The Enactment of Professional Boundary Work: A Case Study of Crime Investigation

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Abstract

Professional boundary takes place as actors negotiate occupational boundaries and division of labour. In this article, we examine the conditions of defensive, accommodating, and configurational boundary work in the context of crime investigation. We analyse how professional boundaries are negotiated as civilian investigators become involved with policing. The article is based on 71 interviews with civilian and police crime investigators from a variety of investigation units in Sweden. Findings show how policing as a professional field is shifted as civilians from a wide variety of backgrounds and with varying motivations enter the occupation. Defensive boundary work that devalued civilians was widely occurring. However, boundary work that focused on learning, collaboration, and training was also occurring in high-status units. The discussion focuses on how power asymmetries impact boundary work when professions are undergoing change. This study exemplifies how organizational actors navigate, defend, and challenge their positions as professional boundaries are negotiated.

Keywords

Boundary work, professionalism, crime investigation, police, policing

Introduction

When a new occupational role is introduced to a professionalized setting, challenges and tensions can be expected (Franzén, 2019). In these processes, previously negotiated organizational boundaries, occupational jurisdictions, and division of labour become renegotiated as changes prompt boundary contestation and rearrangements in how actors relate to each other (Abbott, 1995). In this paper, we seek to examine the different forms that occupational boundary work takes on in different contexts. Specifically, we analyse the contextual conditions associated with different types of boundary work. We draw on data from crime investigation work practice, where civilian crime investigators (hereafter abbreviated CI) are making entry on a broad scale into police organizations, thereby redrawing many established occupational demarcations. Theoretically, we aim to contribute to the literature on boundary work, as we set out to examine contextual and organizational conditions that are associated with what we, with inspiration from Langley et al. (2019), call defensive, collaborative, and configurational boundary work. With some variation in vocabulary, these dimensions of boundary work have previously been discussed and defined in the literature, notably by Apesoa-Varano (2013) and in reviews by Langley et al. (2019) and Akkerman and Bakker (2011). As stated by Quick and Feldman (2014), boundaries are multifaceted and can be seen both as barriers and as junctures, and boundary work is highly dynamic and follows various trajectories.

Much literature on occupational boundary work has described various forms of boundaries as well as the negotiations of those boundaries that constitute boundary work. Still, the question of why boundary work takes on different forms and trajectories has been less studied. In this regard, a common line of thought has been that asymmetries in power and social status have been associated with defensive boundary work (Bucher et al., 2016) while trust amongst actors and belonging to interprofessional communities of practice has been related to collaboration and efforts to blur boundaries (Johannesen, 2018; Meier, 2015; Weber et al., 2022). Nevertheless, many questions are still unanswered regarding this theoretical inference. For instance, it is well established that power can be drawn from many sources, that power dynamics are often complex, and that various types of boundary work can exist simultaneously and on different levels (Fleming & Spicer, 2014). Building on these notions, we set out to explore how different types of boundary work are related and how the organizational context influences boundary negotiations.

To achieve this objective, we draw on empirical data from the context of Swedish crime investigation. As mentioned, there is currently an influx of civilian CIs into police institutions in Sweden, as well as in other countries (Rice, 2020). This development has been referred to as the civilianisation of policing (Kiedrowski et al., 2017). What makes the case of civilian crime investigators CIs particularly interesting from the perspective of boundary work is that crime investigation involves a broad spectrum of organizational units with an internal hierarchy and varying levels of specialisation. In this sense, investigative units that are more administratively

oriented, such as volume crimes, are lower in status than more specialised investigation domains such as severe crimes, murder investigation, and organized crime (Haake et al., 2023; Lindberg et al., 2023). Likewise, regarding specialization, investigations targeting cyber-crime, white-collar crime, and domestic violence involving children would demand specific competencies from investigators. Considering the current large-scale increase of civilian crime investigators, many of these are also newcomers to the police. These conditions mean that civilian CIs are a diverse group in terms of backgrounds, competencies, and specialization. With this variation, it can be expected that aspects such as social status and trust vary within the group and that various strategies of boundary work will also be evident. In short, aspects such as these are important to consider regarding how civilians and police officers negotiate occupational boundaries.

With crime investigation as an example, the purpose of the paper is to explore how types of boundary work are related to organizational contextual conditions as civilian investigators are negotiating occupational boundaries.

Theoretical framework

In the following, we will describe our analytical framework, which separates three distinct types of boundary work. This framework will subsequently be used to analyse boundary work in different contexts of crime investigations. We draw on Lamont and Molnár (2003) to define boundaries as symbolic and social in nature. This means that boundaries are seen as "conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize [...] people and practices [...]". In this sense, boundaries are established as individuals struggle—and come to agree over—meaning. Lamont and Molnár (2003) also put forth how social boundaries are objectified forms of difference that can result in unequal distribution of resources and opportunities. Thus, when symbolic boundaries are widely agreed upon, they take on a constraining character as taken-for-granted patterns of social interaction. This perspective on how boundaries are formed is close to a "negotiated orders" perspective on boundary work (Apeaso Varano, 2013) where boundary work can be seen as a social negotiation process. Negotiated orders stem from an interactionist, micro-sociological perspective on organizational phenomena emphasising how everyday activities and practices at workplaces link up to social structures (Lawrence and Phillips, 2019).

The previous literature on boundary work has mainly focused on *defensive boundary work*. Studies of defensive boundary work regularly set out to analyse how organizational actors use self-protective mechanisms such as affirmation of differences, conflict, exclusion, and protection of legitimate membership to distinguish themselves and defend status positions (Allen, 2000). As stated by Langley et al. (2019, p.707), defensive boundary work can thus be said to entail a process in which actors are "working for boundaries" by establishing and defending differences. Put somewhat differently, Liu (2018) described defensive boundary work

processes through the notion of boundary making, which denotes the process by which professional groups seek to maintain and defend boundaries by exclusion. As stated by Bucher et al. (2016), these defensive strategies often involve enforcement of one party's interest upon others, thereby limiting the agency of other actors.

While defensive boundary work has been a central focus of research, negotiations of boundaries may also take on different forms and to more fully understand the intricacies of boundary negotiations, we need to extend our understanding of how boundary work is enacted. Drawing on Langley et al. (2019), we will here describe collaborative and configurational boundary work as two complementary approaches to defensive boundary work.

Collaborative boundary work entails boundary negotiations that take several actors' interests and motivations into account, thereby changing, developing, and negotiating extant boundaries (Langley et al., 2020). This phenomenon has also been described in terms of boundary-blurring, or transformative boundary work (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011; Liu, 2018; Weber et al., 2020). A common feature of these concepts is that boundaries entail social and symbolic interfaces between groups, and deployment of boundaries is a contested process (Lamont & Molnar, 2003). As such, actors can strive to blur boundaries (Johannessen, 2018) and boundary work can thus function to connect actors to each other (Christiansen et al., 2017; Kerosuo and Engeström, 2003; Quick & Feldman, 2014). Examples of collaborative boundary work include translation efforts in which actors adapt their language or expressions to create shared domains, aligning among differences (i.e., recognizing distinctions and finding ways to connect them) or decentring differences (i.e., making extant differences obsolete or meaningless; Quick & Feldman, 2014).

A third type of boundary work has been described as *configurational*. This means the actions that organizational actors undertake to facilitate the boundary work of others (Langley et al., 2019). Following Lunkka et al. (2021), configural arrangements can be defined as the conscious use of boundaries to shift or reconfigure how interaction takes place in organizational contexts. As Langley et al. (2019) stated, configurational arrangements can be based either on the separation of activities (thus creating isolation) or consolidation (thus creating interaction), so that new spaces and places for action and learning open (Lindh Falk et al., 2016). Lunkka et al. (2021) discussed configurations in terms of the creation of settings or spaces in which various interests and groups can transcend and interact on different premises than what usually is possible. Similarly, Kersch (2015) discussed configurational boundary work in terms of the creation of learning spaces in which employees' personal agency was supported. In the following, we present an empirical study wherein the broad theoretical categories of *defensive*, *collaborative* or *configurational* boundary have guided the analysis.

The research setting
The research setting for this article is Swedish police crime investigation. Within the Swedish police system, civilian CIs work alongside with police CIs at all types of investigation units such

as special victims' investigation, eco-crimes, cyber-crimes or severe crime investigation. Moreover, civilians and police investigators conduct similar work tasks such as leading investigations, conducting interrogations and victim interviews, and compiling investigation reports. There are few formal differences in work tasks between civilians and police investigators and these have to do with legislative boundaries surrounding the police mandate (Police Authority, 2018). For example, civilian CIs are not armed when on duty and are not allowed to enforce coercive methods in the same manner as their police colleagues.

In numerical terms, 10,852 individuals (of whom 3,202 were civilians) were full-time employees within investigative units in 2022 in Sweden. As Figure 1 indicates, the share of civilian CIs has grown over time relative to their police colleagues.

Figure 1

Civilian and police employees in investigative units over time
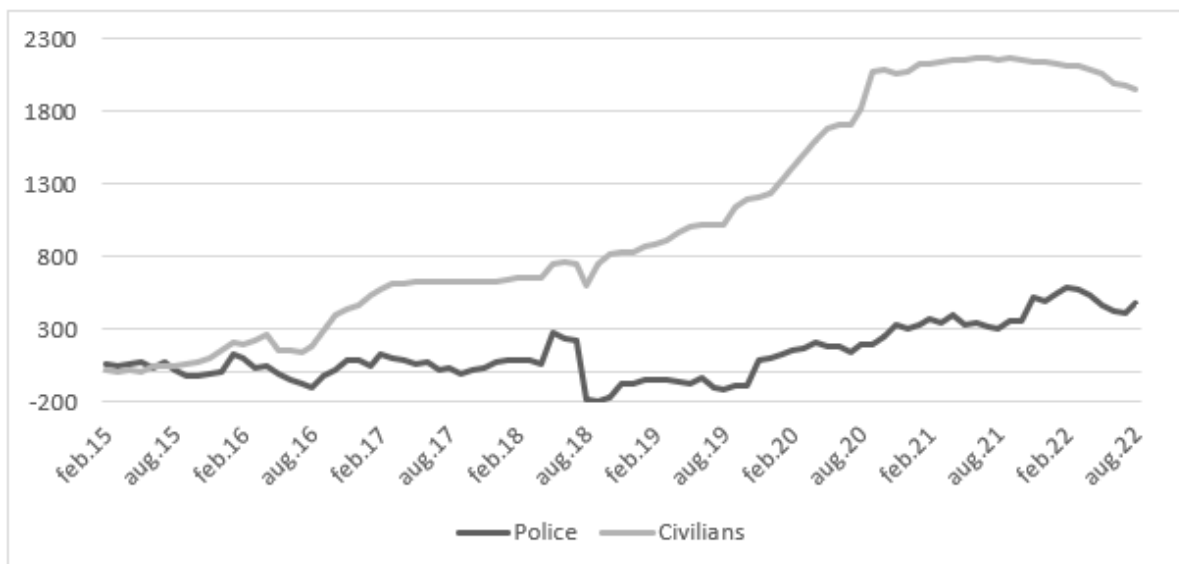
The influx of civilian investigators is related to political ambitions to increase the number of employees within policing and to address major challenges in solving crimes and handling increased workloads (Police Authority, 2022). However, the integration of civilians into the police force has not been without problems. Civilians differ demographically from their police colleagues. One example of this is gender distribution: Whereas police investigators are 58% male and 42% female, the percentage of civilian investigators is 27% male and 73% female. Civilians are also to a higher degree holding academic degrees and a larger share of them have higher education, whilst police investigators have basic police training as their primary educational background. With a changing workforce in investigation, conflicts have risen, with arguments that civilian investigators entail a form of "blue washing" that undermines police professional efforts and reduces the status of the police profession (Police Union, 2022).

Methods

The data collection in this study consists of 71 interviews. Of these, 56 are interviews with civilian CIs from 11 types of investigative units. Complementing these interviews, 15 interviews were conducted with police CIs (from 4 different types of investigative units), see Table 1. With this sample, the article mainly focuses on boundary work from the perspective of civilian CIs as most codes and categories were generated from interviews with civilians. The choice to focus on the civilian perspective is motivated by the fact that civilian CIs are in one aspect trying to increase their access to, and participation within the highly instituted setting of policing (Lindberg et al., 2023). It can also be argued that civilians are in a contested position within the police force (c.f. Haake et al., 2023; Rice, 2020). With these characteristics, we expect boundaries as well as boundary work to be visible from the perspective of civilians as they as a group regularly encounter exclusion and inclusion through manifestations of boundaries. Whilst the focus is on the civilian perspective, interviews with police CIs have also been included in the analysis. These mainly serve the purpose of adding a contextual understanding, substantiating interpretations, providing other points of view, and examining if there were contrasting pictures. As Table 2 indicates, the gender distribution amongst civilian CIs was 14% male and 86% female and for police CIs were 46% male and 54% female. This sample mirrors how an influx of civilian CIs means that more female employees are making an entry into policing. Furthermore, table 1 shows that most of the interviewed civilian CIs had higher education degrees, with social work as the most common educational background. Furthermore, the most common units these individuals worked at were volume crime and domestic violence.

Table 1

Participants

Civilians (n=56)

Gender		Unit		Educational background		Degree subject		City size**	
Male	8	Volume crime	21	Higher education	47	Social work	11	Large city	20
Female	48	Domestic violence	11	Upper secondary education	7	Criminology	7	Medium City	17
		Serious crime	6	Other (military, voc., phd studies)	2	Law	7	Small city/ rural area	19
		White-collar crime	5			Political science	5		
		Youth crime	3			Psychology	3		
		Environmental crime	3			Sociology	5		
		Special Victims Unit	3			Other	9		
		Work incidents	1						
		Cyber crime	1						
		Intellectual Property	1						
		Traffic investigation	1						

4Police (n=15)

Gender		Unit		Educational background		Degree subject		City size**	
Male	7	Volume crime	5	Upper secondary education	8	Social work	1	Large city	3
Female	8	Domestic violence	5	Higher education	5	Law	1	Medium City	5
		Serious crime	3	Military	1	Psychology	2	Small city/rural area	7
		Youth crime	2			Education	1		

**Definitions derived from Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions. Large city >200,000; Medium city 50,000-199,000; Small city/rural area <50,000

Data collection

We recruited participants for this study partly through information at an internal training event and through information on the police intranet web page where we asked for civilian and police CIs to participate in the study. Before we commenced data collection, we obtained informed consent from all participants. Thereafter, the authors and two research assistants conducted interviews during 2020 and 2021. These revolved around topics and sensitising concepts (Bowen, 2006) such as investigators' backgrounds, trajectories into the police, experiences of interprofessional collaboration, learning of the occupation, and career possibilities. Interviews varied in length from approximately 45–90 min, and due to social restrictions

following the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews were conducted using video conferencing software. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim before further analysis.

Analysis

To analyse various boundary work strategies and the conditions surrounding these, we took inspiration from Srivastava and Hopwood (2009) and their abductive approach to data analysis. This meant that initial topics and concepts were coded from the interviews on par with theoretical exploration and reading into the research field. We first coded all data into the background investigative unit, role, gender, experience, and geographical place of work. We did this to be able to control for background factors in relation to qualitative findings. Thereafter, the analysis proceeded in three cycles: Examples of boundary work were coded into the theoretical categories of *defensive*, *collaborative* or *configurational* boundary work (see theory section). thereafter, these broad categories were explored more in detail as we analysed concept dimensions for each type of boundary work (see Tables 2, 3 and 4). We analysed these themes "axially" (Saldana, 2021) by cross-examining different types of boundary work in relation to our previous codes regarding background and contextual factors. Using this approach, we were able to relate types of boundary work to types of investigative units, gender, and investigators' experiences.

Findings

Crime investigation is an occupational field that is undergoing change as the number of civilian CIs increases. The interviews provide a rich dataset wherein mainly the civilians' experiences of boundaries in work practice become visible. As we will explain, these boundaries also impact how advantages and benefits are distributed within the social system of crime investigation. In the following, we present our findings regarding defensive, collaborative, and configurational boundary work through data structures and exemplifying quotes to portray how boundary work was described in various investigative contexts.

Defensive boundary work

It can be concluded that the participants had many examples of defensive boundary work wherein the boundaries between civilians and police officers within investigative work practice were upheld, mainly through exclusion mechanisms. From the perspective of civilians, these types of boundaries were highly visible and limiting in their daily work practices, placing them in a contested position. Common descriptions of this contested position were that civilians were said to have to work harder, to prove themselves, and to earn their place in the police organization. Specifically, we identified four types of defensive boundary work. These were occupation-cultural, jurisdictional, and organizationally oriented defences, as well as an emphasis on differences that were expressed by civilians themselves (see Table 2 below).

Table 2

Defensive boundary work

Boundary work	Function	Examples
Defence of occupation culture (police)	Emphasising a professional boundary through police specific narratives and symbols	Police mindset, police gear (badge, uniform, weapons),
Jurisdictional restrictions (police)	Defending the core tasks of investigative work practice	Civilians are unauthorized to conduct work tasks associated with investigative work practice
Organizational restrictions (police)	Keeping civilians out from key positions, safeguarding the professional core	"Glass ceiling," civilians not eligible to apply for positions
Emphasising difference (civilians)	Coping, justifying one's position	Civilians are educated, specialists, subject-specific experts

As Table 2 indicates, *occupation cultural defence* entailed examples of how civilians experienced how police made use of a pattern of specific occupational narratives, customs, and symbols to demarcate and emphasise occupational differences. Occupation cultural markers in this way functioned in an exclusionary manner, entailing an enacted boundary between civilian CIs and their police colleagues. Examples of police-specific narratives were storytelling about a common background, training, or occupational socialisation through the occupational experiences of policing (such as patrol policing). As the following quote emphasises, civilian investigators experienced that police officers shared a cultural bond that civilians would not be part of:

> Many of the police officers have worked with incredibly special incidents. I mean, everything from collecting body parts from a train rail to breaking up fights and all sorts of things like that. And there is this, if not pride, so at least a certain mentality that comes with those types of experiences. You must get through them, and this coping is a collective experience that brings people together. [...] I get the feeling that those who are police officers are proud that they have earned their uniform […] This brings about a certain pride, or poise, depending on how you see it. (male, civilian, interview 4)

This quote describes, from the perspective of an outsider, how a strong cultural bond in the shared history and previous experiences amongst police-trained investigators could work in an exclusionary manner. Interestingly, while cultural boundaries may be informal and ideational, this boundary would regularly "materialize" in tangible symbols and markers that were imbued with meaning, such as the police uniform, the service weapon, or the police badge and badge wallet. In turn, these symbols produce effects as they are used purposefully, as the following quote exemplifies:

> …At court proceedings, police are exempt from having to go through the security check, but this does not extend to the civilian CIs. The police cruise through while the civilians must queue with the suspects and the others to be searched before entering. The police show their badge and are allowed to go in one direction and then the civilian CI arrives and is referred to another queue. (male, civilian, interview 32)

This quote exemplifies how symbols guide others outside the police to recognize the difference between police officers and civilian PIs, thereby reinforcing this difference.

Extending our analysis of cultural exclusion, we also identified instances of rule-based or *jurisdictional boundaries* in the daily work practices of civilian CIs. These types of boundaries can be seen as highly institutionalized and "ascribed", thus stipulating what different categories of employees within the police are allowed to do. For instance, Police CIs were allowed to initiate investigative and coercive measures such as picking up suspects for interrogations, seizing objects, calling for premise searches, collecting DNA samples, or informing suspects of their rights. None of these actions were available for a civilian CI to initiate, thus restricting their professional autonomy and leaving civilian CIs unauthorized to conduct central work tasks. By extension, the consequences of this boundary were that a horizontal division of labour is upheld and defended, as police CIs have a greater leeway for action and exclusionary work tasks.

The participants also reported several *organizational restrictions* that would entail boundaries between civilians and police officers. While jurisdictional boundaries often had their foundation outside the police (in legislation, etc.) organizational restrictions would be internally determined but could be so with reference to external jurisdiction. Organizational boundaries tended to restrict the possibility for civilian CIs to develop within the organization. Several career opportunities would be closed for non-police employees because they would be based on a police-specific rank structure, thus creating hindrances and effectively blocking out civilian CIs. The following quote exemplifies this tendency:

> [...] There are people who get skipped over, and it is hard to do anything about it in this organization. The police have their [rank structure]: they begin as assistants, next they become inspectors, and then they move on from there [...] But it is harder to say what positions correspond to your civilian competence [...] It is difficult. You can become group leader and principal investigator as a civilian, but for instance, I recently saw that they had a job opening in the special investigation unit. They were looking for staff in City A. I thought that job sounded interesting. But only police criminal inspectors could apply. That means a lot of experience, and an eligibility requirement to have been a police officer for 10 to 15 years. (male civilian, interview 32)

While not always visibly present in the day-to-day practice of CIs, these types of organizational boundaries would surface over time, reducing the possibilities for civilians to develop within

the police and specialize vertically as well as horizontally. A consequence of this was that formal hierarchies (position-based power), as well as specialization (knowledge-based power) would be harder to acquire for a civilian CI than for a police CI.

In the light of these defensive dimensions of boundary work, a fourth defensive strategy was described as initiated by civilians themselves. We termed this the *emphasis of difference*. By emphasising and constructing themselves as different from the police, this difference, which would often be a drawback, could be redefined as an advantage and a factor that legitimatized a civilian CIs place in the organization. The emphasis on difference would be socially oriented, and about civilians seeking out the company of other civilians to acquire social support and build a sense of belonging in a challenging work environment. As one Civilian CI who worked with volume crime puts it:

> Me and another [civilian] CI started at the same time, and we ended up sharing an office. Naturally, we started to hang out together, and we have continued to do so. We found a couple of others who also were "outsiders" and who wanted to interact with us—turns out that we are all civilians. There was probably no thought behind it, rather, we just ended up the way we did. [...] I spend time with the ones I like. And they happen to be civilians. (female, civilian, interview 39)

In addition to this focus, emphasizing difference could also be about safeguarding specialization, such as specific knowledge domain (e.g., IT, Cyber), or conversely, the experience of higher education and various generic competencies that stemmed from that.

Collaborative boundary work

In addition to defensive boundary work, many initiatives to bridge boundaries could be identified in the empirical material. These strategies would occur simultaneously with or in direct response to defensive boundary work. Table 3 displays the main strategies by which collaborative boundary work took place in the context. In essence, these strategies for boundary work entail ways to relate and socially interact to minimize the impact of boundaries, resolve boundaries, or work around and downplay boundaries. In contrast to defensive boundary work where boundary defence often entailed a division between civilian and police CIs, collaborative strategies of boundary work would regularly include civilians and police CIs working together.

Table 3

Collaborative boundary work

Boundary work	Function	Examples
Teamwork in case work	Increasing capacity through collective effort	Working together in specialized or high-profile investigations
Partnering civilians and police	Working together to be fully operational	Working in pairs, doing tasks together
Downplaying difference	Simplifying workflow	Letting the differences go unnoticed internally and externally

As Table 3 indicates, a common strategy of collaborative boundary work was when CIs worked in a *team-based manner* on their cases. In these instances, they described how work took place in a sense of urgency, and extant boundaries were often transferred so that police, as well as civilian CIs, would work side-by-side to progress in an investigation. This approach to investigating was common in large-scale or high-profile crime investigations wherein much information had to be processed. In these instances, the primary objective of teamwork was not to bring civilians and police CIs together; rather, this was a consequence of the need to increase the capacity in investigations through collective effort.

A similar strategy for collaboration was when civilians and police CIs were paired. This could be done to circumvent the jurisdictional restrictions of civilians so that whenever CIs foresaw that they could benefit from having full decision-making power, they could pair up, ride to-gether to distant locations or do work tasks together. While this strategy meant that more human resources were used, CIs would often describe their work strategy as rewarding, since they would learn from each other's experience while working cases. As stated by one civilian CI working with severe crimes:

> There are many police officers who are extremely skilled detectives, and I respect their skills. They can do things that I cannot. That is exactly why it is so good [that different people] know different things. And as soon as we start to work together, we get good. That's why it's so beneficial to work in pairs: Four eyes, two brains, four hands [...]. In this way, we achieve a high tempo in case work, everybody helps, pushing each other forward. Then it doesn't matter who is a civilian and who is a police CI. (female, civilian, interview 29)

While the team and partner approach to collaborative boundary work mainly differs in terms of the scale and amplitude of social interactions, a third approach to collaboration was to *downplay the boundaries* and differences between civilians and police CIs. This strategy of boundary work is in a sense in opposition to the defensive strategy of emphasising difference as this approach meant that civilians would hide, or at least not showcase their civilian status

unless it was called for. Frequently, this led to people both outside the police, as well as inside the organization, assuming they were police CIs, thereby granting them the same status and treatment. This could be done in relation to external parties, such as in witness interviews, but it could also be a strategy internally, in relation to colleagues within the police. As one female civilian CI stated:

> [...] I was up in [City A], and myself being a civilian, I got a police team made available to me to support the mission—it was about bringing in a suspect. So, I briefed the team. I shared the mission plan, and when I informed them, I just introduced myself as interrogator and the person responsible for the mission. I ended the briefing by saying that I was a civilian, and this really made an impact: many of them reacted very positively and were like "Oh, how nice, how talented you must be."

> So, I noticed the impact, if I had [introduced myself as a civilian] and put it first, half of them would have stopped listening right there. But I put it last and got a lot of positive reactions. The moral of the story is that you must be smart, that's just how it is. (female, civilian, interview 22)

An interesting point that concerns all the collaborative strategies is that these were often described in relation to large-scale and highly specialized crime investigations. One reason for this may be the fact that these units are used to working together, while smaller, more mundane investigations are often led by a single CI. Large-scale investigations often revolve around serious crime and demand more specialization, something that also means that civilians with special skills would be valued by the organization on that basis, and this would also motivate police as well as civilians to try to work close together, bridging their differences.

Configurational arrangements

We now turn to describing configurational boundary work as it was described from the perspective of civilian investigators. Configurational boundary work in this regard revolves around the organizational arrangements that the CIs had experience with and that were put in place to bridge boundaries, facilitate cooperation, and overcome obstacles related to boundaries. Thus, configurational arrangements have similarities to collaborative boundary work with the major difference being that configurational boundary work was more clearly institutionalized initiatives aimed at reconfiguring how interaction takes place in organizational contexts. From the interviews, most of the examples of initiatives were aimed at increasing collaborative work practice and learning between civilians and police CIs. In overview, we identified five configurational boundary work strategies which we divided into two dimensions. See A and B in Table 4, below:

Table 4

Configurational boundary work

A) Training as configurational boundary work		
	Function	Example
Training to fit	Decrease lines of difference through training	Introduction/induction, learning "the ropes," routines, etc.
Training to gain qualifications	Qualifying to conduct work tasks	In-service training and internal qualifications
Police training for civilians	Immersion	Making police officers out of civilians
B) Organizational configurational boundary work		
	Function	Example
Changing the rules	Expanding the mandate of civilians	Delegating tasks, extensive interpretation of statutory rules, etc.
Organizing collaborative spaces	Drawing on interprofessional knowledge	High profile and specialized investigative units with various competencies involved

As Table 4 indicates, the first dimension of configurational boundary work revolves around *learning-focused configurations*. These were mainly attempts on an organizational level to use training and continuing professional development to help civilians become immersed or accepted in the police organization. The most obvious configurational initiative in this regard was to provide police training for civilian CIs through an internal police training initiative financed by the police authority. Through this programme, the boundary between civilian and police CIs would be completely dissolved; civilians through this arrangement become police CIs, thereby reaching immersion within the professional community of the police. The initiative was a clear dividing line. Critical voices emphasised that the initiative devalued the status of the civilian CIs, was costly, and would probably have little impact. Others saw it as a possibility to be more fully integrated into policing. As one civilian CI expressed it:

> I think it's a fantastic way to get people committed and new skills into the police force. The purpose of the in-house training initiative is not to work with beat-policing, although they will certainly do that for a while, but it is the investigative work that is in focus. In a way, the ones who go through with it will be employees who are to be reckoned with, they will be part of the occupational community, they get a new skill set, they will be accepted in all contexts, and they will have the power to "enter all rooms" within the police. (female, civilian, interview 34)

The quote quite clearly expresses how the configurational arrangement of in-house training ultimately would dissolve a boundary between civilian and police CIs, by giving the former the same professional and jurisdictional mandate as all police officers.

Other, less immersive training initiatives were also common, such as training civilian CIs to overcome jurisdictional problems. In this regard, civilian CIs could do in-service training to

gain the authorization to function as primary investigators, or conduct certain types of interrogations that they, contrary to their police peers, would not have the right to do without specific qualifications. Similarly, some training, such as induction programmes and mentorships, was also reported to contribute to the socialisation and onboarding of civilian CIs more broadly into the police, as these types of training activities were directed at "learning the ropes" of investigative work practice.

While training ultimately is about achieving various changes by exposing actors to experience, a second dimension of configurational initiatives instead revolved around *changing the organizational boundaries*—that is, the prerequisites for work—rather than striving to change the individuals doing the work. A common approach in this regard was that the police organization locally would make beneficial interpretations of rules, or even change how rules were to be applied, so that civilian CIs would gain the authorization to conduct work tasks, thereby overcoming the jurisdictional boundaries that would hinder them. A commonly occurring narrative was that rule applications had become more liberal over time, as the number of civilian CIs had increased:

> What we're allowed to do has simply been expanded. For instance, to notify suspects of the suspected crime [with or without having an attorney present] was something we could not do before, but now we can hold these initial interrogations… The same goes for serving a suspect with documents and things like that. Similarly, it was completely closed for a civilian CI to lead investigations, but that has changed, and now we see civilians working as principal investigators. Of course, there are still things we can't do. Negotiation for example, to work those types of incidents, one needs to be armed. (female civilian, interview 40)

As our interviews were done nationwide, we noted that an expanded mandate for civilian CIs was a broad trend. However, we also noted that rule interpretation seemed to vary depending on what precinct an investigative unit was in, so that things that are allowed in one part of the country would be prohibited in another, even as the police authority would be the same. Local interpretation of rules and legislation thus had a real impact in this regard.

A second approach to configurational arrangements was also to locally organize collaborative spaces in which civilian CIs and police would interact and work closely on a regular basis. One prominent example of this entailed investigation units in which a pluralised, multi-functional approach to investigation was encouraged. These units were characterized by highly complex cases requiring several specializations. As such, the configurational dimension of boundary work was often visible and associated with specialized, high-status investigative units, where the police authority needed different perspectives to coincide to successfully deal with casework. In more mundane, day-to-day, volume crime investigation, these efforts to get CIs to collaborate were less common.

Discussion

We have analysed variations of boundary work in an occupational field that is being differentiated as civilian investigators from various backgrounds make an entry into work practice. While the literature on boundary work strategies has proliferated, little attention has been paid to the question of how different types of boundary work are linked and how contextual conditions impact how boundary work is enacted (Langley et al., 2019). Our findings show that defensive, collaborative, and configurational boundary work were present in investigation work practice, and furthermore, we identified a variety of approaches to boundary work within these broad categories. We now turn to discussing these findings from two perspectives. First, we discuss how different types of boundary work may intersect. Second, we address how contextual factors such as power asymmetries and, specifically, social status, impact how and why different types of boundary work are enacted.

Connecting types of boundary work

As noted, different types of boundary work could often be talked about in an interrelated fashion, where a defensive mechanism often simultaneously could be mirrored by an opposite simultaneous or sequential boundary work strategy. As stated by Quick and Feldman (2014) as well as Langley et al. (2019), this multiplicity is to be expected as boundaries are not fixed but rather constantly negotiated. Similarly, Lawrence and Phillips (2019) highlighted the importance of examining what resources and practices are involved in such negotiations and on what levels different types of boundary work are enacted. In Figure 2, we have connected defensive boundary work strategies (on the left) to collaborative and configurational boundary work strategies (on the right) to visualize how different boundary defences and strategies to counter boundary defences are related.

Figure 2

Connecting defensive, collaborative, and configurational boundary work
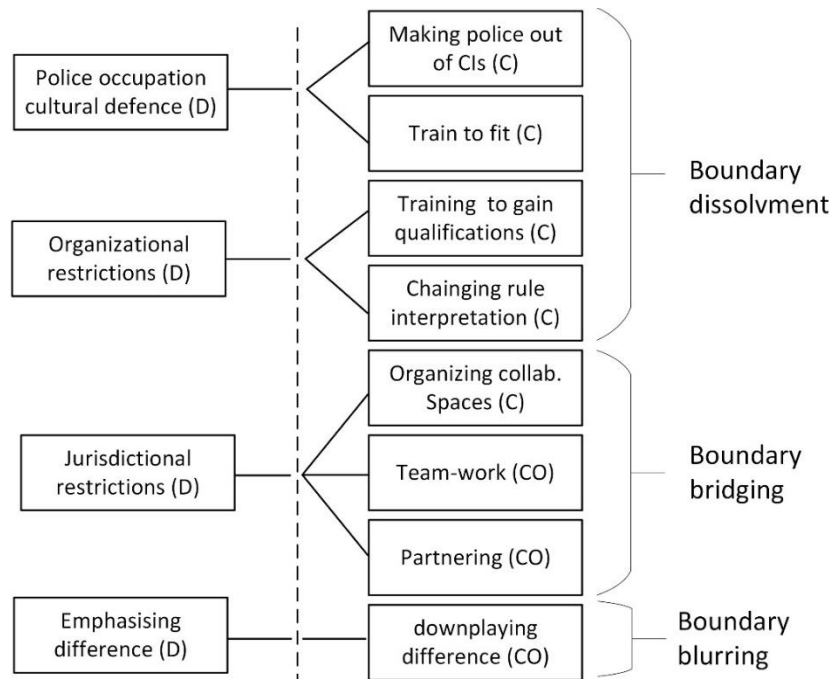
D = defensive, C = configurational, CO = collaborative

Figure 2 indicates that cultural and organizational defence strategies were mostly counteracted with configurational arrangements. For instance, local civilian CIs or police detectives would themselves have little leeway to change organizational restrictions or cultural defence. Rather, a more institutionalized approach would be needed such as investment in continuing professional development and training, or an organizationally sanctioned mandate to interpret rules in a new way. Cultural and organizational boundaries are in a sense police-internal, thus demanding a more structural or configurational approach where the goal is to change the current practice by dissolving boundaries. Interestingly, in relation to cultural defence, this dissolvement would not primarily entail addressing cultural issues, but rather changing the status of civilians into becoming police detectives, thereby transforming their professional selves into insiders.

In relation to jurisdictional boundaries, such as externally determined legislation, the findings point to the conclusion that local initiatives were more common here to counter boundaries. Examples included coming together within units by partnering or working in a collectively oriented manner. These initiatives enabled the involved detectives to work around, bridging legislative boundaries so that work could continue. Finally, we identified the defensive strategy of emphasising difference and the countering collaborative strategy of downplaying difference as two identity-centred strategies of boundary work as these strategies revolve around how civilian CIs define themselves as part of the police organization. Whilst the strategy of defining oneself as other than police serves to create an alternate identity position for

civilian CIs, the collaborative strategy of defining oneself as like police functions serves to blur the boundary, thereby making it less tangible.

In conclusion, different types of boundary work requires different types of resources from the involved actors: Configurational boundary work was related to occupation cultural and organizational defence mechanisms, while collaborative boundary work was carried out more autonomously by individuals engaging in identity-centred "self-work" (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019). While this conclusion shows that boundary work strategies don't form in isolation, but rather as different positions in ongoing negotiations and struggles over meaning, the question of in what contextual conditions different types of boundary work are mobilized in the organisation remains to be discussed.

Social status of work and boundaries of work

A clear tendency is that collaborative boundary work strategies and configurational arrangements structured to facilitate interaction were associated with more specialized—and in essence "high status"—types of investigative practice while defensive boundary work was common throughout the organization. Furthermore, many of the configurational arrangements were focused upon learning and in-service training. From previous research on continuing education, it has been established that there is a "Matthew effect" (Merton, 1968) in how training and organizational resources are allocated. This means that training and development initiatives are often provided to those who work in high-status environments within an organization. Considering this conclusion, the finding that configurational investments are directed to highly specialized investigative units is expected. However, current research on boundary work has suggested that "…higher-status professions tend to defend existing boundaries while lower-status professions strive to change them" (Bucher et al., 2016, p. 465). The quote describes how position-based power asymmetries have been described to relate to defensive boundary work as professional groups want to safeguard a privileged position (Abbott, 1995). That high status resonates with defensive boundary work is a recurrent theme in the literature. For instance, Allen (2000, p.84) studied stories of nurses and how contrastive rhetoric constructed social differences between the occupations of nursing and medicine on the one hand and differences between nursing expertise and other forms of knowledge held by assistants and support staff on the other. While recent research has stated the likelihood for high-status social roles within organisations to entail a propensity for boundary defence within that organisation, this tendency was not evident in the empirical material studied here.

There may be many potential reasons why high-status investigation practices were not more clearly associated with boundary defence. For one, employment in highly specialized investigation units is seldom the first contact with investigation work; rather, these types of units are workplaces that CIs advance towards over time. Thus, much of the defensive boundary work may take place in other contexts within the police that civilian CIs encounter prior to

working with, for instance, serious crime. Connecting to this, the civilians who work in highly specialized investigation units are themselves often specialists, holding high levels of expertise within subject domains for which the police may lack knowledge. Examples include specific aspects of forensics or technological expertise. With complex, large-scale investigations, wherein various knowledge domains are important for a successful outcome, it follows that knowledge sharing becomes highly valued.

These factors may explain why collaborative and configurational boundary work was more common in these settings. Other research to point in this direction: Meier (2015) studied disciplinary boundaries and collaboration in emergency medicine, and showed how trust, knowledge sharing, and relational coordination may dissolve disciplinary boundaries. Meier concluded that trust entailed a precondition for collaboration, but it was also central in realising collaboration. Similar conclusions were drawn by Weber et al. (2022), who discussed how "benevolence-based trust" was associated with collaborative boundary work. In essence, this type of trust involves consideration of others' interests and needs as well as a disposition to compromise. As stated by the authors, benevolence-based trust therefore creates conditions for psychological safety, which in turn allows the involved parties to discuss alterations of boundaries. It is not unlikely that in large-scale investigations, wherein collaboration is a prerequisite for success and wherein different CIs bring different types of expertise to the table, this may create other types of power differentials than those that are based on professional belonging. The dynamics of large-scale investigative work may simply reduce the difference, and by extension, this reduces the mechanisms for defensive boundary work. As such, this paper points to the conclusion that in studies of boundary work, social status is an important driving force for groups and individuals. Given that investigative work is becoming more specialized and characterized by knowledge diversity in the light of knowledge developments such as digitalization, new forensic methods, and transnational crime, specialists are needed within this work and are valued based on their complementary spheres of knowledge (Deslauriers-Varin & Fortin, 2021). While this study has begun to describe how various forms of boundary work relates to status and knowledge within investigation, these relations might also be further explored. For instance, the sample of the present study mainly focuses on the civilian perspective, and among civilians, female detectives are in the majority. Indeed, gender is an important marker for status and to explore the ways male and female investigators experience boundary work is an interesting avenue for further research. Similarly, the results of this study may also spur further studies focusing on how police detectives experience boundary work in relation to the inflow of civilians into policing.

Article history

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