

# Something there is that doesn't love a wall

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## **Abstract**

### **Introduction**

The inspiration for this paper comes from a poem by the American poet Robert Frost and it provides the title of the paper. The poem was motivated by the experience Frost had, once a year, of walking the boundary wall with his neighbour and making good where the wall required mending. At one point Frost comments to his neighbour "There where it is we do not need the wall" but his neighbour replies "Good fences make good neighbours". The poem is clearly an exploration of the tension between whether walls are a good or bad thing in social relationships. In this paper we explore the notion of such walls in and between organisations.

Boundaries exist everywhere and there is an increasing interest in them and their properties. However in conceptualising walls we add another dimension. Walls constrain by definition; boundaries do necessarily do so.

In this paper we build on the literature of boundaries and develop a conceptual framework on the subject of walls which we use to structure the paper. In addition to sketching out the conceptual nature of walls we also provide some empirical examples of both the nature of walls and their consequences based on some empirical examples involving the relationship between a web design consultancy and one of its main multinational customers.

We conclude by suggesting how further research into walls might be carried out.

### **Boundaries**

Boundaries are, understandably, an important subject of study in the social sciences. "In recent years, the concept of boundaries has been at the center of influential research agendas in anthropology, history, political science, social psychology, and sociology" Lamont and Molnar (2002). However as Heracleous points out "In the management literature however, there has been little concerted study of the formation, properties and consequences of boundaries per se as complex, shifting, socially constructed entities" (Heracleous (2004), p95). However it should be noted that the boundaries that largely concern management and organisation researchers are those of organisations as opposed to boundaries within organisations.

Hernes ???offers a typology of such boundaries which includes the physical, social and mental (Hernes pp36-42). In a similar vein Mingers (2007), in his book on systems thinking, categorises boundaries into the physical, the conceptual and the social. Physical boundaries, he argues, can be further categorised into edges/ surfaces, enclosures which are defined as being "relatively impermeable"; membranes which are active enclosures which have to be actively maintained; and demarcations which are bounded systems such as a central heating system. He also observes that "So far we have assumed that an object has just one boundary but that is in general not the case (p69)."

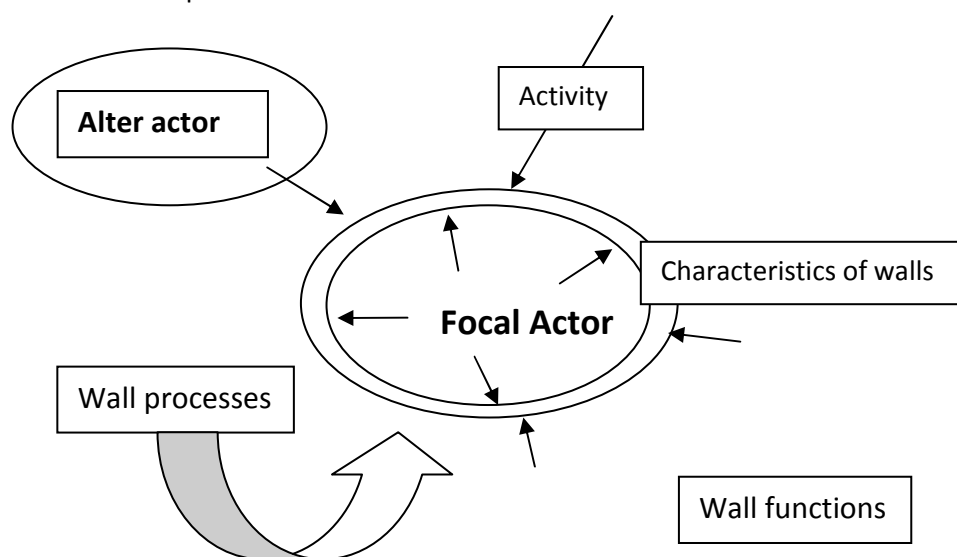
Conceptual boundaries are essentially language based, affected by the cognitive processes of individuals and therefore relative and debatable. However that does not mean that they are entirely

arbitrary and therefore incapable of being effective or understood. This view complements the notion of symbolic boundaries which is well established in the social sciences. “Symbolic boundaries are conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, practices, and even time and space” (Lamont and Molnar, p168). They point out that “Symbolic boundaries also separate people into groups and generate feelings of similarity and group membership” (Lamont and Molnar, p168). When it comes to social system boundaries the issue of definition becomes even more contentious. Membership is one measure of a social system but what are the measures of such membership? Are they to be identified only by their self admission or by behaviour or by their allocation to a group by some outside agency? Mingers (p84) relies on the processes involved i.e. whether there are autopoietic practices involved. Lamont and Molnar offer two options. “Social boundaries are objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources (material and non material)) and social opportunities“(Lamont and Molnar, p168). Heracleous offers a more down to earth definition of social boundaries “....organizational boundaries are in the final analysis intersubjective, negotiated, and set through the decisions and actions or organizational actors (Heracleous (2004) p99). We argue that intraorganisational boundaries could be characterised in the same way. Boundaries exist within and between organisations.

## Walls

We define walls as anything which prevents an actor, human or material, from undertaking a set of activities. This is a limited and limiting definition but one which provides an entry into the complex nature of walls.

Walls are largely but not entirely invisible, are universally present and have a major influence on human events. The term wall was chosen to represent this entity not simply because of the Frost poem, though Frost does alludes to some of the features that walls possess, but mainly to distinguish it from the notion of boundary. Walls are boundaries but not all boundaries act as walls. Walls are, of course, boundaries but they have powers in their own right. Most significantly they prevent access, of exit and entry, to a particular space or, more widely, prevent movement between a number of such spaces.



**A Model of Walls**

## **Activity**

Walls represent as an absence; an absence of activity. In the diagram above the arrows represent potential activities which cannot take place because of the existence of a wall. For example it might be due to the poor performance of another actor or actant. Moreover the attitude of the focal actor towards this constraint may be frustration, indifference or contentment. It is often helpful to have an excuse for not carrying out a specific task.

It is equally important to note that walls can operate in reciprocal ways. For focal actors the wall might very well be protective in that it ensures that they are not required to undertake activities because of the wall.

## **Function**

Why do walls exist? We need walls to give us direction and help us decide what actions we should take among the infinity of possibilities that we would otherwise face. In this paper we will be concentrating specifically on the actors involved in buyer – seller situations.

Individuals need to undertake activities in order to exist. A castaway on a desert island has to find food and shelter in order to survive and hence has choices to make about what to do, when and in what order. Those choices are constrained by the physical environment and by the capacities of the individual concerned. S/he is walled in but not entirely so. Even in this highly constrained situation s/he can never be sure whether the choices are the best that could be made. The problem of making the best choice would be much more problematic were some of the constraints removed.

We would argue that there are always walls between the many different kinds of actors in Business to Business markets beginning with individual humans and working up to industrial networks. Some are designed, planned and enacted by humans; others, perhaps the majority, simply occur as the result of human attempts to organise, which in this context is taken to mean any human activity.

Terms such as walls, barriers and constraints tend to have rather negative connotations and there have been many books and papers written on the need to remove barriers between and within organisations. The general assumption of such writing seems to be that openness is necessarily a good thing since it must, for example, help actors to be more sensitive and reactive to their environments and be enabled them to marshal their resources in response.

However the opposite is also true. If individual actors are either or both too accessible to outside influences and have too many choices to make their situation will become untenable. Walls could also be said to be regarded as that set of activities which do not occur which might possibly occur.

Actors need to have their options limited either by their own decision, or by the decision of some other actor (e.g. their manager), in order to carry out a feasible and / or acceptable action set.

Walls ensure focus and concentration on relevant activities as, for example, they do in organisations in terms of individual actors' roles and functions. Between buying and selling organisations they help to wall off activities that might provide the other actor with unacceptable advantages in the exchange relationships. Mathematical programming provides a helpful metaphor in this case. In order to find an optimum solution to a resource allocation problem, such as a particular mix of inputs in a petroleum refinery, it is necessary to know not only the quantifiable different values of all the alternatives (output levels) but also the constraints which they are subject to (processing temperatures).

Clearly both the cases of few and impenetrable walls and many and highly porous walls are likely to be disastrous for any organisation and also for interorganisational relationships. There is a balance, or more likely a tension, between the two extremes and this is the tension that Frost is writing about

in his poem. He does not attempt to resolve that tension and, of course, there can be no optimum level of balance. This is at least partly due to that fact that walls are, in general, both rather indistinct and multivariable. A particular wall might be somewhat open in some respects and somewhat closed in others.

Walls constrain, protect and enable. All of these properties can have positive or negative outcomes for actors. They constrain by not allowing an actor to act in the way that they would prefer to (Example; a request by a customer to a Key Account Manager to change an order quantity up until the last minute). Walls protect by preventing others acting in ways that the actor would be unhappy with (Example; a salesperson's job description). Walls enable in that they can either or both create a pathway of activity that is satisfactory for the actor or constrain another actor, so increasing the possibilities for the focal actor (Example; marketing plan). In summary, walls act to constrain and/ or controlling; protecting and shelter; open up and liberate – all at the same time.

### **Actors**

Walls, as we define them, are ubiquitous in both human and material worlds. We are under their influence all of the time but specifically, in this instance, the actors are involved in buyer – seller situations.

Walls are discussed here in terms of how they affect actors and so the nature and type of actor involved is likely to be an important determinant of wall structures and processes. For example actors can, in theory, be human or non human. In the latter case the walls are likely to be more constraining than would be the case for a human actor since material objects cannot, in general, act without human intervention. For example products are central to many B2B exchange relationships and their properties are more or less fixed by their specifications and mode of manufacture. There are activities that they can allow and those that they can prevent. They create walls for human actors but cannot normally vary those walls without human actors deciding to make this possible.

Human actors can be categorised in terms of their numbers and groupings. In this paper the categories adopted are individual, group (e.g. section, department, division etc), organisation and interorganisational relationship.

### **Characteristics of Walls**

Walls can be characterised in a number of different ways. In this paper we have chosen to use the categories similar to, but not identical with, those suggested by the authors previously discussed. In particular the social category has been expanded to deal with boundaries other than the organisational boundaries and another important category, time, has been added. The categories are physical / material; individual (cognitive, affective); social (different organisational levels) and what might be termed generic characterises of walls such as time and permeability. However the most important characteristic is how they are likely to act in relationship to the activities which are prevented by the existence of the wall.

#### **Non Human/Material Actors**

Walls can also simply be walls, of plasterboard, brick or concrete. Social relationships are affected by the materiality of the environments in which such relationships exist. For example open plan offices have quite different social characteristics compared with closed plan offices. Social relations are also affected by the ergonomic and design features of work environments.

Machines, while material, have more complex effects on human activity. Exchanges and relationships of many different kinds, within and between organisations, are now heavily mediated by electronic devices and systems, both fixed and mobile. A crucial characteristic of such systems is the accessibility that such systems need to offer. Access to information is equally important and the quality of both the information concerned, mostly likely in digital form, and the ease with which it can be acquired are central to the avoidance of unhelpful walls.

These material actors are examples of boundary objects which mediate, for good or ill, relationships between social actors (Mason and Easton (2009)). Discussion of boundary objects has often been confined to material objects and the facilitative function that they offer. However we would argue that boundary objects can also act as walls and can involve human as well as non human actors

### Space

Space, in terms of the distance between actors, is a material actor in the sense that it is a general measure of the distance between actors. In the first instance this can simply refer to how far away one actor is from another. There is ample evidence that individuals in an office space who are more distant from one another are less likely to communicate. For example situating departments on different floors of a building usually means that casual communication is severely curtailed. Actions that necessarily require face to face communication will probably take place but it is often the less “necessary”, but also somewhat useful, informal communications that often turn out to be significant. If the term space is modified to mean generalised accessibility then the issue becomes even more important. In broad terms it means that walls can be created by communication systems that favour certain pathways rather than others. In general the greater the distance between actors the more likely there is to be a wall.

### Individual human actors

Walls also differ in terms of the actors involved, more specifically their number and character.

Individual actors face “one great *blooming, buzzing confusion*” (James (1920)) which they have to make sense of. As individuals their actions are not only determined by walls created by external actors but also by walls that imprison them within their own heads. For example they may not possess the necessary information or cognitive, technical or social skills to carry out the required activities. More particularly Naturalistic Decision Making (NDM) researchers suggest that there are two different types of decision-making; pattern recognition and mental simulation (Vanharanta and Easton (2009)). The first involves repeated decision-making situations in which firstly recognition of the need to make a decision occurs, secondly identification of a suitable action response based upon past experience of similar situations is made and thirdly appropriate action is taken. The second involves taking action in situations where previous experience is somewhat limited. In this case mental simulation of possible outcomes occurs and the action with the most promising outcome is chosen. Such extrapolations require considerable skill and their absence represents a wall that can prevent action from taking place. However walls may be attitudinal as well as cognitive and actors may be reluctant to take actions that they believe are likely to result in outcomes deleterious to the organisation or run counter to their beliefs.

Actions are driven not only by cognitions but also by affective and emotional states of mind. If focal actors do not wish for some reason, which would be regarded as “irrational”, to carry out an activity then they can create rationalised walls which can persuade others that the activity should not take place

### Social and Political Actors

While the individual actor faces internal walls there are also walls which exist around them in the guise of other social actors. Walls are created by social others in terms of the roles they take in our lives and the expectations they “send”. Such roles are a combination of what the necessary behaviours are for a fellow employee, the holder of a particular functional role and what the necessary behaviours for a colleague are. More generally cultural differences create walls in terms of both national and organisational cultures.

Actors are constrained by a set of political forces of various kinds one of which, formal power, requires that certain “rules of engagement” are adhered to by an individual in respect of his or her actions in their exchange activities with the internal and external parties. In addition there are the general formal rules of the organisation as well as the specific job specifications to more or less adhere to.

### Organisational Actors

At the organisational level walls are imposed on individuals and agencies within an organisational network for the purposes of structuring and categorization of ownership and work allocation; and created by agencies and individuals to define, defend and strengthen their position. As agencies or individuals continually redefine and shift their position within the network, so the walls must shift and evolve both constructively and destructively. Overlap (more permeable walls) might cause synergies or ‘stepping on toes’. Growing disparities (less permeable walls) might cause the creation of extra unnecessary work and poor communication and / or lead to the need for clearer definition of roles.

### Interorganisational Actors

In terms of buyer- seller relationships, all of the wall creation drivers described above will be present with the additional problem that a complex and structured wall necessarily exists between all of the actors at any level. For example the differing actor cognitions in the buying and selling organisations (e.g. high technology supplier vs low technology customer) may create a wall. These walls are only breached by the necessity to make exchanges so that both organisations can survive.

At a metaphorical system level the two options, weak walls and strong walls, would appear to mirror the differences between the two canonical alternatives “free” and relational markets. In the former case it is clear that many high walls are implied between buyers and sellers. In the latter there are fewer, weaker walls.

It is difficult to see how any market could operate where there are unscaleable walls between buyers and sellers or where there are no boundaries whatsoever. It makes better sense to follow Frost by accepting that in some places walls are not needed and in others they are. Put another way, to think of walls in terms of different kinds and levels of their permeability; managing the openness between organisations.

Finally there are likely, almost by definition that there will be walls between nets since nets are recognised by the strong boundaries that exist between them compared with the weaker boundaries within.

### Generic characteristics

Generic characteristics are those which refer to characteristics of the wall largely separate from the actors or actants involved.

### Permeability

A significant, albeit more specific dimension, is that of permeability. This can vary from huge, such that there is almost no wall in place, to negligible so that almost no access across the wall is possible. This is, of course, referred to in the Frost poem. The wall is breached in parts but not totally destroyed. It is now more permeable to certain kinds of actor such as people. They can now inhabit the space and act within it. But it was also previously permeable to birds, moles and probably any human actors who were nimble enough to climb over it but without affecting it in any way. It is also clear that walls can be permeable to some activities and not others. In organisational terms an example of permeability would be when a member of a department can refuse to give information about the performance of a fellow worker to a member of another department but could give information about the general performance of the whole department.

#### Strength

The strength of a wall can be assessed by how easy it is to break down or reduce its strength. In the Frost poem the wall is clearly a dry stone wall and while it is unlikely to be breached by a small animal it would be relatively easy for a hunter to remove a few stones. This would not be the case were the wall made of concrete blocks cemented into place. In the same way a wall in an organisation can be very difficult to breach if, for example, it involves an office worker gaining access to the CEO.

#### Absorption / Reflection

Walls may be absorptive or reflective. In the former case activity may take place which appears to cross the wall but the result is that the activity has no effect. This is typical of the situations where it is clear that actors are simply “going through the motions” such that the activity does not achieve what it as meant to achieve. This is often happens when major organisational initiatives are launched. Alternatively it may be that it is not clear that a wall actually exists, a common experience for new comers to organisations. In the Frost poem it would be obvious to humans why the wall existed since the meaning of wall is understood. To animals this will not be the case.

#### Ephemeral / Transient

Many of the individual, social and organisational walls are ephemeral since they are features of human behaviour although others will not if they are based upon strong beliefs and are constantly reinforced by other actors and actants.

#### Multiplicity

Multiple walls are obviously present all the time with different effects, defined in relation to certain activities and they will interact with one another

#### Time

This particular generic dimensions is alluded to in another poem by Andrew Marvell, “Had we but world enough and time”. One of the most crucial and least obvious of walls is time or, more precisely, the availability of time. Actors are prevented from carrying out all of the activities they would like to carry out because they have insufficient time. This can be illustrated by reference to the diagram model of walls above. Four activities are depicted as arrows and if the length of these arrows represented the time activities required to undertake and if that equals the time available then addition of another activity would mean that it or another activity would not get done. Time is a constraint since the “time” wall could not be breached and therefore time as time available can be regarded as a wall.

There is a huge amount of evidence that employees, and especially managers, are frustrated because they never complete all the tasks that they set themselves in a day. This wall is somewhat unusual in that it refers not to a specific activity but to all activities; it has no object. However it does

represent a constraint that has huge ramifications and it affects all of the other walls that actors have to deal with. Different time zones, for example, create walls between organisations operating globally.

### **Processes of wall creation, maintenance and destruction**

Walls are also brought into existence and maintained through a variety of different agencies. How are walls built and maintained? Walls are created and destroyed, maintained, recreated and reconfigured, in total and in part all the time. The processes involved are rather complex, continuous and often ill apprehended and little understood by those involved. They can be planned or happen serendipitously. A wall can be created by one actor on either side of the divide or by both. It may be conscious or unconscious process since actors are rarely in a position to understand how other actors are positioned with respect to the walls they are constrained and protected by.

### **Commune Case Study**

The following case study describes a situation lasting several weeks during which a web based advertising campaign was being developed for a car manufacturer. The case study analysis consists of the identification of a number of situations where walls of the kind described previously are present. Wall identification and processes are indicated by *(bracketed and italicised comments)*.

### **The Organisations**

Auto (UK) is a major international car manufacturer with a wide range of car models. Auto (UK) is the UK branch of the company. Commune is Auto (UK)'s creative web agency and has designed and runs Auto (UK)'s websites. There is a close relationship between the two organisations. Ad-agency is Auto (UK)'s above the line advertising agency and is responsible for their conventional media advertising. Media-plan is Auto (UK)'s media planning agency.

### **The Auto (UK) "Cute" campaign**

The Auto (UK) "Cute" is a specific model of car requiring its own microsite within Auto (UK)'s website. Each car model Auto (UK) produce has its own page within the Auto (UK) cars section of Auto (UK) website but this particular site will operate independently as the online destination and focus for a specific Auto (UK) "Cute" campaign. The campaign has been devised to drive advocacy of the Auto (UK) "Cute" brand across both traditional and online media, under the strap line 'Sure looks "Cute"'. Auto (UK) is searching for consumer "brand advocates" who have engaging stories to tell about 'how the "Cute" is part of their life', in order to feature and share them with the general public. The assumption is that the "Cute" 'sells itself', and does not require a particularly large above-the-line campaign (no TV and some print only).

The creative strategy devised by Ad-agency is to focus the campaign around a competition whereby Auto (UK) "Cute" owners submit their advocacy stories online, and 4 winners are selected to have their story filmed and made into a video. Commune's role is to interpret the campaign for digital execution, and provide an online space where the content produced – both the advocacy videos and other advocacy stories – will 'live'.

## **The Briefing Meeting**

The brief for the Auto (UK) “Cute” project emerged from a meeting between Auto (UK), the above the line agency Ad-agency, the media planning agency Media-plan, and the digital creative agency Commune.

Commune’s Senior Account Director, Sarah is responsible for the majority of client facing activity on the Auto (UK) account, and represented Commune at this meeting, as is the norm in this relationship. She acts as a conduit between Auto (UK) and the Commune, having several years experience with the client, not least in her capacity working for Commune from Auto (UK)’s offices in the temporary absence of a digital marketing manager (*Space – working in the client office – not particularly usual*). With her ‘client hat’ on, she is trusted to deliver the brief through to the team at Commune and oversee the project from within the agency.

Ad-agency have developed the creative concept of ‘Sure looks “Cute”’ (*creation of wall since it walls off most, but not all, other creative ideas however it can still be interpreted in many different ways*). Commune’s role is to establish a mechanism by which advocacy videos can be presented online, alongside the usual Key Performance Indicator drivers of stimulating users with calls to action (booking a test drive, requesting a brochure, calling a dealer). Sarah briefed the strategy and planning team at Commune to this effect, and their role is to now develop a creative brief from this client brief. The role of the creative brief is to distil the client brief and other relevant research or information into a document (*material boundary object which creates further tighter walls round possible future actions*). This needs to be made actionable by the designers and creative concept teams.

Al (Head of Strategy at Commune) and Jon (Senior Planner at Commune) write this document, highlighting the need for action to be taken soon (*time wall but not clearly specified*) so that Commune can ‘present [their] vision of the project’ to Jonny (Digital Marketing Manager at Auto (UK)) as soon as possible to get buy in (*walling off all other options*).

In fact, the above the line agency Ad-agency have already started casting for their advocacy videos, and have suggested that Commune will host these online in some way within a microsite that should go live around the first week of June (*specific time wall*). As a result of these time restrictions, the creative brief and planning research is developed in parallel (*tactic to make a hole in the time wall*) to concepting teams working on a creative concept that should, in theory, come out of the creative brief. The translation between this planning document and the creative concept is not realised, and instead there is a huge overlap in terms of time (*the creative process is compressed and the time wall is breeched*). Also, problematically, there is no overlap in terms of actors. Those involved in the creative concepting are not involved in the strategy insight (*actor wall in place*) or actants. The creative concept as an abstract idea is developed independently of the creative brief as a tangible document (*actants wall developed*).

## **The Creative Concept – The Directors’ meeting**

The creative concept or ‘big idea’ for the campaign comes out of a brainstorming meeting between some of the directors, Adam, Steve and Michael two of the Directors and the Head of Copy respectively (*functional wall created by the directors to decide upon the creative idea*). Sarah has given them a verbal brief (*information wall breeched to allow directors to carry out their objective*) on the work that needs doing in an informal capacity. They have yet to see the creative brief (*information wall in place*) but have a rough outline of the client brief. They sit at the back of the office and jot some ideas down on post-it notes pulling out key words around the campaign

(*material wall actants which help to limit possible number of ideas and channel the outcomes*). These centre around emotional values such as ‘passion’; ‘fun’; ‘sharing’; ‘fame’; it’s all about me’ and so on, and begin to develop a picture of what the campaign might be like (*“building the wall” process*). As the creative concept is heavily influenced by existing creative for the campaign by Ad-agency (“Sure looks Cute” concept and, they know that the campaign should tie in with existing work as well as concurrent processes occurring internally for example planning and research (*awareness of, and influence by, existing walls*)).

Nothing formal is produced, only an agreed and a, relatively abstract at this stage, idea that the “Sure looks cute” campaign will be all about a ‘homepage takeover’, where the customer becomes the king and takes over the site (*strong wall reinforced around the concept*). The extent to which the idea exists at this stage is embodied in the directors.

### **The Translation Meeting -Determining specifics and translating to designers/developers**

Copywriter Michael joins Account Director Sarah, Project Manager Jeff, Planner Jon and Information Architect (IA) Cynthia in the downstairs boardroom. They lean around the large table where Michael is sketching out preliminary drawings, indicating what the website might look like; or ‘scamps’, directed by Sarah, Jeff and Jon (*process of walling off visual options*).

Jon has just talked through the creative brief, a hard copy of a PowerPoint presentation or ‘deck’ that sets the scene for the “Cute” campaign as briefed in by the client (*key wall enforcing boundary object*). He flicks through the deck and describes the key insights and main takeouts for those others present at the meeting. Whilst Sarah and Jeff have been briefed before, most of this information is new to Michael and Cynthia (*breeching their information*). Key points outlined are that the campaign must integrate with above-the-line activity; that it must focus on new user and potential user advocacy; that it ‘must’ fit in with the new ‘look and feel’ of the new Auto (UK) digital platform; (*clear description of the dimensions of the campaign wall and their parameters*) and that there is a very limited timescale for the completion of the work (*time wall again*). A particularly short turnaround is required for the first stage of the process, in this case – presenting initial concepts and ideas to the Digital Marketing Manager for Auto (UK), Jonny, to approve for budget within a matter of days (*resource wall may well be already in place and negate work to date*) .

There is no specific creative brief implied, only that the look and feel should work with the new platform when the website goes live (*creative wall is permeable*). However, thoughts on what the creative execution should be are harboured by several members of the meeting – particularly Jeff who has a few ideas passed on to him from directors Steve and Adam who are not present (*if ideas within walls do not overlap or have permeable walls then outcome may be problematic*)

Sarah takes the lead, briefing Michael: “So we’ve got to have one section showing everyone’s story entries, one section showing the winners and their videos, and then all the normal request a brochure; book a test drive”. Michael replies “But what’s the focus? What’s the top panel? Where’s our USP in all of this, otherwise it’ll be all over the place, that’s three things on one site. What’s it all about?” Michael is faced with the task of sketching his ideas out on the fly, which at the moment represent three boxes (*a creative / technical wall that has previously been agreed on*) as they might appear on a webpage – one that he has made larger than the others.

Jeff interjects “Wasn’t Adam’s idea for us to do a homepage takeover? And that’s a first for us as well...its our reason for doing the whole thing” Jeff’s comment inspires Michael to create the main panel as the ‘homepage takeover’ sketching a customer next to her video and a series of images around her showing her life with her Auto (UK) “Cute” (*and breaks down the emerging wall*). This

has now become the focus of both the conversation and the scamp for the page. (*The process of walling in the final form of the website continues*)

Sarah describes how she sees it; “Right so you say here’s Michelle, here’s her favourite assets about the car, and we have a photographer in doing it all and she’s taking over the homepage, its her page”, but Jeff seems unsure “...As to the detail of exactly how we do it, we need to hand it over to Adam and figure it out”. Sarah tries to clarify further “The whole ethos of the campaign with Ad-agency and everyone is about advocacy, it’s not just us doing this, they’re gonna be capturing advocacy stories in dealerships, they’re already doing it and “Cute” sells itself everyone loves it, there’s no kind of revolutionary technology to it or anything - the previous one’s brilliant this one’s even better”. “So we want something with a story behind it, so we have something to show.”

“The challenge is that say we have 75 grand for everything (*existence of one kind of resource wall*), we’ve only got two weeks (*time wall*) and we have to spread that money across filming the winner, creating the content, and also making some sort of hub for the Wiedens videos and when they stop and we have to revert to sort of desire content”.

### **Changes by Auto (UK) communications**

Several phone calls between Jeff and the team at Auto (UK) have revealed some quite significant changes in the campaign. Budget cuts and time deadlines have meant that Ad-agency videos have been cut. (*The resource and time walls have contracted even more*). These changes have fed through incrementally to Commune via Jeff as PM who has ploughed on with the creative concept and translated the information as and when necessary to the design and development team (*breaching information walls*). However, none of it is particularly drastic from a design/development perspective – hosting one video instead of eight simply requires cutting down the number of pages to be designed and coded. Similarly, the project remains on brief – it is about providing a space for this advocacy video, and the advocacy user-generated content produced (*the Commune creative wall remains in place*)

### **Incremental Drift and its Consequences**

An email is sent around to ‘everyone’ at Commune, by Jeff, the Project Manager for the Auto (UK) “Cute” account. There is a specific address for this meaning everyone at the agency is copied into the mail. Within the email is a link to the website, as hosted on the local server. When an email is sent to everyone, it is opened in ripples throughout the agency as everyone is notified and at a natural break within their current workload, they check the mail. On looking about the office, the website can be seen popping up on everyone’s machine.

The reaction is not a good one. Sarah stands up and begins marching around, asking for Jeff. “Why have you been changing the format of this without asking me first?” she demands (*the creative format wall has been breached without permission*). Jeff has had to make adjustments to the original plan incrementally throughout the past couple of days leading up to the project deadline, resulting in some quite significant changes (*project walls have contracted*). “Well we had to pull Ad-agency’s videos, and just do our one, so that’s the focus of the page now”, he replies.

Meanwhile, Steve and Adam (Creative Directors) are gathered around Steve’s computer, looking at the website. It was their creative concept in the first instance, although their involvement in the project since this initial concept meeting has been minimal (*maintenance of the creative wall has not happened*). Steve’s initial response is “Oh it’s plop isn’t it...who’s the designer on this?” Jon replies “Well I don’t know, I worked up the concept and then left it alone, so I dunno...” (*No reinforcement*

of the creative wall). Jeff interjects “Kenta and Petter I think they both did some...” It is not clear who knows what is going on. Steve takes the lead. “Right, we need to get this sorted out (*What is being built within the time wall needs rebuilding*) It doesn’t look like a takeover at all. Someone tell Serena to pull it from the PR agency, we can’t give it to them like this. The user needs to be displayed much more clearly” Adam: “Yea it looks like she [the character on the website] has just been plonked on the side”. (*Actions are taken to re-establish the content through actions within the wall which has major time wall ramifications*). Steve and Adam start making some calls to the design team downstairs. Serena calls the PR agency, and tells them that some major readjustments need to be made before it goes live. A discussion ensues as to when the site does actually go live, which the answer seems to be ‘When ISD (Auto (UK)’s Internal Digital Department) get it live’ (*Going live depends on activities outside Commune’s wall which creates major uncertainties in the walls involved*). Peter (Designer) argues that there is too much copy to make the design any more impactful or user-centric. Michael (copywriter) begins cutting it down and the team do the best they can to start making the website look more like a ‘homepage takeover’ before the morning (*the wall is hurriedly changed along some dimensions*), Everyone skulks back to their desks to begin reworking the site: this project isn’t finished yet. “Come on then guys, let’s sort our shit out” – Steve (Creative Director) (*What is within the wall being rebuilt in a shrunken time wall*)

## Conclusions

It is clear that boundaries are a major conceptual and theoretical issue in the social sciences and are becoming so in management and to a lesser extent in marketing. However what is also obvious that it is the properties of major boundaries such as those between organisations and the “environment” that are being privileged. There appears to be two major topics of interest. The first is the external factors that are expected to determine the nature of such boundaries e.g. via a Transactions Cost or institutional approach. The second is the roles that exist at the boundaries of organisations i.e. boundary spanning. This is somewhat popular within the IMP group. What is missing is a more micro, foundations approach to the issue. What are the boundaries that we have to exist behind and deal with not only in our everyday lives but in our organisational existences?

The major contributions of this paper are the recognition of, firstly, the importance of boundaries of various kinds in organisations, secondly, the role of constraints that such boundaries impose and which we characterise as walls and, thirdly, the exquisite tension that exists between being free and being bounded. This latter point is hardly new to the world but seems to be a novelty in the study of markets and management.

How do we research the nature of walls? The data we have presented here is, of course, much less rich than that actually collected in particular because it was the result of an ethnographic study. Any one incident could have been excavated in much more depth. Our objective was to give a feeling for the variety of possibilities. It should also be pointed out that this conceptual framework has been induced from the data. If we were to study walls more systematically in future there are a number of possible lines of research that could be taken. For example researching a limited set of rather similar walls might be rather fruitful. Another option would be research a small project and look for the links between walls. A single person could also be methodically studied to see how a portfolio of walls affects their actions. Perceptions of what for an individual is and is not possible could also be researched. And finally studying the least complicated roles in an organisation, call centre or production line workers, for example might prove interesting.

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