route of a bus, there is a great chance that more drivers and busses will be needed, and procuring them takes time. The long planning horizon makes WRPT very dependent on receiving information as early as possible and any changes to traffic or bus stops needs to be approved months in advance. In the collaboration, the fact that they have lead times that are so much longer than the other two organizations is a catalyst for frustration, mostly within WRPT itself. The short timeframe of the project and its contractors is not always compatible with how operations are run in WRPT.

Roles and objectives

When it comes to the roles and objectives of the organizations in the project collaboration, WRPT and STA are the ones with clearest objectives. For STA, the objective is simply the task they have been assigned; to build a tunnel under the city of Gothenburg, as financially, efficiently and with as high quality as possible with respect to the given time and resources. WRPTs objective is to protect the interests of public transportation during construction and to operate and traffic the finished tunnel. In contrast, CoG is somewhat divided in this aspect. They want to develop the city, to make it a more modern, sustainable and safe place, and

infrastructural developments are seen as a necessity for the growth of both the city and the region at large. In this sense, CoG comes to the project as a partner that wants to help STA build the West Link. On the other hand, CoG needs to work in the interest of a third party as the representative of the Gothenburg citizens, through the political assembly, they need to consider the citizens' ability to live, work and move around in the city. CoG also wants to make sure that STA follows the local guidelines and regulations. In this sense, CoG is an authority with the task of reviewing the work of STA. This puts them in a difficult position regarding in which questions they should be an authoritative municipality and in which questions they can be a flexible collaborative partner:

Sometimes conflicts appear in the form that... in part, the City is a collaborative partner, and we should help them (STA) to succeed... and on the other hand, we are an authority too, where we note that 'here is a party that is digging in our land'... then we have a number of regulations that we demand they follow.
(Respondent X4)

This is explained by respondents from CoG to cause conflicts between CoG and STA since representatives from CoG need to wear 'different hats', where the authoritative hat is non-negotiable and the collaborative hat is more flexible. There also seem to exist ambiguities within CoG itself regarding if and when they are an authority, a collaborative partner or both. While most respondents from CoG discussed the difficulty of being both an authority and a collaborative partner, and having to switch between the two, one respondent from CoG was adamant on the authoritative role, stating that:

It is not we who bring forth the solution. We are an authority that reviews what the project wants to do... we cannot provide any nifty ideas; we just want to look at what is planned so we can put our stamp of approval... we cannot help in fixing stuff... that is not our role. (Respondent X8)

Political Governance

Even though the three partner organizations are all public organizations, they seem to differ quite a lot in terms of how the public ownership affects the management of the organizations. Respondents from both STA and WRPT explained that they are not as politically influenced as CoG, something respondents from CoG seemed to agree with. Respondents from both WRPT and STA viewed themselves as having a lot of freedom and trust in their assignments and they did not perceive themselves as strictly politically governed:

Even if we have a political management... it's much faster, much smoother here (WRPT)... I imagine that we have more trust... our politicians... they are not in on questions on a detailed level in the same sense that I've experienced... or heard... that they are in the Gothenburg administrations. (Respondent Z4)

While the West Link project is owned by a governmental organization, the project organization itself is more or less autonomous, giving them freedom to manage the project work as they see fit, without much interference from the government:

We have an advantage in the sense that we have very clear political directives... 'do this and let us know when you're done' sort of [...] we never see any politicians here and there are no political decisions being made in the meantime.
(Respondent Y2)

CoG on the other hand, has a heavy political involvement. Respondents from CoG have emphasized that: "We have to follow our... it is the municipal Act, and it is the order Act and all number of different things that govern... I mean, it is politicians that govern our organization" (Respondent X8). The political involvement in management of CoG is also very apparent according to respondents from the other two organizations. Respondents from STA have stated that they can sometimes notice changes within CoG when the political power shifts as: "[...] it affects the civil servants exercise of the office ... what kind of assignments they receive from the politics and what kind of questions they are allowed to pursue" (Respondent Y7). This has affected the collaboration as: "[...]new politicians are entering all the time and they think differently, and that, I can feel, has been a great difficulty in the cooperation with the municipality (CoG)" (Respondent Y11).

Frustrated relationships

As the previous sections has illustrated, the three organizations differ greatly in terms of structure, processes, roles and objectives and how affected they are by their political governance. These differences put together place a lot of strain on the representatives and their relationships, as their individual characteristics are not always compatible, which will be discussed further in the following section.

The Swedish Transport Administration and the City of Gothenburg

The project collaboration is explained as a constant give and take where multiple interests collide. We find that there are tensions in the relationship between STA and CoG, which appear to exist for great parts due to their differing organizational structures and processes. Respondents from CoG explains that their organization and STA are both quite used to getting their way with things: "Both organizations are used to always being right... they are always the largest organization... and they are now suddenly to meet on equal terms" (Respondent X4). This ultimately affects the collaboration between them. It is a complex relationship where CoG often feel that STA gets tired and frustrated with them, questioning why it takes such a long time to make a decision. As respondents from CoG explain, they have a heavy political involvement and no mandates to make decisions on their own. For the representatives of CoG, it is all about trying to make the processes function as good as possible and then communicate the outcome back to the collaborating partners. Thus, people from STA and CoG do not meet on equal terms, as STA has much more mandate to make decisions. A respondent from CoG explains this as:

They have very high mandate from the West Link [...] they (STA) have a bag with money that they control while we in the City we're just...we try to coordinate everyone who has decision mandate so it's a bit different...when you meet someone, I always have to say 'I'll just go home and ask first'. (Respondent X1)

This puts strain on the relationship as the three parties are generally not able to make any decisions on the spot as representatives from CoG, but also WRPT, have to go back to their organizations to get the issue investigated and approved. Respondents from CoG argue that they often have to explain why things take a long time as representatives, from STA mainly, do not seem to understand how CoG works and that it is a big and heavy machinery. Although, some respondents from STA state that they do understand the situation CoG is in and that things take longer time there, the same respondents also express a frustration and confusion concerning CoG. Many respondents from STA have for example stated that they cannot understand CoGs organizational structure, repeatedly calling it diffuse and complicated. CoGs shattered structure and complicated processes thus seem to make it difficult for representatives from both the other two organizations to understand their structure:

The city (CoG) has a very large organization that is difficult to understand and I perceive it being difficult to understand for both us and STA ... when can VLIS make a decision or when should a decision come from an administration or the politics? (Respondent Z6)

Respondent Y3 describes that in previous projects, they have always felt calm and safe when entering municipality ground as the municipality is supposed to be their partner, supporting them in their endeavors. However, this has not been the case in the West Link project. Collaborating with CoG has instead been one of the greatest challenges for the STA. A few respondents from STA draw parallels to similar projects in Malmö and Stockholm city and explain that those journeys with the municipality were much smoother and that the relationships were perceived as more flexible and accommodating.

This perception of other municipalities could be due to them having had more mandate for decision-making further down in their organizations compared to CoG. Respondent X6 explain that the organization is currently in a phase of heavy monitoring and regulation, which limits the room for flexibility and interpretation. As a result, CoG is perceived by respondents in the other organizations as square-minded, following rules and guidelines to the extreme. Respondents for example stated that: "The most important thing for them (CoG) is not to find a good solution that works for the third party... they would rather find a bad solution that is correct ..." (Respondent Y5). Respondents from STA wishes that some rules could be interpreted differently, taking more consideration to how the project works, but feels that CoG does not dare to: "They don't dare. They are doing right by their rules, so we can't say that what they are doing is wrong, but it becomes very cumbersome and it affects the cooperation and becomes very tiresome" (Respondent Y3). This puts a lot of strain on the collaboration as STA have different experiences from other cities and feel that CoG could have provided some sort of alternative solution when given a request they cannot approve, but that all they say is yes or no:

We felt that... the City (CoG) did not provide any input, they just said ‘you may not, may not, may not’ while we were ... ‘well what can we do?’ and have some sort of dialogue about it but it was just no, no, no. (Respondent Y5)

The relationship affecting WRPT

Respondents from WRPT also notices the frustrating relationship between STA and CoG and explain that it affects their role in the collaboration. The complicated relationship between STA and CoG claim much time from meetings, which also takes focus away from WRPT: “There have been meetings where you sit[...]where one-two hours pass and it is the Transport Administration and the City discussing agreements [...] there is not enough time for our questions to be addressed.” (Respondent Z1). Respondent Z3 explains that their role in those situations have sometimes been to act as the mediating party in order to move along in the project: “Sometimes it feels like Västtrafik (WRPT) has to sit in and be like... the kind people who sit in and mediate and try to find solutions... I mean, then it feels like you could do something else with your time” (Respondent Z3). Another respondent from WRPT also stated that:

[...] we are keen to solve the arguments but we might not be able to contribute much to the issue being solved other than posing dashing comments like: ‘it is important that you solve this issue so we can move on’. For our employees in the work groups, it can sometimes feel as they are just sitting there, waiting out the time.
(Respondent Z6)

While this causes frustration and exhaustion among respondents from WRPT, they also believe it is natural for STA and the CoG to have more to do with each other as they are both larger in size and have bigger roles to play. However, they still believe the difficult relationship between STA and CoG affects the collaboration a great deal: “It takes a great deal of time for us, a lot of work hours for the employees of Västtrafik (WRPT) to man their collaboration organization. It’s not the only one we have but we have to be there” (Respondent Z5). Respondent X7 also stated that the effort WRPT has put in to argue their point in the collaboration may have cost them a lot more employees than might have been necessary, implying that the strain caused by trying to collaborate and fight for their cause might have caused a lot of employees at WRPT to quit.

In sum, differences between the three organizations lead to confusion and frustration among the parties. STA and CoG are both large organizations, used to being the dominant party in any collaboration, which leads to a strained and complicated relationship between the two. However, their difficulties in getting along do not solely affect the two parties alone but WRPT as well. Making them act the mediator and putting them in a position that they feel is a waste of their time.

Time and ambiguities - reflecting upon the collaboration

The following section is a concluding reflection about the collaboration from an empirical viewpoint. As illustrated in the previous sections, there are many factors that pose challenges for the West Link collaboration project. Respondents have however indicated that it might not

solely be the differences themselves that cause this frustration, but rather the ambiguities surrounding them, as will be illustrated below.

The aspect of time

As described in the setting, the West Link project has been running for many years already, and will continue running until 2026. The very long time horizon has had various impacts on the collaboration as it has moved through different stages. One challenge that respondents from all three organizations have pressed upon is employee turnover. When a project goes on for decades, it is only natural that some employee turnover will occur but it poses a challenge for the collaboration. A high employee turnover makes it difficult to get the goals and values of the Pyramid structure to reach all the way out to new representatives. This has led to people having to explain and redo many of the agreements within the work groups as new employees do not know what has been previously discussed or decided, which has been argued to cause confusion and frustration among people within the Pyramid.

Over time, a project will also move through different stages of research, planning, executing, and so on. Only, the difference between the West Link and smaller projects is that these stages span over years. While many respondents from all three organizations have stated that they think the collaboration in general is working just fine, most of them have also expressed a feeling of frustration toward at least one of the other parties, as illustrated above. This frustration is also described to having increased when entering the construction phase of the project. During the planning phase, discussions revolved around rather abstract ideas and there was a long timeframe to sort things out. Respondents have argued that there has been a mentality of “[...] we will sort things out along the way” (Respondent X8) as decisions and agreements have been pushed ahead until the last minute: “some details haven't been sorted out until people are like... standing in the pit” (Respondent X4). Respondents state that this mentality was fine during planning, as there was no direct need to make decisions and people could focus on creating common visions and goals. However, when entering the construction phase, decisions needed to be made much faster, something STA feel CoG cannot handle as their lead times are still the same. It also puts pressure on WRPT who suddenly has to deal with sudden changes that are not compatible with their lead times. This has created frustration within the project as the collaborating parties has moved away from each other, instead focusing on guarding their individual interests:

There is a pretty shattered image, [...] When we were dealing more with the planning of the work, I believed that we were more together but when entering the construction phase, it becomes very rule-based, there is not so much ‘together’ anymore. (Respondent Y11)

Three parties

In the eyes of the public, the collaborating parties wants to be perceived as a united organization, working together for the West Link. However, according to respondents, it is generally a case of pulling themselves together and present a united front in those situations, rather than working at actually becoming one unit:

I think we are probably three parties, then you come to a situation where you meet the public, for example a press release or something, in those cases you really have to say the same thing... but it's more like you buck up in those cases.

(Respondent Z2)

The West Link collaboration project is, after all, constituted by three, very different, public organizations. They range from national, to regional, to local level and they all have different values, agendas and perspectives. A number of respondents have pointed to these differences and stated that, while the intention from the beginning might have been to collaborate and achieve the West Link together. It is now more a case of three organizations doing their own thing and coordinating these individual activities:

We are three parties who are to collaborate but everyone still has their own image. It is not the case that you go into a new organization and let go of the old, it is not like we are building the West Link together, everyone has different initial values and aims. (Respondent Z2)

Many respondents have emphasized this dilemma of being three very different organizations and that, though everyone wants the project to be a success, they differ quite a lot in what that means for the separate organizations:

We have three completely different missions... three completely different agendas... everyone wants the tunnel to get finished... everyone wants things to be as good as possible in the meantime... we just have three completely different ways of getting there. (Respondent X8)

Ambiguities

Respondents have argued that the organizational differences should have been clarified, discussed and established much more thoroughly in the beginning of the project, for example saying that: "My personal opinion is that some of these agreements should have been written a long time ago, and I believe most people think that" (Respondent X4). Many respondents seem to be in agreement that some of the conflicts that have appeared in the collaboration might have been avoided or eased if the partner organizations' differences, missions and roles had been discussed and established more thoroughly from the beginning:

I believe that... like always, one should have talked about more things much earlier. Had a better dialogue about the consequences of construction [...] one should have talked about the rules of the game a lot earlier in some way, I think... it would have made it easier. (Respondent Y6)

Another issue that has been pointed out is the vagueness and ambiguity regarding how the collaboration has been framed. Throughout interviews, it became clear that two parties within the collaboration project are more dominant than the third. In most interviews with respondents from CoG and STA, they generally only talked about the relationship between one another.

WRPT was often mentioned as an afterthought, usually as a response to a direct question. Even though all respondents stress the importance of WRPT, they were often referred to by the other two organizations as something of a tag along: “[...] Västtrafik (WRPT) rides along” (Respondent X4) or “[...] is last in line” (Respondent X1) or “I perceive them more as a little brother” (Respondent Y3). Indicating that the power relationships are not evenly distributed among the parties.

Throughout interviews, respondents have also referred to the collaboration organization as both a cooperative organization, a collaborative organization and a conflict solving organization, showing that people are not quite on the clear on what type of organization it is. A respondent from STA observed this, stating that:

I think the parties might have had different views of collaboration or cooperation... or what cooperation or collaboration is... so, I'm pretty sure that has been rather unclear and if you ask a bunch of people, then... most of them don't have a clear image of what is collaboration and what is cooperation. (Respondent Y11)

Respondent X7 also reflected on this ambiguity, meaning that by calling all three organizations “partner” organizations they were elevated to the same level in the collaboration. The respondent argued that this is not the case as CoG and STA are two authorities who have the right to make decisions and WRPT is more of a service provider, with a very narrow and specific task in the larger context. Putting all three organizations on the same level on paper might therefore have given an unfair representation of the power-relationships between the three, causing unnecessary strain on the collaboration.

In sum, while organizational differences might cause strain on a collaborative relationship. The biggest issue seems to lie in the ambiguities caused by not addressing these differences early on. When starting a collaboration, it is easy to focus on what everyone has in common and how they can contribute to the goal. However, not facing parties' different interests, limitations and demands opens up for confusion, misunderstandings and conflicts later on as people wonder why the other party suddenly does not want to cooperate. As a respondent from CoG neatly put it:

One should've been more clear from the beginning that there are two authorities and one who is allowed an opinion... instead of calling it three parties [...] it's hard on people, working in these cooperative organizations... it's all nice and pretty on paper but it's not that easy when it comes to practice. (Respondent X7)

Discussion

There are numerous challenges facing a collaboration between public organizations. We find that some of the main difficulties lies in coping with organizational differences, not meeting on equal terms in regards to decision mandate and political governance, how to organize, frame and define the collaboration and what form of entrepreneurial contracts are used. These challenges have contributed to causing frustration and confusion within the collaboration and

in turn, have greatly affected how boundary work is performed by individuals, and in turn organizations.

Comeau-Vallée and Langley (2019:3) define boundary work as “any effort aimed at creating, maintaining, blurring or shifting boundaries”. In the case of the West Link, we identify a number of different forms of boundary work occurring simultaneously. Some of them more deliberate than others and sometimes both conflicting and mutually affecting as multiple boundaries are engaged at the same time.

We find that the West Link collaboration project contains multiple boundaries where individuals engage in boundary work. Boundaries “consist of any demarcation that distinguishes one group from another” (Comeau-Vallée & Langley, 2019:3) and some of the most evident boundaries in the West Link collaboration are between the three organizations, between different work groups, between the work groups and the coordination groups, between the three parties and the contractors, as well as boundaries within the individual organizations themselves.

The Pyramid Structure - A Faltering Boundary Organization

The Pyramid structure was intentionally created to enable inter-organizational collaboration. This illustrates how actors have strived to create a boundary organization, where parties can negotiate their interests and roles to find a way to accommodate the other without damaging their own core values (O’Mahoney & Bechky, 2008). We thus find that managers have practiced configurational boundary work (Langley et al., 2019) as they, from afar, have created a structure which is to organize how individuals are to work and engage with each other. Configurational forms of boundary work often entail both collaborative and competitive forms of boundary work (Langley et al., 2019). However, as the intention behind the Pyramid in our case is to develop and sustain patterns of collaboration and coordination, it can be argued that it is mostly a purposeful form of overarching collaborative boundary work (e.g. Langley et al., 2019; Apesoa-Varano, 2013; Meier, 2015). On the other hand, when the structures and systems are put into practice, it becomes obvious, as illustrated in the findings, that the functionality of the Pyramid as a way to enhance collaboration falters.

People working within the Pyramid seem to have difficulties in understanding and embracing the structure. Ambiguous framings of the collaboration and high employee turnover, that makes it hard to anchor values and goals, inhibits collaboration. By expressing frustration and confusion regarding the structure, representatives from the three organizations are distancing themselves from the Pyramid. While unintentionally, this contributes to creating (e.g. Farias, 2017; Edlinger, 2015) boundaries between themselves and the structure, thus practicing competitive forms of boundary work. At the same time, we find that people have also practiced collaborative forms of boundary work by suggesting a change of the structure, which is a purposeful effort to shift the boundaries of the Pyramid through negotiation (e.g. Apesoa-Varano, 2013; Kellogg et al., 2006). However, we find that the rigidity of the structure inhibits this collaborative form of boundary work, as it is met by competitive forms of boundary work. Huxham (2000) argues that structures of collaboration will change over time as it goes through different phases. However, by keeping to the original structure of the Pyramid, managers contribute to defending (e.g. Hazgui and Gendron’s, 2015) the boundaries that the confused and distancing representatives have created.

In line with Langley et al., (2019), we argue that boundary work is not wholly collaborative or competitive. Rather, by practicing configurational boundary work in creating a boundary organization, managers have created a multi-boundary environment where multiple, coexisting forms of collaborative and competitive boundary work emerge simultaneously.

Negotiating and embodying boundaries

We find that most of the collaborative boundary work performed within the collaboration project takes the form of negotiation (e.g. Apesoa-Varano, 2013; Kellogg et al., 2006). The collaboration is described as a process of give and take, and every work group is a site of negotiation as representatives from each organization seek to come up with a common solution that suits everyone by discussing their different perspectives and needs.

We also find cases of embodying boundaries (e.g. Ellis & Ybema, 2010; Azambuja & Islam, 2019) to enable collaboration. Individual representatives from each organization function as a form of boundary subject (Azambuja & Islam, 2019; O'Mahoney & Bechky, 2008; Allen, 2009) as they become a link between their respective permanent organization and the collaboration project. Representatives need to act as translators by embodying both sides of a boundary, representing their permanent organization's interests when in the project while at the same time representing the project's interests when in the permanent organization, thus enabling a smoother collaboration. By embodying different boundaries in different situations, representatives can contribute to bridging the gap between the project organization and the respective permanent organizations (Ellis & Ybema, 2010). It can also help in the continuous negotiating processes within and between work groups as the representatives can consider perspectives from both sides. However, as illustrated above, factors such as organizational differences and colliding interests, treated as barriers (Quick & Feldman, 2014), limits the positive effects that the embodying and negotiating practices could have on a collaboration in practice. Hence, we find that in the West link collaboration, the embodying of boundaries is simply a purposeful effort by individuals trying to cope with the difficulties and complex challenges that the coexisting relationship of a project organization and a permanent organization constitutes (Azambuja & Islam, 2019; Löfström, 2010; Sahlin-Andersson & Söderholm, 2002; Hodgson et al., 2019; Jurisch et al., 2013), rather than utilizing the full potential of embodying boundaries in order to collaborate.

Organizational differences and entrepreneurial contracts – enabling or challenging collaboration?

Just as the healthcare workers in Meier's (2015) study argue that they need to collaborate because they are different, so too does STA, CoG and WRPT in the West Link project. However, what we find in this case is that while the partner organizations imply that they need to collaborate because they are different, in practice, these differences are not treated as an enabler of collaboration but rather as obstacles that create difficult challenges. As a result, there are numerous examples of competitive boundary work within the West Link collaboration and most of them seem to be an effect of organizational differences and colliding interests. One such difference that has caused a lot of frustration among the collaborating parties is that they do not meet on equal terms in regards to decision mandates. The differences in political involvement in the governance of the organizations can thus be argued to have contributed to

both creating and maintaining (e.g. Edlinger, 2015; Hazgui and Gendron's, 2015) boundaries between the organizations. Not being able to make decisions 'on the spot' because WRPT, and CoG in particular, need to take the issue 'home' to be anchored in their organizations puts a strain on the collaboration as STA holds higher mandates and work with comparatively short time frames. The differences in mandate level thus only works to amplify the fact that they are three different organizations, enforcing boundaries, which leads to limiting and challenging any collaborative boundary work between them.

Respondents have also pointed to STA and CoG both being big organizations used to "getting their way" as something that has affected the collaboration, making their relationships within the collaboration frustrated and difficult as much of the time is taken up by their disputes. There are however contesting forms of boundary work in this situation. Individuals from STA are engaging in collaborative boundary work, such as negotiating (e.g. Apeso-Varano, 2013; Kellogg et al., 2006) as they seek to accommodate the interests and processes of CoG. From another perspective, CoG is practicing a competitive form of boundary work at the same time as they follow rules and regulations to the letter, arguing that "we cannot do any nifty solutions" or "we have to follow this law" thus defending (e.g. Hazgui & Gendron, 2015) their boundaries toward STA. On the same note, while it can be argued that STA is practicing collaborative, negotiating boundary work by asking "what can we do?" when receiving a "no" from CoG, they also practice a form of competitive boundary work. By criticizing CoGs inability to be flexible, and comparing them to other municipalities, STA may contribute to increasing the frustration towards CoG and construct an image of them being 'difficult', which might spread throughout the collaboration. Unintentional comments and comparisons from STA may therefore contribute to creating boundaries, separating CoG from STA.

While probably unintentionally, the frustrated relationship between STA and GoG also contributes to creating boundaries towards WRPT. We therefore argue that, by describing WRPT as a "tag along" or "little brother" or "last in line", representatives from STA and CoG practice competitive boundary work by using rhetoric that amplifies the differences between them and WRPT, thus contributing to the demarcation between them. According to Langley et al. (2019), boundaries are enacted by both deliberate and reflexive actions. We argue that the competitive boundary work directed toward WRPT is an unintentional, every day action form of boundary work. While not deliberately using phrases such as "tag along" or "last in line" to actively place WRPT last in line, the unconscious, reflexive behavior of actors within STA and CoG might affect how WRPT is perceived or treated elsewhere in the project. This, in turn, leads to defending of boundaries (e.g. Hazgui and Gendron's, 2015) on WRPTs part as they argue their importance and work tirelessly to protect the interest of public transportation. This shows, in line with Sanders & Harrison (2008) and Ybema et al. (2012), that boundary work can be carried out without any planned deliberate efforts. It is therefore important for actors within a collaboration to be careful of how one expresses themselves about other parties since it might spread throughout the collaboration which in turn can lead to infected relationships and more deliberate forms of competitive boundary work.

While not being part of the Pyramid, the contractors are still distinctly present in the collaboration. As a result, we find both collaborative and competitive forms of boundary work within the collaboration that are simultaneous and mutually affecting. The turnkey contract form entails that the contract owner (STA) and the contractor work in a close relationship

throughout the construction process, and in our case, the four segment offices were shared between STA and the contractors. We find that STA practiced downplaying (e.g. Meier, 2015; Ybema et al., 2012; Quick & Feldman, 2014) of boundaries toward their contractors by placing themselves closely together, both physically and symbolically. Any boundaries separating STA from the contractors then became blurred, showing highly collaborative forms of boundary work. However, CoG and WRPT is not part of this relationship as they are not allowed to speak directly to the contractors but should go via STA. This illustrates a deliberate effort of competitive boundary work from STA as, by separating their contractors from WRPT and CoG, STA contributes to creating boundaries between them. As a result, this relationship comprises multiple forms of boundary work at once. When contractors' go against established principles and wishes of the collaborating partners, WRPT have sometimes felt the need to bypass STA and talk to the contractors directly. WRPT can then be argued to practice collaborative boundary work as they try to downplay (e.g. Meier, 2015; Ybema et al., 2012) boundaries between themselves and the contractor by not acknowledging any separation. At the same time, the reason for it is to defend (e.g. Martin et al., 2009; Burri, 2008) their own role and processes, thus practicing competitive boundary work.

Boundary work over time

The aspect of time is found to be of great importance in the West Link case as it illustrates how boundaries and boundary work shift and change over time and that it is enacted by the everyday practices of people (Meier, 2015; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). In the beginning of the project, it can be argued that parties engaged in purposeful collaborative forms of boundary work. By not addressing their various differences and how these might create conflicts, the parties were able to redirect focus to the issues that were of common interest. Any organizational boundaries between them were thus downplayed (e.g. Meier, 2015; Ybema et al., 2012; Quick & Feldman, 2014), and put away from sight, giving the collaborating parties a greater feeling of togetherness, making the collaboration run somewhat smoothly. However, when the project moved into the construction phase, things needed to happen faster and the organizational differences grew more apparent. Boundary work then turned more defending (e.g. Hazgui and Gendron's, 2015) and contesting (e.g. Bucher et al., 2016; Sanders & Harrison, 2008) as interests and objectives collided. Parties then started to guard their own interests, rather than working together to find a collective solution. In this case, the aspect of time shows how, what was originally collaborative boundary work shifted into more competitive forms of boundary work as the surroundings changed. In line with Lindberg et al. (2017) and Garud et al. (2014), this illustrates how boundary work can change in a sequential manner and that boundaries and boundary work are not static, but shift through social interactions (Meier, 2015; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010) and purposeful efforts (Langley et al., 2019). Therefore, we argue that the collaborating parties also hold the capacity to affect the boundary work being performed. By taking a more deliberate stance toward the boundaries between them, the collaborating parties might be able to return to more collaborative forms of boundary work and perhaps a somewhat similar setting as in the beginning of the project. However, as of today, we find limited efforts in trying to achieve this turn in boundary work.

Coexisting forms of boundary work - purposeful and reflexive actions

As illustrated many times over, the West Link collaboration is a setting of multiple, coexisting forms of boundary work. Previous research (e.g. Langley et al., 2019) have argued the case of coexisting forms of boundary work, stating that boundary work is never wholly collaborative or competitive. However, in contrast to Lindberg et al. (2017) or Garud et al. (2014), we show that these various forms of boundary work do not simply happen sequentially, rather, they are also simultaneous. There are both collaborative and competitive forms of boundary work being carried out by individuals on various different boundaries within the Pyramid at the same point in time. There are conflicting forms of boundary work being carried out by people from different sides on the same boundary, e.g. negotiating or defending the structure of the Pyramid. There are also multiple forms of boundary work being practiced by one and the same individual when engaging different boundaries. A representative from CoG may practice negotiation (e.g. Apesoa-Varano, 2013; Kellogg et al., 2006) when wearing the collaborative ‘hat’ but will defend (e.g. Hazgui and Gendron’s, 2015) their boundaries when practicing the role of a monitoring authority.

Both Quick and Feldman (2014) and Bucher et al. (2016) acknowledge that multiple forms of boundary work in their studies overlapped and were used in conjunction. However, they do not consider how these interact or affect each other. Our study shows that collaborative and competitive forms of boundary work is not simply coexisting in both sequential and simultaneous ways, they are also interactive and mutually affecting. For example, managers wish to perform collaborative boundary work, thus practicing configurational boundary work in creating a boundary organization. This boundary organization in turn leads to the emergence of both collaborative and competitive forms of boundary work as multiple boundaries are engaged at the same time.

Langley et al. (2019) argued that the level of agency has varied in previous boundary work research. Scholars have often focused on either purposeful, deliberate actions to affect boundaries (e.g. Mørk et al., 2012) or on the reflexive, everyday actions (e.g. Sanders & Harrison, 2008; Ybema et al., 2012). Our case shows that it is not only different forms of boundary work that exist simultaneously, but that these forms may be performed with varying degrees of purposefulness. However, our study also show that collaborative boundary work practices more often seem to emerge from deliberate intent than the competitive forms. For example, the collaborative forms of boundary work often take a more formal role as all three organizations participate in deliberate actions of creating a boundary organization, negotiating, downplaying and blurring boundaries in order to enable collaboration. The competitive forms of boundary work however, seem to be more connected to reflexive and unintentional actions performed by representatives as they perform their everyday work. The competitive forms of boundary work are often performed through unintentional rhetoric, e.g. calling WRPT “little brother” or expressing frustration of CoG not being flexible. We therefore argue that in the case of collaboration projects, collaborative forms of boundary work emerge from purposeful actions and competitive forms of boundary work result from reflexive responses of everyday work.

1 Unit or 3 Parties - a uniting ideology

Within the collaboration organization, we identify an inherent struggle and ambiguity whether the West Link is to be conducted as one unit or if it should be accomplished by three separate parties coordinating their individual efforts. The Pyramid is framed around common goals of ‘good cooperation’ and ‘we do this together’. However, this “togetherness” and “unity” is not expressed as a given. We find an ideal of “doing this together” that has been introduced to the individuals of the collaboration project to aim for. However, in practice, this ideal is overshadowed by a focus on individual interests and challenges, leading to various forms of competitive boundary work.

However, when facing the public, the collaborating partners put effort into portraying an image of being one unit building the West Link. Any boundaries between STA, CoG and WRPT are then downplayed (e.g. Meier, 2015; Ybema et al., 2012; Quick & Feldman, 2014), presented as non-existing, for the sake of showing a united front toward the public. However, as the above discussions have illustrated, the relationship between the organizations within the collaboration project is rather different in practice. What is evident from our findings is that the three organizations went into the collaboration project with different aims and understandings of the made-up collaboration structure and upcoming work. People within the collaboration project thus have different views and expectations of the collaboration organization. One person has the idea that they should do things together while someone else believe that resources are to be coordinated from different parties to enable the West Link. Ultimately, some people view the three organizations as one unit building the West Link, while others view the organizations as three separate parties. As our finding have illustrated, this has led to a lot of confusion and frustration.

In the end of the day, all three parties want the West Link to be a success. They all believe in the positive outcomes that the West Link can bring and that it is an important investment for the city of Gothenburg and the region at large. The three organizations within the collaboration project can therefore be said to be driven by something similar to what Apesoa-Varano (2013) describes as an ‘ideology of care’. In this case, one could argue that STA, CoG and WRPT are driven by an ‘ideology of the West Link’ which exists as an overarching guidance for all parties involved in the collaboration project. That despite all the frustration, discussions back and forth and not understanding each other, which often enforces the boundaries between them, the ‘ideology of the West Link’ can be seen as an aspect that, in the end, might help the overall collaborative work across boundaries.

Conclusion

The aim of the study has been to bring attention to what people actually do in practice as they engage in inter-organizational collaboration projects within and between public organizations. This has been done by exploring what challenges a collaboration between three public organizations might be facing and how these challenges affect boundary work. We find that some of the main difficulties lies in coping with organizational differences, not meeting on equal terms in regards to decision mandate and political governance, how to organize, frame and define the collaboration and what form of entrepreneurial contracts are used. These challenges have greatly affected the practices of boundary work within the collaboration,

leading to multiple, coexisting and sometimes conflicting forms of boundary work being performed simultaneously. In line with previous boundary work research (e.g. Langley et al., 2019; Mørk et al., 2012; Ybema et al., 2012), we have showed that boundaries and boundary work is socially constructed, formed by both deliberate initiatives and reflexive everyday actions. Boundaries and boundary work are thus not static in their nature but will change over time, influenced by the surrounding context. We have thereby contributed to the boundary work research area by illustrating and exemplifying the coexistence of conflicting forms of boundary work being performed simultaneously, while also considering multiple boundaries and differing perspectives.

Traditional approaches to boundary work have had a dichotomized view of the various forms of boundary work, regarding them as mutually exclusive (Lindberg et al., 2017). We contrast this by illustrating that different forms of boundary work are mutually affecting as one form of boundary work can lead to another form being performed somewhere else. Sometimes, these affecting forms of boundary work may even be practiced at the same boundary as a collaborative form might be met by a competitive form. We have also contributed to the field of boundary work by showing that the level of agency in boundary work varies and that it is not solely purposeful or reflexive actions that perform boundary work.

For managerial consideration, our research has illustrated that organizational differences can have great impact on inter-organizational collaboration. In line with previous research (Huxham, 2000), we have illustrated the importance of framing the collaboration and exemplified ways of how this can influence the collaborative work. Our case thus shows the importance of clearly establishing roles, objectives, mandates and structural differences. In regards to public organizations, there is also a need to consider the possibly limiting and constricting effects of political government, which can vary greatly between organizations.

It is common that when entering a collaboration, parties focus on what they have in common, such as interests, goals and contributions. However, our case demonstrates how it is equally, if not more, important to also address differences and possible conflicts of interest in the beginning of an inter-organizational collaboration, as it is found to be difficult to handle later on. It is evident that creating a boundary organization with multiple boundaries as a structure to enhance collaboration does not fulfill its purpose if everyone has different images of what the project is.

This case show that collaborative forms of boundary work seem to have a higher level of purposefulness than competitive forms. As a collaboration project generally revolves around collaborating, it is likely that this is the case for other forms of inter-organizational collaborations as well. It could therefore be interesting for future research to investigate the relationship between level of agency and form of boundary work in other inter-organizational collaboration settings.

In this paper, we have observed how factors such as organizational differences and framing of collaboration has affected collaborative project work. However, a collaboration project is also part of a larger context and subject to numerous external pressures that might affect and influence collaborative parties. It would therefore be interesting for future research to consider the external context of the collaboration, taking into account how external factors influence the permanent organizations and their collaborative work.

References

- Allen, D. (2009). From boundary concept to boundary object: The practice and politics of care pathway development. *Social Science & Medicine*, 69(3), 354-361.
- Apesoa-Varano, E. (2013). Interprofessional Conflict and Repair. A Study of Boundary Work in the Hospital. *Sociological Perspectives*, 56(3), 327-349.
- Arvidsson, N. (2009). Exploring tensions in projectified matrix organisations. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 25(1), 97-107.
- Azambuja, R., & Islam, G. (2019). Working at the boundaries: Middle managerial work as a source of emancipation and alienation. *Human Relations*, 72(3), 534-564.
- Bakker, R., Defillippi, R., Schwab, A., & Sydow, J. (2016). Temporary Organizing: Promises, Processes, Problems. *Organization Studies*, 37(12), 1703-1719.
- Brunsson, N., & Sahlin-Andersson, K. (2000). Constructing Organizations: The Example of Public Sector Reform. *Organization Studies*, 21(4), 721-746.
- Bryman, A., & Bell, E. (2017). *Företagsekonomiska Forskningsmetoder* (3 ed.). Malmö: Libris.
- Bucher, S., Chreim, S., Langley, A., & Reay, T. (2016). Contestation about Collaboration: Discursive Boundary Work among Professions. *Organization Studies*, 37(4), 497-522.
- Burri, R. (2008). Doing Distinctions: Boundary Work and Symbolic Capital in Radiology. *Social Studies of Science*, 38(1), 35-62.
- Bygballe, L., Swärd, A., & Vaagaasar, A. (2016). Coordination in construction projects and the emergence of synchronized readiness. *International Journal of Project Management*, 34(8), 1479-1492.
- Canonica, P., & Söderlund, J. (2010). Getting control of multi-project organizations: Combining contingent control mechanisms. *International Journal of Project Management*, 28(8), 796-806.
- Chiocchio, F., Forgues, D., Paradis, D., & Iordanova, I. (2011). Teamwork in integrated design projects: Understanding the effects of trust, conflict, and collaboration on performance. *Project Management Journal*, 42(6), 78-91.
- Cicmil, S., Williams, T., Thomas, J., & Hodgson, D. (2006). Rethinking Project Management: Researching the actuality of projects. *International Journal of Project Management*, 24(8), 675-686.
- Comeau-Vallée, M., & Langley, A. (2019). The Interplay of Inter- and Intraprofessional Boundary Work in Multidisciplinary Teams. *Organization Studies*, 1-24.
- Crawford, L., Costello, K., Pollack, J., & Bentley, L. (2003). Managing soft change projects in the public sector. *International Journal of Project Management*, 21(6), 443-448.
- Edlinger, G. (2015). Employer brand management as boundary-work: A grounded theory analysis of employer brand managers' narrative accounts. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 25(4), 443-457.
- Ellis, N., & Ybema, S. (2010). Marketing Identities: Shifting Circles of Identification in Inter-organizational Relationships. *Organization Studies*, 31(3), 279-305.
- Engwall, M. (2003). No project is an island: Linking projects to history and context. *Research Policy*, 32(5), 789-808.

- Faraj, S., & Xiao, Y. (2006). Coordination in fast-response organizations. *Management Science*, 52, 1155-1189.
- Farias, C. (2017). Money is the Root of All Evil – Or Is It? Recreating Culture through Everyday Neutralizing Practices. *Organization Studies*, 38(6), 775-793.
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five misunderstandings about case-study research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(2), 219-245.
- Garud, R., Gehman, J., & Karunakaran, A. (2014). Boundaries, breaches, and bridges: The case of Climategate. *Research Policy*, 43(1), 60-73.
- Gieryn, T. (1983). Boundary-work and the demarcation of science from non-science: Strains and interests in professional ideologies of scientists. *American Sociological Review*, 48(6), 781-795.
- Giezen, M. (2012). Keeping it simple? A case study into the advantages and disadvantages of reducing complexity in mega project planning. *International Journal of Project Management*, 30(7), 781-790.
- Greenman, A., Wright, M., & Marlow, S. (2011). Entrepreneurial activities and occupational boundary work during venture creation and development in the cultural industries. *International Small Business Journal*, 30(2), 115-137.
- Göteborgs stad. (2020). *Stadsutveckling Göteborg*. Retrieved May 5, 2020, from <https://stadsutveckling.goteborg.se/projekt/vastlanken/>
- Hazgui, M., & Gendron, Y. (2015). Blurred roles and elusive boundaries: On contemporary forms of oversight surrounding professional work. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, 28(8), 1234–1262.
- Hobday, M. (2000). The project-based organisation: An ideal form for managing complex products and systems? *Research Policy*, 29(7), 871-893.
- Hodgson, D., Fred, M., Bailey, S., & Hall, P. (2019). *The projectification of the public sector (Routledge critical studies in public management)*. New York: Routledge.
- Huxham, C. (1993). Pursuing Collaborative Advantage. *Journal of the Operational Research Society: Interface between OR and the Social Sciences*, 44(6), 599-611.
- Huxham, C., Vangen, S., Huxham, C., & Eden, C. (2000). The Challenge of Collaborative Governance. *Public Management: An International Journal of Research and Theory*, 2(3), 337-358.
- Håland, E. (2012). Introducing the electronic patient record (EPR) in a hospital setting: Boundary work and shifting constructions of professional identities. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 34(5), 761-775.
- Jensen, A., Thuesen, C., & Geraldi, J. (2016). The projectification of everything: Projects as a human condition. *Project Management Journal*, 47(3), 21-34.
- Johansson, S., Löfström, M., & Ohlsson, Ö. (2007). Separation or integration? A dilemma when organizing development projects. *International Journal Of Project Management*, 25(5), 457-464.
- Jurisch, M., Ikas, C., Wolf, P., & Krcmar, H. (2013). Key Differences of Private and Public Sector Business Process Change. *E-Service Journal: A Journal of Electronic Services in the Public and Private Sectors*, 9(1), 3-27.

- Kellogg, K. C., Orlikowski, W. J., & Yates, J. (2006). Life in the trading zone: Structuring coordination across boundaries in postbureaucratic organizations. *Organization Science*, 17(1), 22-44.
- Kent, D., & Becerik-Gerber, B. (2010). Understanding construction industry experience and attitudes toward integrated project delivery. *Journal of Construction Engineering and Management*, 136(8), 815-825.
- Kvale, S. (2006). Dominance Through Interviews and Dialogues. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(3), 480-500.
- Lamont, M., & Molnár, V. (2002). The study of boundaries in the social sciences. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 28(1), 167-195.
- Langley, A., Lindberg, K., Mørk, B. E., Nicolini, D., Raviola, E., & Walter, L. (2019). Boundary work among groups, occupations, and organizations: From cartography to process. *Academy Of Management Annals*, 13(2), 704-736.
- Lindberg, K., Walter, L., & Raviola, E. (2017). Performing boundary work: The emergence of a new practice in a hybrid operating room. *Social Science & Medicine*, 182, 81-88.
- Lohr, K., Weinhardt, M., Graef, F., & Sieber, S. (2018). Enhancing communication and collaboration in collaborative projects through conflict prevention and management systems. *Organizational Dynamics*, 47 (4), 259-264.
- Lundin, R. A., & Söderholm, A. (1995). A theory of the temporary organisation. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 11(4), 437—455.
- Löfström, M. (2010). Inter-organizational collaboration projects in the public sector: A balance between integration and demarcation. *International Journal of Health Planning and Management*, 25(2), 136-155.
- Martin, G., Currie, G., & Finn, R. (2009). Reconfiguring or reproducing intra-professional boundaries? Specialist expertise, generalist knowledge and the ‘modernization’ of the medical workforce. *Social Science & Medicine*, 68(7), 1191-1198.
- Martin, P. Y., & Turner, B. A. (1986). Grounded theory and organizational research. *The Journal of Applied Behavioural Science*, 2, 141-157.
- Maurer, I. (2010). How to build trust in inter-organizational projects: The impact of project staffing and project rewards on the formation of trust, knowledge acquisition and product innovation. *International Journal of Project Management*, 28(7), 629-637.
- Meier, N. (2015). Collaboration in Healthcare Through Boundary Work and Boundary Objects. *Qualitative Sociology Review*, 11(3), 60-82.
- Myers, M., & Newman, M. (2007). The qualitative interview in IS research: Examining the craft. *Information and Organization*, 17(1), 2-26.
- Mørk, B., Hoholm, T., Maaninen-Olsson, E., & Aanestad, M. (2012). Changing practice through boundary organizing: A case from medical R&D. *Human Relations*, 65(2), 263-288.
- Okhuysen, G. A., & Bechky, B. A. (2009). Coordination in organizations: An integrative perspective. *The Academy of Management Annals*, 3, 463-502.
- O'Mahony, S., & Bechky, B. (2008). Boundary Organizations: Enabling Collaboration among Unexpected Allies. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 53(3), 422-459.
- Patel, R., & Davidson, B. (2011). *Forskningsmetodikens grunder: att planera, genomföra och rapportera en undersökning*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

- Pauget, B., & Wald, A. (2013). Relational competence in complex temporary organizations: The case of a French hospital construction project network. *International Journal of Project Management*, 31(2), 200-211.
- Pine, K., & Mazmanian, M. (2017). Artful and Contorted Coordinating: The Ramifications of Imposing Formal Logics of Task Jurisdiction on Situated Practice. *Academy of Management Journal*, 60(2), 720-742.
- Quick, K., & Feldman, M. (2014). Boundaries as Junctures: Collaborative Boundary Work for Building Efficient Resilience. *Journal Of Public Administration Research And Theory*, 24(3), 673-695.
- Ramsing, L. (2009). Project communication in a strategic internal perspective. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 14(3), 345-357.
- Sahlin-Andersson, K., & Söderholm, A. (2002). *Beyond Project Management. New Perspectives on the Temporary-Permanent Dilemma*. Stockholm: Liber.
- Sanders, T., & Harrison, S. (2008). Professional legitimacy claims in the multidisciplinary workplace: The case of heart failure care. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 30(2), 289-308.
- Silverman, D. (2017). *Doing Qualitative Research* (5 ed.). SAGE.
- Sosa, M., Gargiulo, M., & Rowles, C. (2015). Can informal communication networks disrupt coordination in new product development projects? *Organization Science*, 26(4), 1059-1078.
- Styhre, A. (2006). The bureaucratization of the project manager function: The case of the construction industry. *International Journal of Project Management*, 24(3), 271-276.
- Sun, J., & Zhang, P. (2011). Owner organization design for mega industrial construction projects. *International Journal of Project Management*, 29(7), 828-833.
- Sun, W., Mollaoglu, S., Miller, V., & Manata, B. (2015). Communication Behaviors to Implement Innovations: How Do AEC Teams Communicate in IPD Projects? *Project Management Journal*, 46(1), 84-96.
- Söderlund, J., & Sydow, J. (2019). Projects and institutions: Towards understanding their mutual constitution and dynamics. *International Journal of Project Management*, 37(2), 529-268.
- Trafikverket. (2015). Projekt Västlänken och Olskroken Planskildhet - en kortversion av vår övergripande projektplan.
- Turner, R., & Zolin, R. (2012). Forecasting Success on Large Projects: Developing Reliable Scales to Predict Multiple Perspectives by Multiple Stakeholders Over Multiple Time Frames. *Project Management Journal*, 43(5), 87-99.
- Williams, D., & Parr, T. (2006). *Enterprise programme management: delivering value*. Pelgrave MacMillan.
- Xue, X., Shen, Q., & Ren, Z. (2010). Critical review of collaborative working in construction projects: business environment and human behaviors. *Journal of Management in Engineering*, 26(4), 196-208.
- Ybema, S., Vroemisse, M., & van Marrewijk, A. (2012). Constructing identity by deconstructing differences: Building partnerships across cultural and hierarchical divides. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 28(1), 48-59.

- Zhang, L., Cao, T., & Wang, Y. (2018). The mediation role of leadership styles in integrated project collaboration: An emotional intelligence perspective. *International Journal of Project Management*, 36(2), 317-330.
- Zietsma, C., & Lawrence, T. (2010). Institutional Work in the Transformation of an Organizational Field: The Interplay of Boundary Work and Practice Work. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 55(2), 189-221.