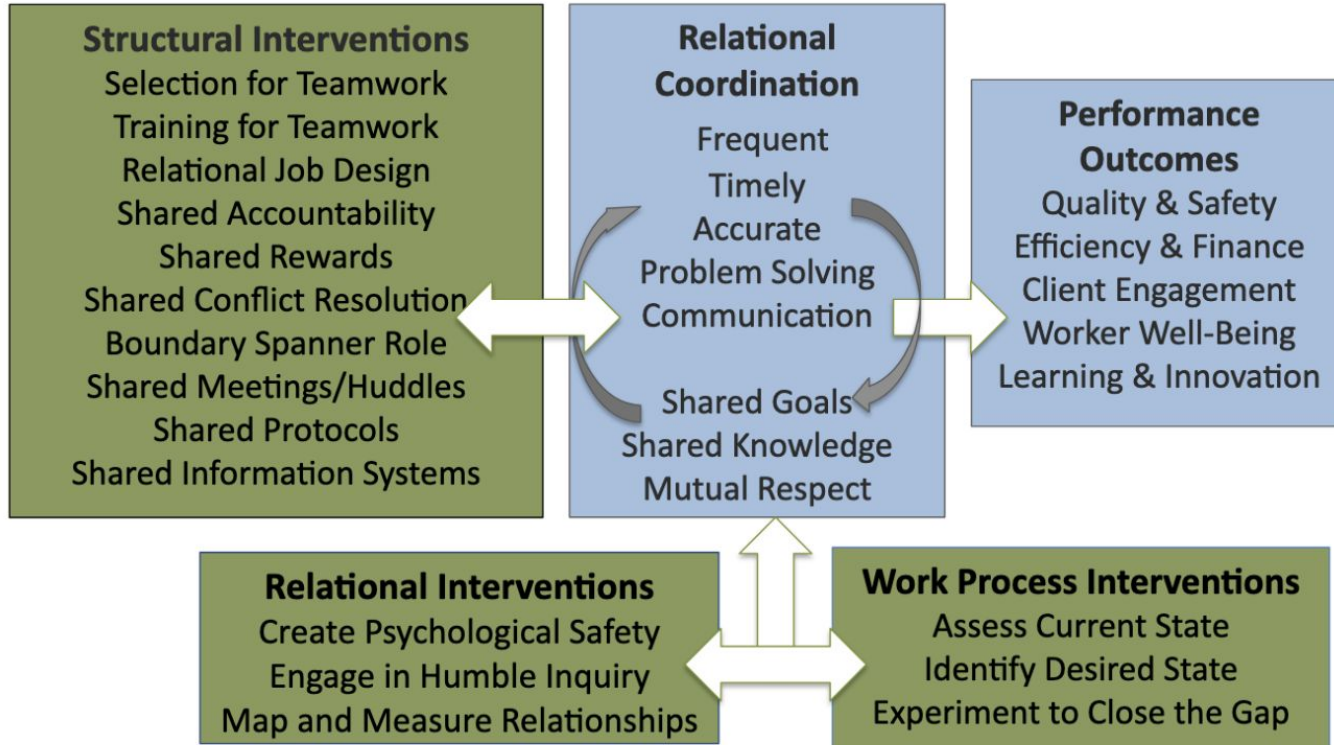


# Boundary spanner role

- **What It Is:** Boundary spanners manage the flow of information across functional or organizational boundaries. Effective boundary spanners do more than process information however. Effective boundary spanners are also engaged in relationship-building, developing relationships of shared goals, shared knowledge and mutual respect among participants to facilitate the coordination of work.
- **Why It Matters:** Boundary spanners are particularly important for coordinating work when participants perform very different tasks and therefore have very different perspectives on what needs to be done.
- **How To Do It:** Guided by results of the Org Structures Assessment, identify which jobs are supported - and which are not supported - by a boundary spanner role. Consider expanding the current boundary spanner job description to support all roles that need to coordinate. Develop a new boundary spanner job description if none exists. Ensure adequate boundary spanner staffing levels to meet coordination needs.

# Boundary spanner role is part of the Relational Model of Change



# Other structures in the Relational Model of Change

- Selecting & training for teamwork
- Relational job design
- Shared accountability & rewards
- Shared conflict resolution
- Boundary spanner roles
- Shared meetings & huddles
- Shared protocols
- Shared information systems
- Shared space

A summary of the evidence:  
Bolton, R., Logan, C., & Gittell, J. H.  
(2021). [Revisiting relational  
coordination: A systematic review.](#)  
*The Journal of Applied Behavioral  
Science*, 57(3), 290-322.

Gittell, J. H. (2016). [Structural interventions](#) in *Transforming relationships for high performance: The power of relational coordination*. Stanford University Press.

# Identify needs using the Org Structures Assessment Tool

## Structures

	Nurses	Case managers	Physicians	Residents	Physical therapy	Respiratory therapy
Selecting for Teamwork	Strong Support	Strong Support	Weak Support	Weak Support	Moderate Support	Moderate Support
Training for Teamwork	Strong Support	Strong Support	Moderate Support	Moderate Support	Strong Support	Strong Support
Relational Job Design	Moderate Support	Moderate Support	Weak Support	Weak Support	Strong Support	Strong Support
Shared Accountability	Moderate Support	Weak Support	Moderate Support	Moderate Support	Moderate Support	Weak Support
Shared Rewards	Weak Support	Weak Support	Weak Support	Weak Support	Weak Support	Weak Support
Conflict Resolution	Strong Support	Strong Support	Moderate Support	Moderate Support	Strong Support	Strong Support
Boundary Spanner Role	Strong Support	Weak Support	Weak Support	Weak Support	Moderate Support	Weak Support
Shared Meetings & Huddles	Strong Support	Strong Support	Weak Support	Weak Support	Strong Support	Strong Support
Shared Protocols	Strong Support	Strong Support	Moderate Support	Moderate Support	Strong Support	Strong Support
Shared Info Systems	Strong Support	Strong Support	Strong Support	Strong Support	Strong Support	Strong Support
Shared Space	Weak Support	Weak Support	Moderate Support	Moderate Support	Moderate Support	Weak Support

 **WEAK SUPPORT**

 **MODERATE SUPPORT**

 **STRONG SUPPORT**

# What makes boundary spanners effective?

“What enables boundary spanners to be effective? Boundary spanners are expected to be more effective when there are fewer products, processes, or customers they are responsible for coordinating at any one time so they can devote more attention to each one.”

Gittell, J. H. (2009). *High performance healthcare: Using the power of relationships to achieve quality, efficiency and resilience*. McGraw-Hill.

# What makes a good boundary spanner?

“[Boundary spanners] have to be very very very good communicators and negotiators and very assertive but also have a good sense of timing. They have to be very collaborative. Need to have a great ability to deal with confidential and sensitive information. Have to have a good analytical ability to deal with financial issues. They have to be willing to be a patient advocate but also be able to balance the financial parameters and think ‘out of the box’ and have a systems perspective.”

Gittell, J. H. (2009). *High performance healthcare: Using the power of relationships to achieve quality, efficiency and resilience*. McGraw-Hill.

# What makes a good boundary spanner?

“The [boundary spanner] is a very difficult, very complex role. You’re balancing a lot of different roles. So it takes just the right person to be able to do it. And they have multiple reporting relationships. So it’s important that someone is able to deal with that kind of multifaceted negotiating relationship. So right away, when someone said ‘I can’t work for two bosses,’ I knew I had the wrong person. Because the nature of this role is having to negotiate things like that all of the time.”

Gittell, J. H. (2009). *High performance healthcare: Using the power of relationships to achieve quality, efficiency and resilience*. McGraw-Hill.

# Boundary spanners help to coordinate between jobs

“The operations agent’s job is important. It’s their responsibility to coordinate the flight. You need someone quarterbacking the flight departure.”

Gittell (2003). *The Southwest Airlines Way: Using the Power of Relationships to Achieve High Performance.*

# Boundary spanners as a type of relational job design

- Job design often overlooks relationships between jobs
- But people in different jobs need to work with others to deliver high performance outcomes
- Relational job design
  - Can design jobs for overlap between roles
  - Can design boundary spanners between roles
  - Can design in more interaction with the customer

# Boundary spanners as a type of relational job design

The boundary spanner job is to integrate the work of other people around a customer, process or project.

Boundary spanners build understanding between areas of expertise and add the most value when existing boundaries are most divisive.

## **Boundary spanners ensure space that is non-defensive, non-judgmental**

Boundary spanners support positive relational coordination when there is sufficient staffing to given the spanner time needed to engage in relational practice.

Boundary spanner keeps everyone on track resulting in significant payoffs in efficiency, quality performance, improved outcomes, and team satisfaction

# Evidence from research

## Find summary here:

Bolton, R., Logan, C., & Gittel, J. H. (2021). [Revisiting relational coordination: A systematic review](#). *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 57(3), 290-322

Klindt, M. P., Baadsgaard, K., & Jørgensen, H. (2024). [Boundary spanning and partnership performance: Bringing the structural perspective into the game](#). *Public Management Review*, 26(10), 2776-2801.