Preface

Spanning boundaries, whether these refer to organizational, sectoral, social or policy boundaries, has become one of the most intriguing challenges in contemporary public management and governance. Various developments, such as increasingly experienced complexity of public issues and fragmentation of the public sector, rising demands for more integrated and citizen-oriented service delivery and rising calls for more participation, co-production and community-based initiatives, put pressure on existing organizational and institutional boundaries in the public sector. Because of such developments, boundary spanning work has become a core activity of today’s public management and governance. Boundary spanners are the people that undertake the cross-boundary work that is needed to develop coordination and collaboration across boundaries.

While the literature on boundary spanners has a quite rich history in the field of organizational studies and business administration, explicit and careful attention to their work, antecedents, outcomes and profiles in the field of public administration is scarce. Comprehensive textbooks on boundary spanners are missing. This is remarkable, given the tremendous rise in publications, also in the field of public administration, which pay attention to boundary spanners. Next to scholarly attention, the concept of boundary spanners has a strong appeal to both students and practitioners, who recognize the challenges of cross-boundary endeavours and the important role, activities and competence of individuals who engage in boundary spanning work.

With this book we wanted to provide a comprehensive understanding of this fascinating topic. It pays explicit attention to the people who do the boundary spanning work. We aim (1) to provide a coherent overview (theory, relevance, description, and analysis) of the state of the art on boundary spanners and boundary spanning, and (2) to support and advance research on boundary spanning in the field of public management and governance. We pay specific attention to boundary spanning theory, drivers for boundary spanning, measurement of boundary spanning, profiles of boundary spanners, antecedents of boundary spanning behaviour and the effects of boundary spanning work.
This book is the result of multiple years of research and discussions on boundary spanners between the two of us. Some two and a half years ago the idea of writing a coherent and comprehensive book on boundary spanners emerged. An important part of this project was to systematically review the substantive amount of literature on the topic in order to provide both comprehensive and interdisciplinary understanding. This review was a time-consuming, but useful effort and has advanced our knowledge and overview on the topic. We specifically would like to thank David Vaandrager for his assistance and contribution to this systematic literature review.

Next to the lively discussions on the different drafts of the book chapters between the two of us, we would like to thank several colleagues in the field for their useful input, feedback, and collaboration which were – sometimes indirectly – important for this book project. We thank Paul Williams, Michael Howlett, Chris Ansell and Janine O’Flynn for their nice endorsements/response to the book. Furthermore, we thank Henk Wagenaar for his useful review on our book proposal, which helped us a lot in further developing the book. Furthermore, we thank William Voorberg for the nice discussions and conversations during the book project, both on and off-topic. We also would like to thank Erik-Hans Klijn for the lively discussions on the subject and for the nice collaboration in related work on connective capacity and network management. Finally, we would like to thank Edward Elgar, and in particular Mark McClellan and Hayley Stephenson, for the smooth collaboration in the editing and production of the manuscript.

We hope that you like reading the book and find useful insights, approaches and practical guidelines in studying boundary spanners or bringing boundary spanning behaviour into practice.

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