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Communication (and Coordination?) in a Modern, Complex Organization

by Adam M. Kleinbaum, Toby E. Stuart and [Michael L. Tushman](#)

Abstract

This is a descriptive study of the structure of communications in a modern organization. We analyze a dataset with millions of electronic mail messages, calendar meetings and teleconferences for many thousands of employees of a single, multidivisional firm during a three-month period in calendar 2006. The basic question we explore asks, what is the role of observable (to us) boundaries between individuals in structuring communications inside the firm? We measure three general types of boundaries: organizational boundaries (strategic business unit and function memberships), spatial boundaries (office locations and inter-office distances), and social categories (gender, tenure within the firm). In dyad-level models of the probability that pairs of individuals communicate, we find very large effects of formal organization structure and spatial collocation on the rate of communication. Homophily effects based on sociodemographic categories are much weaker. In individual-level regressions of engagement in category-spanning communication patterns, we find that women, mid- to high-level executives, and members of the executive management, sales and marketing functions are most likely to participate in cross-group communications. In effect, these individuals bridge the lacunae between distant groups in the company's social structure.

Keywords: [Business Conglomerates](#); [Interpersonal Communication](#); [Organizational Structure](#); [Social Issues](#); [Boundaries](#);

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About the Author

[Michael L. Tushman](#)

Baker Foundation Professor, Paul R. Lawrence MBA Class of 1942 Professor of Business Administration, Emeritus

Chair, Program for Leadership Development

[Organizational Behavior](#)[View Profile »](#)[View Publications »](#)