PAPER IV: *Cross-sector strategists: From dietician to formal boundary spanner*

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Prolonged abstract

In this article, I will describe and analyze the emergence of cross-sector strategists in Swedish public management, focusing on the specific case of public health strategists. The study will delineate the occupational journey of public health planners transitioning into cross-sector strategist. This occupational group has moved from working within healthcare, primarily seeing patients via referrals in a delineated policy field (working with preventive care, e.g., weight management, smoking cessation support, dietary interventions, and promoting physical activity), to functioning as formal boundary spanners tasked with monitoring and promoting cross-sectoral policy objectives (Svensson, 2019; Kanon & Andersson, 2023).

Responding to the interconnected character of public health challenges, the World Health Organization (WHO) advocated for a cross-sectoral policy integration approach in public health policy as early as 1979 through its 'Health-In-All' strategy. This call gained momentum globally from 2006 onwards (Ollila 2011), and in Sweden 2018 (Public Health Agency, 2021), urging nations to broaden the scope of public health policy to encompass all determinants of health and well-being. Central to this approach is the strategic cultivation of partnerships across various sectors to address social, environmental, and economic factors influencing health and health equity (Tosun & Lang, 2017). This paradigm shift was further catalyzed by heightened interest from diverse stakeholders in public health issues, particularly when these issues were seen as major parts of achieving the social sustainability goals outlined in the UN's 2030 sustainability agenda. Consequently, the language of health promotion has often been reframed to align with the discourse of social sustainability, especially within public organizations outside of the health care sector (Scheele et al. 2018; Synnevåg et al., 2017; Kokkinen et al., 2019).

In Swedish municipalities, akin to many other nations, designating a specific role as a public health strategist has become considered as a crucial measure to achieve coordination among disparate actors in the policy area of public health. Although not legally mandated, this position is endorsed by national policies as a means to monitor and promote cross-sectoral public health issues. Such cross-sectoral policy integration is often referred to as 'mainstreaming' of a perspective into other organizational units in terms of policy-making, in the Swedish practical context, the most commonly used term for this is 'cross-sectoral policy

issues', i.e., *tvärsektoriella policyfrågor*. What makes the case of Swedish public health professionals interesting is that it implies a form of inverse relation between processes of professionalization and institutionalization. When an occupational group, such as the studied cross-sector strategists, externalizes control of the application of its knowledge base in this sense, it marginalizes its role as a professional group that maintains control of the application of its knowledge base (cf. Risi & Wickert, 2017). In this sense, their former role as dieticians in preventive health care became obsolete as their mission became institutionalized as a cross-sectoral policy challenge, resulting in an asymmetrical institutionalization process for their issue and their own professionalization process asymmetrical. Instead, this occupational group increasingly fills the role of formal boundary spanners, spanning the political, bureaucratic, and professional realms; coordinating and facilitating the political-administrative interface, the intersections of vertical and horizontal specializations and the boundaries of jurisdictional expertise.

Organization scholars from various schools of thought have increasingly focused on occupational groups and individuals taking on intermediary roles in managing and facilitating 'complex webs of relations' by connecting and mediating across organizations, professionals, and tasks (Anteby et al. 2016). Such 'boundary spanning' can be defined as 'a set of communication and coordination activities performed by individuals within an organization and between organizations to integrate activities across multiple cultural, institutional and organizational contexts' (Schotter et al., 2017, p. 404). The literature on so-called 'boundary spanners' (Williams, 2012; Van Meerkerk & Edelenbos, 2014; Edelenbos & Van Meerkerk, 2015) focuses on organizational members who operate at the interface of different organizations or occupational groups by linking expertise domains (Levina & Vast, 2005), mediating conflicts (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967), and enhancing coordination in decision-making and organizational activities (Ancona & Caldwell, 1990; Williams, 2012). While existing research generally distinguishes between formal and informal boundary spanners, i.e., those formally assigned a role as integrator from those who perform it out of personal interest (Levina & Vaast, 2005), most studies emphasize interpersonal aspects of boundary spanning rather than intermediaries that exist by design in the organizational structure (DiBenigno & Kellogg, 2014). Consequently, the present study focuses on the previously overlooked dimension of organizations implementing formal arrangements to facilitate boundary work in both public (Svensson, 2019) and private (Monteiro, 2017) organizational settings.

The study will illustrate and analyze the occupational journey of public health strategists, transitioning from dieticians to performing as formal boundary spanners amidst a spectrum of so-called 'grand challenges' concerning public health and social sustainability. These cross-sector strategists work as a support function in the connection between otherwise separated professional groups, functioning as an intermediary occupation, supporting, facilitating, and process-leading the establishment of embedded workspaces to induce cross-jurisdictional problem-solving. Their obligations also include overseeing and monitoring strategic policy areas by establishing connections with the vertical hierarchy, facilitating increased capacity to enforce accountability, and allowing for monitoring, controlling, and predicting action in the bureaucratic organization structure. Lastly, cross-sector strategists navigate the 'purple zone' (Alford et al., 2017; Brorström & Norbäck, 2020) of the politics-administrative interface. However, the study will show how assuming the role of a formal boundary spanner does not automatically translate into effective boundary spanning 'in practice', since this requires establishing oneself as a legitimate participant in multiple fields, negotiating on behalf of stakeholders (Levina & Vaast, 2005; Soundararajan et al., 2018; Langley et al., 2019), cultivating what Bourdieu calls a 'joint field of practice'. Despite their formal designation, many strategists struggle to maintain a neutral and purely facilitative stance.

The aim of this paper is to advance our knowledge of formal boundary spanning in public organizations, addressing both theory and practice.

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