

**The In-Between: How Role Ambiguity Facilitates Mediation across Faultlines.**

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## **Abstract**

One of the key challenges in highly innovative industries is to balance creative and commercial objectives. More specifically, in the creative industries the tension between these two objectives can lead to deep faultlines between artistic and commercial professionals. In the film industry this faultline is most readily apparent in the relationship between the director and producer. In this paper we examine the role of the first assistant director (1<sup>st</sup> AD) who occupies a role in between the director and producer while being accountable to both. As a result of occupying this in-between role, the 1<sup>st</sup> AD experiences role conflict and role ambiguity. In contrast to previous studies that highlight the negative effects of role ambiguity, we show that role ambiguity has a positive effect on successfully performing the mediating role and helps to bridge the faultline between art and commerce. Our case is based on interview data with 24 producers, 14 directors and 14 first assistant directors.

## INTRODUCTION

Faultline theory is an influential and growing field of study in organization science. Faultlines are intra-group dividing lines along which a group can be split up into relatively homogenous subgroups, in such a way that interaction between group members is at least partially determined by their position relative to the faultline (Thatcher, Patel 2011, Thatcher, Patel 2012, Bezrukova, Jehn, Zanutto, Thatcher 2009, Gibson, Vermeulen 2003, Li, Hambrick 2005, Lau, Murnighan 1998, van Knippenberg, Dawson, West, Homan 2011). In case of conflict or disagreement, these faultlines can become apparent, which can have a negative effect on organizational performance. Most faultline studies focus on demographic attributes such as gender, age or ethnicity that may define faultlines. Other include differences that are not immediately or visually identifiable (Jackson, Joshi, Erhardt 2003, Jehn, Chadwick, Thatcher 1997, Jehn, Northcraft, Neale 1999) and which can easily lead to different orientations and value systems.

A recent study focuses on faultlines in top management teams that derive from differences in the functional background of team members (van Knippenberg, Dawson, West, Homan 2011). Since large organizations can have multiple core objectives it can make sense to distribute these core objectives among the members of the organization by making particular employees or particular departments responsible for attaining particular objectives. By dividing the organization along functional lines, such as research and development (R&D) and marketing, one runs the risk that precisely by dividing the individual members according to the core objective they pursue, this will

result in a dominant faultline affecting organizational behaviour and performance (Gupta, Raj, Wilemon 1986, Leenders, Wierenga 2008).

One possible way to manage an organization in which there is a clear functional faultline is to make this faultline the core organizing principle and let it extend from the operatives up to the top management team that will consist of two or more hierarchically equivalent executives, each of which is responsible for one core objective and related functional tasks. The organizational structure in which there are two such top executives is also called the dual leadership structure (Reid, Karambayya 2009). If an organization is characterized by functional faultlines and led by dual executives, each of whom is responsible for her/his side of the faultline, roles and responsibilities can be relatively clear for these executives and most of the other organizational members they manage. A recent study shows that even though teams with strong faultlines are characterized by stronger polarization between subgroups, once there is agreement among the members within each of the two subgroups, they are faster in reaching consensus at the aggregate team level compared to teams that have weak faultlines (Mäs, Flache, Takács, Jehn, forthcoming). However, when conflicts do arise between the dual leaders, these may be harder to solve.

If there is an individual occupying an in-between role precisely on the faultline, but at a lower hierarchical level, this can bring advantages by helping the dual leaders to solve conflict that derive from opposing interests. These in-betweens may be especially successful if they are “crisscrossing actor” that share attributes with members of more than one subgroup, because as a result of this similarity they are better able to act as a mediator in case of conflict between these subgroups (Mäs, Flache, Takács, Jehn, forthcoming). At the same time, however, the occupant of such a position might

experience role conflict when faced with inconsistent or even incompatible demands (Rizzo, House, Lirtzman 1970, Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, Rosenthal 1964, Biddle 1986, House, Rizzo 1972) and role ambiguity, which refers to uncertainty about which tasks and responsibilities are part of the role (Biddle 1986). This may be especially pertinent in dual leadership structures.

The core contribution of this paper is to combine insights from faultline theory and role theory to understand how the role conflict and role ambiguity associated with a role on a faultline, can allow the individual occupying that role to more effectively bridge the faultline and act as a mediator between the dual leaders. Whereas earlier studies focus on the negative effects of role ambiguity and conflict; in this study we argue that, precisely for the roles maximally exposed to such ambiguity and conflict, they can bring important positive effects. We show that role conflict and role ambiguity allows for managing tensions at the faultline more effectively. By doing so, we contribute to a better understanding of the interrelationships between faultlines, roles conflict, and role ambiguity, which, in turn, contributes to a better understanding of how the distribution of responsibilities can affect organizational performance in organizations with multiple objectives.

The empirical setting of this study is the film industry, which is characterized by a faultline between roles primarily concerned with artistic objectives and roles primarily concerned commercial objectives. (DeFillippi, Grabher, Jones 2007, Thompson, Jones, Warhurst 2007, Voss, Cable, Voss 2000, Holbrook, Addis 2008, Cohendet, Simon 2007). Film organizations usually have a dual leadership structure, consisting of a creative executive, the director, and a commercial executive, the producer. While the director is predominantly responsible for the artistic aspects of a film, the producer is

predominantly responsible for the commercial aspects of a film (Baker, Faulkner 1991). The producer and director are supposed to collaborate closely to ensure that the organization as a whole functions well as a team. Thus, at first sight it seems that it is their responsibility to bridge the faultline between art and commerce.

The first assistant director (1<sup>st</sup> AD) occupies a position below the producer and director, and reports to both. Although the activities of the 1<sup>st</sup> ADs have been mentioned in earlier studies (Bechky 2006) their role has not been investigated in depth. Besides being the right hand of the director, the 1<sup>st</sup> AD also coordinates production activities, and liaises with the production office. By occupying the in-between role, hierarchically below the producer and director, the 1<sup>st</sup> AD is expected to suffer from role conflict and role ambiguity. Role conflict and ambiguity, however, also can provide 1<sup>st</sup> ADs with space to craft their role to successfully manage conflicts across the faultline between art and commerce that runs through every film project organization all the way up to the dual executives.

The structure of this paper is as follows. First, faultline theory, dual leadership structures and role theory are discussed. We will consider how these theoretical approaches help one to understand the practice of film production. Next, we describe the setup of our qualitative study. The results are presented and discussed, focusing on the role of the 1<sup>st</sup> AD, and how role conflict and role ambiguity create space for crafting the role of the 1<sup>st</sup> AD to act as a mediator and bridge the faultline.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Faultline Theory**

Faultlines describe the boundaries between two or more subgroups (Lau, Murnighan 1998). Much research has been done to study the effects of particular faultlines in groups or teams on collective performance (Thatcher, Patel 2011, Thatcher, Patel 2012, Bezrukova, Jehn, Zanutto, Thatcher 2009, Gibson, Vermeulen 2003, Li, Hambrick 2005). This stream of research has mostly focused on faultlines defined by demographic attributes (Jehn, Chadwick, Thatcher 1997, Jehn, Northcraft, Neale 1999), but also values (Bezrukova, Jehn, Zanutto, Thatcher 2009, Jehn 1994) have received attention as characteristics that can define faultlines. Group values denote essential beliefs or orientations of individuals that are held in common by particular (sub)groups and that determine the behavioural choices of these individuals. The more these group values are different on the two sides of a faultline, the more one can expect different decisions to be preferred by these individuals, and the greater the potential for disunity and conflict at the intergroup or organizational level.

A recent study focuses on faultlines that derive from differences in functional background of members of top management team members (van Knippenberg, Dawson, West, Homan 2011). Organizations often engage in many different business activities, organized in several divisions and functional departments, with a strong division of labor. To mitigate inefficiencies and conflicts it makes sense to distribute these tasks over organizational members who are best suited to perform them. In larger organizations this can lead to the establishment of functionally specialized departments,

such as research and development (R & D) and marketing. Each of these departments then focuses on a particular range of activities, necessitating particular skills and capabilities.

In turn, this kind of departmental specialization can create new problems, precisely because this specialization can decrease the effectiveness of communication and decision making across departmental boundaries. Earlier studies have focussed especially on the negative effects of incomplete integration across the R&D and marketing interface (Gupta, Raj, Wilemon 1986, Leenders, Wierenga 2008). The tensions between different sets of objectives, orientations or other personal characteristics can result in conflicts that have the potential to split the organization as a whole, or at least severely impair its performance. This problem is often referred to as the interface problem, but it could also be considered as a faultline issue.

A recent study, however, shows that although teams – or organizations for that matter – with strong, in contrast with those with weak, faultlines are characterized by a strong polarization between subgroups, once there is agreement among the members within the two subgroups, they are faster in reaching consensus at the aggregate team level (Mäs, Flache, Takács, Jehn, forthcoming). Even the previous study focuses on demographic attributes of team members, one might expect that it also applies to other than demographic attributes, such as experience in different functional backgrounds. Yet in a dual leadership structure the top executives may ultimately encounter friction in integrating the often conflicting interests of the opposing subgroups on each side of the faultline.

However, if there is an individual occupying an in-between role precisely on the faultline, but at a lower hierarchical level, this can bring advantages by helping the dual

leaders to solve faultline conflicts that derive from opposing interests. These in-betweens may be especially successful if they are “crisscrossing actor” that share attributes with members of each subgroup, because as a result of this similarity they are better able to act as a mediator in case of conflict between these same subgroups (Mäs, Flache, Takács, Jehn, forthcoming). But precisely because of their position right on the faultline, this “crisscrossing actor” or in-between may suffer role conflict and role ambiguity, precisely because it is not clear on which side of the faultline they belong, and which authority they have.

### **Role Theory**

When a position within an organizational structure comes with a specified set of tasks or responsibilities, that position can be described as a role that is performed by a particular individual (House, Rizzo 1972). Roles are thus shaped in the context of a particular organizational structure (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, Rosenthal 1964, Jones, Deckro 1993, Morris, Steers, Koch 1979). A person performing a role is expected to perform the associated set of tasks and make decisions that are befitting of the role (Rogers, Molnar 1976). In addition, roles can also be seen as socially constructed units of what is appropriate and expected of a person in a particular position in an organization or a team (Ilgen, Hollenbeck 1990). Each role is inevitably linked to other roles within the organization. Because of this interdependency, those performing certain roles should have expectations about those performing other organizational roles.

Performing roles in organizations can lead to stress to the individuals occupying them, but not just because of the individual being aware of the expectations of others. Two specific categories of role stress are role conflict and role ambiguity. Role conflict arises when a person is faced with inconsistent or even incompatible

demands on how she/he should behave to properly fulfill her/his role (Rizzo, House, Lirtzman 1970, Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, Rosenthal 1964, Biddle 1986, House, Rizzo 1972). Second, when the employee does not have a clear idea of the boundaries of his role, or of which tasks and responsibilities are parts of his role, role ambiguity can arise (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, Rosenthal 1964, Biddle 1986). It is also not unlikely for individuals to experience both role conflict and role ambiguity at the same time, since the perception of incompatible expectations associated with role conflict can interact with uncertainty about the precise content of one's role (Morris, Steers, Koch 1979). Moreover, an increase in role conflict can cause an increase in role ambiguity and vice versa (Rogers, Clow, Kash 1994).

Role conflict and role ambiguity are often linked to undesirable outcomes for both the members of the organization as well as the organization at large. Role conflict and role ambiguity can lead to dissatisfaction with the role, a distorted reality (Rizzo, House, Lirtzman 1970), decreased individual satisfaction, decreased perceived organizational effectiveness (House, Rizzo 1972), anxiety, low organizational commitment, and lower performance (Jackson, Schuler 1985, Tubre, Collins 2000).

An often mentioned source of role conflict and role ambiguity within an organization is that one individual has to report to more than one other person. This is especially likely in matrix organizations (Jones, Deckro 1993, Galbraith 1971, Sy, D'Annunzio 2005) or in organizations that have a dual leadership structure, at the top of which there are two hierarchically equivalent managers (Reid, Karambayya 2009, Eckman 2006). In such organizations, there is a violation of the principle of unity of command (Jones, Deckro 1993, Ford, Randolph 1992), from which it follows that "every subordinate should be assigned to a single boss" (Ford, Randolph 1992: p. 275).

Violating the principle of unity of command can increase the chances of role conflict and ambiguity (Rizzo, House, Lirtzman 1970, Morris, Steers, Koch 1979), because this causes employees to be confronted with multiple reporting lines, as a result of which they may be exposed to multiple and sometimes incompatible orders and objectives. These employees may experience stress from being in the middle; to live up to the expectations and demands of one manager could mean falling short in meeting the expectations and demands of the other (Rizzo, House, Lirtzman 1970, Jones, Deckro 1993).

Coordination between interdependent roles can be improved by the creation of an integrating role. Reid and Karambayya (2009) also stress the importance of mediation between the two leaders in a dual leadership structure. The existence of a role in the “in-between position” may reduce or resolve conflicts between the individuals on both sides, especially if the latter manages her or his role stress well (Jones, Deckro 1993). This person might function as a “bridge” and enable the two leaders to provide efficient leadership that benefits the organization as a whole. Earlier studies have suggested that there are necessary conditions for such an in-between role to be successfully performed. The role should be fulfilled by a person “who can exercise expert power in the form of persuasion and informal influences” (Galbraith 1974: p. 34). This individual occupying a mediating role should also play an active part in defining, innovating and crafting his/her own role (Wrzesniewski, Dutton 2001).

Role crafting, in terms of moving outside one’s “normal” role, can be seen as extra role behavior in which individuals go beyond their formal job description (Organ 1997). However, instead of performing these additional tasks only incidentally,

individuals can craft their role more structurally, with the result that performing these tasks becomes part of what is expected of them.

Role crafting can be of particular importance in relation to a particular form of ambiguity individuals in their organizational roles can be confronted by, namely ambiguity with respect to occupational jurisdiction. This refers to ambiguity about which occupational group has the knowledge, authority or legitimacy to control the execution of a particular range of tasks (Bechky 2003) or, in other terms, who has the right to make decisions about the content, objectives, and outcomes of particular tasks and the resulting responsibilities of the individuals performing the concomitant roles, where there are multiple competing claims of expertise (Long Lingo and O'Mahoney, 2010). On the one hand, jurisdictional ambiguity, especially when they have reached the highest hierarchical level of the dual executives, might lead to a decision-making gridlock. On the other hand, jurisdictional ambiguity may also create space for individuals to (re-)craft their roles in order to manage conflicts that arise due to the faultline between artistic and commercial objectives.

The constructs of jurisdictional ambiguity and role ambiguity are related but different. Whereas jurisdictional ambiguity is a – occupational – group level construct that could lead to competition among groups (Bechky 2003), role ambiguity is an individual level construct that could lead to competition between individuals with potentially overlapping roles.

Model 1 provides a visual representation of our theoretical framework. Below we will further explore how the in-between role can be crafted in such a way that it creates a position that allows for effective mediating behavior across the faultline in a dual leadership structure. In addition, we study to what extent the space that is available

for crafting the in-between role, is a direct result of the way in which dual executive leaders enact their roles. The testable proposition is that dual leaders that do not enact their roles up to the limits of their authority provide more space for the in-between role and for effective mediation across the faultline by the occupant of that role.

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Insert Model 1 about here

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### **EMPIRICAL SETTING: THE FILM INDUSTRY**

Many authors have pointed out that the dichotomy between artistic and commercial objectives is a major determinant of how organizations in the cultural industries behave (for example: Holbrook, Addis 2008, Caves 2000). Given the importance of the tension between artistic and commercial objectives in the cultural industries, it seems sensible to have departmental specialization along those lines. In many cultural industries this specialization structured by the artistic-commercial faultline characterizes all levels of the organization, up to the top managers who form a dual executive leadership (Reid, Karambayya 2009). In some industries, for instance the theatre, the two top executives are explicitly referred to as the artistic director and the commercial director (Bhansing, Leenders & Wijnberg, 2012).

In the film industry – the empirical setting of our study – the dichotomy and organizational faultline between art and commerce are clearly identifiable. The director

usually has the main responsibility for artistic matters or the look and feel of the film, while the producer is responsible for business issues, such as financing and organization (Squire 2004). The producer and director form the leadership duo and can be seen as the personification of the conflict between art and commerce in the film industry (Delmestri, Montanari, Usai 2005), since the artistic goal of the director, wanting to build a reputation based on artistic performance, can potentially be hindered by the producer's goal of keeping within budget and making a profit (Svejenova, Vives, Alvarez 2010).

Although in the first half of the 20th-century Hollywood was characterized by the dominance of large centralized and vertically integrated organizations (Jones 2001), the film industry in the last decades has become an example of an industry that is strongly decentralized. The disaggregation of the Hollywood studio system meant a shift towards collaborative content production in project-based organizations (PBOs) in order to secure innovativeness and cost efficiency (Windeler, Sydow 2001). Films are mostly produced by a group of independent firms and freelancers that are contracted to supply the resources needed in a project-based organization that is disbanded immediately after the film is completed (Faulkner, Anderson 1987).

The benefits of hierarchy in the old studio system in Hollywood was that key talents, including producers and directors, were tied to the studio with long term contracts (Jones 2001) and disagreements could be settled at (an even) higher hierarchical level. An important side-effect of the replacement of the old studios by a succession of PBOs and short term contracts is the increased difficulty in managing the tensions between art and commerce. One possible solution that was attempted was to have the roles of the director and the producer be occupied by a single person. Although

this solved the organizational problem of balancing commercial and artistic interest, it hampered role specialization and created intrapersonal role conflict within the producer-director role combination. From the 1970s onwards the artistic and commercial roles became increasingly separated (Baker, Faulkner 1991) which led to the re-emergence of interpersonal role conflict between producers and directors.

A strong and stable mediator would be able to help reconcile diverging artistic and commercial goals of the director and producer. A potential mediator can be found in the role of the 1<sup>st</sup> AD. The 1<sup>st</sup> AD is in a position just under the producer and director. The 1<sup>st</sup> AD is accountable to both and is in control of the actual functioning of the film set during the shooting phase (Squire 2004). It is a role that is likely to generate role conflict and role ambiguity as a result of a conflicting set of demands coming from the producer and the director. However, precisely because of his or her position, we expect that the 1<sup>st</sup> AD can prove to be invaluable in managing the tension between art and commerce. In the following case we study the extent to which role conflict and role ambiguity affect the ability of 1<sup>st</sup> ADs to mediate across the faultline between art and commerce by acting as in-between, balancing the opposing interests of directors and producers.

## **DATA AND METHODOLOGY**

Between February and June 2007 we performed 24 face-to-face semi-structured interviews with producers. In addition, we interviewed 14 directors between February and September 2008. These interviews with producers and directors were originally intended for research projects to study contracting and rewarding practices in project-

based organizations (Ebbers, Wijnberg 2009b), and the role of organizational memory in temporary project-based industries (Ebbers, Wijnberg 2009a). In the course of these interviews both producers and directors pointed out the importance of the bridging and mediating role of the 1<sup>st</sup> AD in managing their conflicting commercial and artistic interests. Between April and July 14 we therefore performed an additional round of 14 interviews with 1<sup>st</sup> ADs that at the time were professionally active in the film industry.

We performed (on average) 90-minute interviews that were tape-recorded and subsequently typed out verbatim. We used face-to-face semi-structured interviews instead of questionnaires or surveys because interviews lead to fewer incomplete responses, fewer misunderstandings in relation to the questions, and generally a higher response rate (Yin 2003). All interviews were tape-recorded and typed out verbatim. Moreover, in order to reduce the negative impact of socially desirable answers all informants were granted anonymity in the reporting of the results by giving them a unique alphabetic character (Kumar, N., Stern, L.W. & Anderson, J.C. 1993). In order to improve the response rate we approached all prospective respondents with the active support of their respective professional organizations: Film Producers Netherlands, the Dutch Directors Guild, and the Assistant Directors Club.

The empirical case will be structured along five main themes: (1) the roles of the producer, director, and the 1<sup>st</sup> AD; (2) the relationship between the 1<sup>st</sup> AD and the director and producer; (3) role conflict and role ambiguity of the 1<sup>st</sup> AD; (4) role crafting by the 1<sup>st</sup> AD and bridging the faultline. In annexes 1, 2 and 3 you can find an overview of a number of key characteristics of the interviewees, respectively producers, directors and 1<sup>st</sup> assistant directors. Table 1 shows key quotations with respect to role conflict, role ambiguity and role crafting.

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## **CASE STUDY RESULTS**

### **The Roles of Producer, Director and 1<sup>st</sup> AD**

The producer's most important responsibility is concerned with finding adequate financial resources, managing contracts, guarding the budget, scheduling and organizing the production process. In many cases, once the development of the film script is finished and the project financed, the producer delegates the project to a line producer. On the actual film set there is a production manager who is responsible for managing the daily operations.

The director, on the other hand, is responsible for the ultimate look and feel of the film. One producer states: "the director is ultimately most responsible for the artistic achievements of films. All the others on the [film] set of course also have a responsibility, but the director has the final responsibility" [Producer U]. This view is confirmed by directors: "The director has the ultimate creative responsibility for the film. For everything the D.O.P. [director of photography] or composer does, I am ultimately responsible" [Director B].

Finally, much less is known about role of the 1<sup>st</sup> AD. The 1<sup>st</sup> AD is often involved in the pre-production phase, and always in the production phase during which

the actual shooting takes place. In the pre-production phase he or she is responsible for signalling and tackling problems that may arise during the actual shoot: “when you signal any problems in the planning, you immediately discuss them with the director, the line producer and the cameraman and try to come up with a solution” [1<sup>st</sup> AD M]. During the production phase the 1<sup>st</sup> AD executes the planning and is the coordinator in charge of the daily supervision on the set.

“You are the spider in the web, controlling all the departments. You are responsible for running on time and sticking to the schedule of a production day. You must ensure that people do their work, do it well, and do it on time. Communication is very important. Every department has to know what needs to be done so that no department is waiting, while it could already make preparations for the next take.” [1<sup>st</sup> AD B]

Since 1<sup>st</sup> ADs occupy a hierarchical position below and in between the producer and the director, it is not really clear whether they belong to the production or the directing department, and it often varies in each different project. In other words, there is ambiguity both in terms of jurisdictional ambiguity at the occupational group level, and role ambiguity at the individual level. This means that the boundaries of the 1<sup>st</sup> AD role need to be – at least to some extent – discovered in each new individual film project. “It is always the question whether the 1<sup>st</sup> AD belongs to the production or directing department. That’s always the question” [Director F]. Before focussing in more detail on role conflict and role ambiguity from which 1<sup>st</sup> ADs suffer, we will first highlight the type of tensions that can arise between directors, producers and 1<sup>st</sup> ADs.

## **Tensions between directors and producers**

The previous paragraph suggests that there are clear boundaries between the roles and responsibilities producers and directors, and therefore little jurisdictional ambiguity. However, the boundaries between these roles can be unclear and fluid and therefore occupational jurisdiction contestable. Although some directors indeed see a clear division of responsibilities between art and business, for example: “producers provide the entire logistics and as a director you have a vision of what you want to achieve” [Director H], others have a broader view in which the producer is also involved in decision-making about artistic issues and the director also takes into account commercial issues.

“There are people that view a producer as a completely different person who is only concerned with financial matters. That financial part might be her specialty, but the substantive choices about what the film should be about and what it should look like, these are things we do together (...) At the moment we are casting for my new film. At that stage we also discuss whether an actress is bankable or capable of attracting a large audience.” [Director L]

Even though the previous quote is an example in which problems resulting from the conflicting objectives between directors and producers are solved through joint decision making, tensions between them are all too common. In general, directors appear to feel more emotionally involved with the project. This seems to transform the

balance of power in favour of the producer because the producer knows that he or she is in the position to make the dreams of the director come true. In the words of one of the directors: producers “feel that you are hooked” [Director J]. Another possible cause of the tense relationship is that directors feel that they are not being involved in financial matters. “I deliver something which brings in money for them, so they cannot say that I am not allowed to see the budget” [Director C]. When the budget would be more transparent, directors claim they would have the opportunity to anticipate potential financial problems, and estimate the financial consequences of their artistic choices.

The main bottleneck in the relationship between producers and directors is that directors nearly always need more time and money; more than producers, and the budget they control, allow. Although directors and producers acknowledge that conflicts do indeed occur, most of them do not perceive these differences of opinion as a conflict but more as an on-going discussion: “It is all about looking for a combination that works, just like in a marriage. Either you have your way, you agree with the other, or else you make a compromise” [Director A]. One producer points out that it can also be healthy to have some tensions: “It is normal for a director to ask for 24 shooting days, while there is only room for 22 shooting days in the budget. That is fine, as long as you come to an agreement” [Producer X]. First ADs concur that the relationship between producers and directors can be tense during the shooting phase. “The director will always fight for more money and the producer will always say: there is no money. So [during the shoot] they are making compromises all the time” [1<sup>st</sup> AD M]

The selection of the 1<sup>st</sup> AD can be an important source of tension between producers and directors. Producers like to think of the 1<sup>st</sup> AD as someone who guards their interests and sometimes directors fear that their artistic interests are not being

protected. “There are 1<sup>st</sup> ADs who side with the producer and there are 1<sup>st</sup> ADs who side with the director. The best ones are the ones that perform autonomously” [Director N]. Producers may push for a certain 1<sup>st</sup> AD in order to exert control and view the 1<sup>st</sup> AD as “a spy on the set” [Director G]. Nevertheless, most producers indicate that they allow directors to exert their influence in the selection of the 1<sup>st</sup> AD, because “if a director does not want someone it inevitably comes back to you during production.” [Producer X]. However, certain 1<sup>st</sup> ADs are deemed unacceptable and vetoed by producers when they believe a particular 1<sup>st</sup> AD may neglect their interests. “It once happened that a director wanted me for a project but production did not allow this because they thought that I had chosen the side of the crew too often” [1<sup>st</sup> AD C].

### **Tensions between the 1<sup>st</sup> AD and the Director**

There are two main responsibilities that 1<sup>st</sup> ADs have towards directors. First, the 1<sup>st</sup> AD should create the circumstances in which the director is able to focus entirely on his work. “My priority is to ensure that a situation is created where he can optimally focus on being creative. I always try to create a warm bed” [1<sup>st</sup> AD E]. This is done by taking care of communication and logistics [on the set during the shoot] and making sure that the director feels calm “even when all hell breaks loose” [1<sup>st</sup> AD C]. Second, they need to think along with the director from a creative point of view: “I think the director likes it when you have some knowledge about drama that allows you to think along, which means you understand why a director makes certain choices” [1<sup>st</sup> AD B]. In abiding to the wishes of the director, however, the 1<sup>st</sup> AD always needs to consider time limits and financial limits, the boundaries of which have been set by the producer.

Tensions between 1<sup>st</sup> ADs and directors are mostly related to time pressure. “It is always a time conflict; that the director wants more time than you have. That is standard. It happens at every shoot.” [1<sup>st</sup> AD N]. Also, sometimes the breakdown of scenes into shots is made by the director, without him or her taking into account the original planning made by the 1<sup>st</sup> AD. In that case “...the breakdown does not determine the planning and that is the problem” [1<sup>st</sup> AD K]. Finally, a director may focus too much on the creative side without taking the interests of all the crew members such as wardrobe, light technicians, or catering into account. “It sometimes happens that I support the producer, for example when we are working overtime for a few days in a row already” [1<sup>st</sup> AD G]. These tensions with respect to time are mainly solved by the 1<sup>st</sup> AD through discussing the consequences of the director making certain choices.

“I communicate consequences: when you take more time for this scene, there is only half an hour left for that scene. It is up to me to inform him when a day is not running smoothly, and I should not give him the idea that we have all the time in the world.” [1<sup>st</sup> AD M]

Time conflicts can be caused or exacerbated by bad communication. First ADs report that, during the shoot, directors often change their ideas and opinions on the spot, without communicating this to the 1<sup>st</sup> AD. This creates problems for 1<sup>st</sup> ADs since they need to accommodate these changes in the shooting schedule and communicate this to all other crew and cast members on the set that need to prepare for them. “Sometimes the director thinks of something new and forgets to pass it on” [1<sup>st</sup> AD J]. A possible cause of this is mentioned by one of the respondents, who states that most directors are

working on a film 24 hours a day and are constantly thinking of improvements. “In his creative process, he thought of new ideas and changed things on his own, but I was not given the time to prepare those things” [1<sup>st</sup> AD H]. In case the 1<sup>st</sup> AD cannot solve the problem through discussion and negotiation with the director, either the crew is asked to work overtime or the producer is called in to handle the situation.

### **Tensions between the 1<sup>st</sup> AD and the Producer**

There are two main responsibilities that 1<sup>st</sup> ADs have towards producers: finishing the shoot on time and sticking to the budget. Since time is money these are often two sides of the same coin. “I have to make sure that we uphold the limits of time and budget and create as much production value as possible (...) If we have fifty extras, then he [the producer] wants to see those fifty extras in the shot” [1<sup>st</sup> AD G]. Producers indicate that staying within the budget, meeting the planning and communication indeed are very important. “Those [1<sup>st</sup> ADs] are key individuals to me. They exert all control during production” [Producer S]. Producers want to receive daily updates about the progression of the shoot, and warned on time when certain aspects of production become too expensive. “You are supposed to keep an eye on his wallet; you are not allowed to waste any money on set” [1<sup>st</sup> AD N]. The main source of tension between 1<sup>st</sup> ADs and producers, therefore, is concerned with time management and the completion of a shooting day because it frequently happens that a day’s planning is not met.

This tension between 1<sup>st</sup> ADs and producers could to some extent be avoided if producers would involve 1<sup>st</sup> AD more in the pre-production process. However, often they do not pay 1<sup>st</sup> AD enough to prepare the shoot in the preproduction phase, which

according to 1<sup>st</sup> ADs is “Penny-wise Pound foolish thinking” [1<sup>st</sup> AD H]. The pre-production is the time to make a planning for the shoot – based on the so-called breakdown of the script – that is most efficient within the limits of time and money. A good planning allows 1<sup>st</sup> ADs to work more efficiently during the production or actual shooting phase, and allows them to anticipate or make decisions on the set more quickly. One could argue that “...a film is made in pre-production, during production it is only recorded” [1<sup>st</sup> AD M]. 1<sup>st</sup> ADs indicate that the preparation time needed equals half the time needed for the production during which the actual shoot takes place. When 1<sup>st</sup> ADs do not get enough time to prepare the film this results in inefficient planning and higher costs. “Producers need to realize that we could actually save them money with the expertise that we bring in” [1<sup>st</sup> AD A]. Furthermore, during pre-production:

“There are ten people at work, however, when things go wrong during production there are forty people at work, and in one day you [the producer] will lose the amount equivalent to what people in pre-production cost in a week.”  
[1<sup>st</sup> AD I]

The 1<sup>st</sup> AD often gets blamed by the producer for going into overtime, while he or she is not able to control all contingencies on the film set. Besides managing the delicate balance between the interests of the producer, director and the rest of the crew, 1<sup>st</sup> ADs also have to deal with the large number of contingencies that characterize film shoots, not in the least those related to shooting on location and bad weather. Like conflicts with directors, conflicts between 1<sup>st</sup> ADs and producers are mainly solved through negotiation. When a problem presents itself, it is communicated to the producer

by the 1<sup>st</sup> AD. The 1<sup>st</sup> AD usually proposes ways in which things can be made simpler or more economical. This often includes changing the script, skipping locations or using fewer resources. “You describe some scenarios to him and let him decide on the spot” [1<sup>st</sup> AD J]. The duration of the discussion depends on the producer. Some will immediately follow the judgement of the 1<sup>st</sup> AD, while some will push their own opinion. Either way, the final decision is made by the producer.

### **The In-between Role of the 1<sup>st</sup> AD**

The fact that the 1<sup>st</sup> AD performs a role in between the director and the producer creates role conflict and role ambiguity. This already starts with 1<sup>st</sup> ADs being uncertain about whether they are accountable to the director, the producer, or both. Most of them think they are accountable to both the producer and director. “Technically to the producer (...) but I am the assistant of the director, his most important assistant. In that sense, I am accountable to him as well” [1<sup>st</sup> AD A]. The following director provides an explanation for the different answers by stating that it is not certain whether the 1<sup>st</sup> AD belongs to the production or directing department: “That [1<sup>st</sup> AD] is the only one who falls directly under me, but is selected by the producer” [Director B]. The preference of a producer for a certain 1<sup>st</sup> AD can make directors suspicious. “There are producers who explicitly say that they do not want to work with a specific 1<sup>st</sup> AD but for me that is actually a reason to do precisely that” [Director N].

Although it is not clear cut, the loyalty of 1<sup>st</sup> ADs seems to lie somewhat more with the director. “It is supposed to be fifty-fifty but it varies. It mostly depends on the person” [1<sup>st</sup> AD B]. Even though the 1<sup>st</sup> AD respondents know that they are accountable

to the producer as well, their loyalty is mainly with the director for two reasons. First, the director is the one who makes the film. “If the director is not happy with what he does, there is no point. You may have finished on time and within budget, but that does not mean that you have produced a better film” [1<sup>st</sup> AD C]. Second, the director is the one that the 1<sup>st</sup> AD works with on a daily basis on the film set, while producers are hardly ever in the picture since they are often represented on the set by either the line producer or the production manager. When 1<sup>st</sup> ADs are directly approached by the director to participate in the project as opposed to the producer, they are more loyal towards the director: “Then you are more willing to go through fire and water for a person” [1<sup>st</sup> AD M].

Loyalty towards the director usually means giving him or her some extra time. “When you have a good relation with a director and you see that, even though he is doing his utmost best he doesn’t have enough time, he needs to shoot something but it is not possible, you will try to convince the producer to go along” [1<sup>st</sup> AD B]. For this to happen, the crew has to be asked for permission. “I would rather ask the crew to stay a bit longer, than to have to inform the director that he cannot get what he wants because the crew is going home” [1<sup>st</sup> AD G].

On the other hand, 1<sup>st</sup> ADs feel loyal towards producers in the sense that they need to guard the limits of time and money. Loyalty depends to some extent also on the phase of the project. One respondent states that during the pre-production phase he is more loyal towards the producer, whereas during production “my loyalty shifts to the creative side” [1<sup>st</sup> AD E]. In the pre-production phase the producer, director and 1<sup>st</sup> AD need to come up with a realistic planning for the shoot. When, in the pre-production phase, there appears to be a gap between the interests of the producer and those of the

director they “need to sort this out and find a solution” [1<sup>st</sup> AD I]. When 1<sup>st</sup> ADs have been actively involved during the pre-production phase – which is not always the case – in planning the shoot and evaluating the feasibility it becomes easier to avoid problems during actual production:

“This way you do not have that strange war situation: production against the rest of the world. I am a person they see [on the set] every day and people are less likely to blame someone they can see. That way you defuse that idea of two camps.” [1<sup>st</sup> AD I]

### **The 1<sup>st</sup> AD and Role Conflict**

“A director can say to you ‘it is so awful that the producer is doing that’. Or the other way around a producer can say ‘Hey, listen, we need to see how we can navigate the director a bit that way because he has an enormous set of demands that we cannot meet, especially not within the limits of the budget and time. So can you do something?’ That is how they use you” [1<sup>st</sup> AD B].

The previous quote is a prime example of how 1st ADs suffer from role conflict. This is the result of having to deal with conflicting interests and demands of both producers and directors. Every 1<sup>st</sup> AD respondent points out that they have been confronted with conflicting expectations. On the one hand, the 1<sup>st</sup> AD has to make sure that the shooting is completed within the specified time and budget. On the other hand, the 1<sup>st</sup> AD has to provide the director with the material that he or she needs in order to

make the desired film. “You always have two faces. You are constantly compromising. You are never able to fully support your director, because you know you are there to represent the interest of the producer as well” [1<sup>st</sup> AD A]. As a 1<sup>st</sup> AD, you must meet your responsibilities towards the producer and meet your responsibility towards the director, while these are often incompatible.

“It is a political game in which you must navigate between the wishes of the director and the opportunities that are provided by the producer. You are both the glue and the bumper between both superpowers. In some cases one has to play the role of devil’s advocate “ [1<sup>st</sup> AD D].

The 1<sup>st</sup> AD’s role is to think up creative solutions in order to bring together these opposing tendencies. In doing so he or she clearly explains the problems to both the director and producer and describes the consequences of certain decisions. Choices have to be made in order to continue the shooting in such a way that the production will be finished on time. This usually entails deleting scenes, shortening scenes, or shooting scenes in a different way. “You have to be able to bring forward solutions for how the same story can be told in less time” [1<sup>st</sup> AD J].

In practice this means that either the producer or the director has to make a concession. One time the director needs to listen to the producer, the other time the producer needs to listen to the director. “It is not like I am always with the producer or the director. You always try to take the middle road because if you don’t, who will?” [1<sup>st</sup> AD N]. Although during production there are mainly disagreements about time and money issues in which 1<sup>st</sup> ADs have to make a decision that may go against the interest

of either the director or producer, one 1<sup>st</sup> AD said that it is important to never side per definition with either the director or the producer for the duration of the whole project.

“You have to make sure that you warrant your middle position, so that you are able to bow to the director one time, and to the producer the other time” [1<sup>st</sup> AD F].

Some 1<sup>st</sup> ADs note that role conflict negatively influences their performance. One concrete negative effect of role conflict is that it badly affects their focus. “It may happen that a discussion takes places during which someone blames you for something, or heaps abuse on you, as a result of which you are dreadfully cut up by it, and focused on yourself instead of on the things you are supposed to do as a professional” [1<sup>st</sup> AD J]. On the other hand, respondents also emphasize a positive effect of role conflict. “It ensures you to keep sharp, to constantly deal with new challenges, and constantly consider creative solutions which eventually benefit the quality of the project” [1<sup>st</sup> AD A]. Role conflict, in other words, keeps 1<sup>st</sup> ADs alert and allows them to stimulate the team to constantly perform at the top of its ability and creativity.

### **The 1<sup>st</sup> AD and Role Ambiguity**

In contrast to directors and producers, according to 1<sup>st</sup> ADs there are no noticeable education programmes where one can get a formal degree dedicated to the role they have to perform. Although a few 1<sup>st</sup> ADs are trained as directors, the majority has experience in the production department. The fact that they can have a background

from either side of the faultline between art and commerce may have an effect on their credibility and the degree of experienced role ambiguity. It can influence the degree in which during the shoot, he or she is viewed as belonging to the production department, the directing department, or both. Lacking a strong background in the production department, can have the positive effect that these 1<sup>st</sup> ADs have more credit from the crew. The following 1<sup>st</sup> AD, for example, has a background in the lighting department:

“It was a benefit that I didn’t have a production background, like many of my colleagues who are from the money [production] side... That gave me a lot more credit with the crew. Production people do not have much credit because they know little about implementation, they are not there on the set, they don’t have the practical experience and know how [1<sup>st</sup> AD H].”

First ADs experience role ambiguity resulting from the fact that they are responsible for the planning but are often not given the opportunity to be actively involved in pre-production. “That is a strange thing about our profession; you are the boss of the script, you must take care of everything, but you are not given the time to witness the whole process” [1<sup>st</sup> AD M]. Not having been involved in pre-production means that the production department has made the planning for the shoot. This lowers the role ambiguity for 1<sup>st</sup> ADs since they merely need to execute the planning made by the production department. If the planning is bad, 1<sup>st</sup> ADs do not feel accountable and, as a result, suffer from less role ambiguity because they operate as a hired gun. “You can pass the buck to someone else. They can’t hold me responsible if something is

missing or has not been organized. The producer will then be held responsible” [1<sup>st</sup> AD J].

An important cause of role ambiguity for 1<sup>st</sup> ADs originate from their uncertainty about the authority they possess. Even though the 1<sup>st</sup> AD is the central figure on a film set, and is supposed to manage the staff, he or she does not have the authority or responsibility to hire, evaluate or fire crew members. As one respondent phrases it: “As a 1<sup>st</sup> AD you are the store manager, but you did not hire the personnel” [1<sup>st</sup> AD M]. In addition, the 1<sup>st</sup> AD is said to be the manager on the set even though they do not have the authority to make financial decisions or creative decisions.

“Producers and director often say: “during the shoot he is the boss”. This does not mean that I am in charge of the money, nor does it mean that I am in charge of the content because I really am not. However, you do intervene because you have to. You are involved in the money indirectly, and the content indirectly, and make a contribution” [1<sup>st</sup> AD H].

First ADs sometimes need to take charge and show initiative by stretching their role even if they do not precisely know whether they have the explicit authority to do so. This can lead to awkward situations such as the following in which a 1<sup>st</sup> AD’s position is undermined by the producer, whose interests he or she intended to protect: “So if I say things like ‘we are moving on so we will not do that shot mister director’ [I find it important] that I receive support. If the producer says [to the director] ‘do it anyway’ while I have been saying that it is not OK, I get angry” [1<sup>st</sup> AD E]. It may also

occur that 1<sup>st</sup> ADs feel they might be stretching their role and authority, and therefore need the producer to step in, who, in turn, blames him of not taking responsibility:

“Sometimes I think producers also don’t really know what to do with us. For instance, sometimes when you speak up you have the feeling that you are a pain in the neck, even though you are merely telling them that things are not going well. Then they say ‘[anonymous name], you are rebelling’. [I reply] ‘I am not rebelling, I have a problem. You are the line producer. Help!’” [1<sup>st</sup> AD M].

The fact that there is role ambiguity is especially problematic for inexperienced 1<sup>st</sup> ADs. They need time and experience to figure out what precisely their role is and how to best perform it. The following quote describes the stress that this 1<sup>st</sup> AD encountered on his first assignment even though he had a lot of experience on film sets in numerous assistant level positions including that of the 2<sup>nd</sup> AD who assists the 1<sup>st</sup> AD.

“You don’t know what to do and what is expected of you. You assume that there is a good working relationship between the director, the D.O.P. and the producer and that you only need to guide them. If that is not the case, you need to be very strong and confident. In the first year I cried so often, I was totally at a loss. You are going through hell and at some point you figure it out.” [1<sup>st</sup> AD F].

Another factor contributing to role ambiguity is the lack of performance evaluation and assessment of 1<sup>st</sup> ADs. According to the respondents, they hardly ever

receive an assessment of their performance. The lack of evaluation and assessment stems mainly from the project-based nature of the industry. “It has to do with the project-based nature of the work, the high amount of time-pressure and the fact that everybody is gone after the last day of shooting” [1<sup>st</sup> AD A]. Role ambiguity negatively affects their opportunity to learn and grow. Sometimes it is good to hear what went wrong and what went well in order to learn. “I definitely feel like I am not developing” [1<sup>st</sup> AD M]. Another respondent was starting to doubt himself, as a result of not knowing why he got fired at the will of the director. “At that time we did not even discuss that things were not going well. If he [the director] had told me that things were not going too well I could have done something about it” [1<sup>st</sup> AD K].

### **Role Crafting and Bridging the Faultline**

Most 1<sup>st</sup> ADs perceive it to be their responsibility to intercede between a director and producer, and to help manage the tensions and conflicts between them. Precisely because the role of the 1<sup>st</sup> AD is positioned exactly on the dominant faultline of film production organizations, the role always comes with an exceptional degree of role ambiguity. However, the fact that 1<sup>st</sup> ADs in most cases do not clearly belong to either the production or directing department, makes them well positioned to perform a bridging role between the business interests of the producer on the one hand, and the creative interests of the director on the other.

“I am not a crew member, I do not belong to the production team, I do not belong to the directing team. I am like an isolated island that needs to hold

everyone together and have everyone make compromises, in order to ultimately obtain the best possible result” [1<sup>st</sup> AD M].

Role ambiguity can actually help to bridge the faultline between art and commerce because the ambiguity opens up the opportunity for the occupant of the role to craft this role more freely. More specifically, the strong role ambiguity the 1<sup>st</sup> AD is regularly confronted with also increases the space and flexibility for the 1<sup>st</sup> AD to enact his or her role. The freedom that 1<sup>st</sup> ADs have in crafting their role depends on the extent to which directors or producers keep to their side of the faultline, or cross it, and thereby attempt to perform part of the bridging and mediating function as part of their own roles. If the producer and the director strictly keep to their side of the faultline, although very likely increasing role ambiguity for the 1<sup>st</sup> AD, at the same time this creates the necessary space in which the mediating role of 1<sup>st</sup> AD can be crafted. If the director and producer themselves regularly cross the faultline, the 1<sup>st</sup> AD runs the risk of seeing his or her own role crushed between them, and reduced to running errands.

It also depends on how individuals [directors and producers] enact their role and whether there is space left for me. It is possible that they are both very large and there is no way I can come between them.” [1<sup>st</sup> AD D]

Role ambiguity can have a positive effect on managing the faultline between producers and directors because it also means that 1<sup>st</sup> ADs can stretch their role even if they are not certain whether they have the explicit authority to do so. “If the director wants to rehearse infinitely, take after take, you will turn up the pressure. On the basis

of reasonableness he will have to change his behaviour. Not because you are his boss, because you are not” [1<sup>st</sup> AD N].

Sometimes this means that a 1<sup>st</sup> AD will take the side of the producer:

“It was 6 pm but we still needed to shoot a scene that according to my planning would take 2 hours. At that moment I walked to the production manager to explain the problem and told him ‘if we do it this way we can make it within 1 hour’. One shot had to be skipped. With that plan we went to the director, told him that we needed to finish on time, and proposed which shot could be skipped. And he agreed with that” [1<sup>st</sup> AD K].

At other times he or she will take the side of the director:

“When he [the director] feels the producer breathing down his neck I will try to bring relief where possible. By solving problems, and providing solutions that are acceptable to both. At that moment you are actually mediating. It’s not that I will act against the producer, but it is more like I will help the director to search for a solution or provide him with arguments with which he can go to the producer ” [1<sup>st</sup> AD L].

One respondent notices that a big advantage of the bridging role of the 1<sup>st</sup> AD is that it allows the producer and director to continue on good terms when the production runs into severe problems. Since the 1<sup>st</sup> AD is often the harbinger of bad news, they

cannot accuse one another of being a messenger of bad news. Therefore producers and directors are able to continue talking to each other in a normal, not hostile, way.

“Because I am the transmitter of bad news, directors and line producers can discuss things in a normal way...The bad news has already landed, which allows them to proceed in a normal way. This is important since they are the ones that eventually have to come to an agreement.” [1<sup>st</sup> AD D]

In certain cases the 1<sup>st</sup> AD can consciously act as a broker to solve a potential conflict by strategically offering and withholding information (Lingo, O'Mahony 2010), precisely because the director and producer do not communicate directly.

“I hardly ever discuss things with the three of us together. I either talk to the director or the producer. That's why I can cheat a bit: say one thing to the one person and something else to the other...For example, I give the producer advice on which points he can say to the director that it is possible to do it shorter” [1<sup>st</sup> AD G].

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

In this paper we examined the role of the in-between, the individual occupying a role on the central faultline of an organization, and just below the top managers who each occupy the top role on one side of that same faultline. Our empirical case focuses on a clear example of such a role, that of the 1<sup>st</sup> AD. The responsibility of 1<sup>st</sup> ADs is to

execute – and many cases design – the schedule of film shoots. The 1<sup>st</sup> AD acts as an in-between, hierarchically below the two core roles of the producer and the director, and is positioned precisely on the principal organizational faultline between art and commerce. As a result, the 1<sup>st</sup> AD experiences role conflict and role ambiguity. Role conflict is embedded in the role of the 1<sup>st</sup> AD because the expectations projected on the 1<sup>st</sup> AD by the producer are in many cases inconsistent with those of the director. 1<sup>st</sup> ADs also face role ambiguity because explicit role descriptions are lacking.

Role conflict and ambiguity is even more evident when the role is defined in such a way that it seems to position its occupant at both sides of a faultline or precisely on it, causing conflict, or if it is unclear at which side of a faultline the occupant should consider himself to be. Previous studies – to the best of our knowledge – have exclusively focused on the negative effects of role ambiguity. On the contrary, in this paper we argue that role ambiguity can actually be beneficial for organizational performance when it concerns individuals that are positioned right on, or close to, the faultline because it creates space for them to flexibly craft their role, which, in turn, allows them to resolve faultline conflicts that benefits the performance of the organization as a whole.

Role conflict and role ambiguity provide the 1<sup>st</sup> ADs with the flexibility to craft their role to become an effective mediator between the producer and the director, making them, and the organization as a whole, perform better. Precisely because the 1<sup>st</sup> AD does not belong to either the production or the directing department, and is in charge of the daily supervision on the set, he or she is able to perform a mediating role between the commercial objectives of producers on the one hand, and the artistic objectives of directors on the other. Moreover, the case study

showed that the more the director and producer keep to their side of the faultline and within a “narrow” definition of their role, the more space the 1<sup>st</sup> AD had to craft his/her role.

Our results have several implications for theory. First, in line with previous research we find evidence that individuals occupying roles that bridge faultlines can successfully act as a mediator and as such assist in overcoming coordination problems (Mäs, Flache, Takács, Jehn, forthcoming). However, the previous study neglects potential role conflict (eg. Rizzo et al., 1970) and role ambiguity (Biddle 1986) suffered by the in-between. More specifically, we show that that role ambiguity may have positive consequence in that it allows individuals, and especially those that are located on organizational faultlines, to craft their roles in such a way as to allow them to better perform the mediating role. Focusing on the positive effects of role ambiguity also extend previous studies that mostly – or maybe exclusively – emphasizes the negatives aspects of role ambiguity.

Second, the findings of our study suggest that the violation of the principle of unity of command (Rizzo, House, Lirtzman 1970) does not merely produce negative effects. Tension in the relationship between leaders in a dual leadership structure can be healthy since it may bring out the best of both worlds. Therefore, the goal should not be to eliminate conflict all together, but to create a structure in which conflicts can result in benefits for the organization, instead of just causing damage or precluding effective decision making. The support found in this paper for the mediating role of a “crisscrossing actor” or in-between (Mäs, Flache, Takács, Jehn, forthcoming), such as the 1<sup>st</sup> AD in our empirical case, is in accordance with Galbraith (1974) and Reid and

Karambayya (2009) who propose that mediation may equalize power and increase the joint decision making processes.

Third, we argue that a mediating role by a project manager in a matrix structure, or other shared leadership structures such as a dual leadership structure, is only effective when both leaders do not enact their roles up to the boundaries of their responsibilities and leave enough space for the mediator to act as an in-between. This means that as opposed to extra role behavior in which individuals go beyond their job requirements (Organ 1997) and a flexible role orientation in which they define their responsibilities broadly instead of narrowly (Sharon K. Parker, Toby D. Wall, Jackson 1997), managers need to diminish, as opposed to increase, the extent to which they enact their roles to their limits and steer clear of going beyond their role boundaries. By doing so they will leave the necessary space for mediating individuals, whose responsibilities overlap those of both dual leaders, to engage in role crafting that may help bridge organizational faultlines. Based on these findings we suggest the following propositions:

Proposition 1: A reasonable degree of role conflict is beneficial for role crafting, which in turn, benefits the mediating opportunities of the in-between.

Proposition 2: A reasonable degree of role ambiguity is beneficial for role crafting, which in turn, benefits the mediating opportunities of the in-between.

Proposition 3: A reasonable degree of narrow understanding of their own role by dual executives benefits the mediating opportunities of the in-between.

There are also several implications for practice that follow from this study. First, since other cultural organizations also struggle with the tension between art and commerce, and dynamics that are similar to those between producers and directors, some of our findings may also be applicable to other cultural industries with a dual leadership structure such as theatre (Reid, Karambayya 2009). Second, at a more general level, as suggested by (Galbraith 1974) and (Jones, Deckro 1993), a person fulfilling the in-between role should preferably be able to deal with role stress effectively and be able to exercise power in the form of persuasion and informal influences. This means that executives in dual leadership structures should hire in-betweens on the basis of their tolerance for ambiguity and conflict. Third, the findings of this study provide a number of insights for the management of matrix organizations since these also struggle with violations of the principle of unity of command, since authority within a matrix organization is often split functional and product managers.

This study also has a number of limitations. Each limitation comes with one or more recommendations for future research. First, only the Dutch film industry is examined. In other countries the film industry may be organised differently or roles may be defined differently, so caution needs to be exercised in generalizing the findings of this research to international contexts. In the Italian film industry, for example, directors play a more central role (Delmestri, Montanari, Usai 2005). In fact these international variations with respect to the roles of producer and director would make it highly interesting to explore the ways in which the role of the 1<sup>st</sup> AD is constructed in these different settings.

Second, only the roles of the 1<sup>st</sup> AD, the director and the producer are examined, yet other roles may also play a part in bridging the art-commerce faultline. For example,

the director of photography also plays an important role on set since he or she usually has an important voice with respect to the planning, and is also partly responsible for the look and feel of the film. It would be interesting to investigate whether the occupants of other roles can also assume the in-between role and, if they do, whether they experience role conflict and role ambiguity in a similar way as the 1<sup>st</sup> AD.

Third, unexamined personal characteristics can easily have an impact on the small-group relations. Every combination of people results in a unique chemistry, which affects the atmosphere on set. In addition, some individuals are more open to new ideas and balancing different objectives and points of view than others (Delmestri, Montanari, Usai 2005, Faulkner 1983). For future research on this subject, it would be interesting to look into personal characteristics which make it easier for a person to deal with role conflict and role ambiguity in a way that benefits the performance of the organization as a whole.

Finally, future studies could focus on how past work experience by in-betweens in departments on either side of the faultline, affects their ability to successfully mediate faultline conflicts. A potential theoretical angle is related to the construct of referent power. Referent power is an individual's power or ability to attract and instill loyalty in a group of followers. The higher the level of identification with the individual holding this power the more followers will behave and believe the same as he does (Adams 1976: p. 161). Referent power is enhanced when individuals occupy boundary roles in which they successfully represent the group in their relations with outsiders.

However, the Adams' Paradox suggests that the more time a boundary spanner has spent on the other side, the less they are trusted by their own side. Friendly relations with outsiders enhance the power of the boundary role in relations to group insiders, but

this cooperative behavior may also lead to insiders questioning the boundary role person's loyalty. As a result, their behavior will be more closely monitored by insiders restricting the autonomy of the individual in the boundary role in negotiating with outsiders. This lack of trust in boundary role person's loyalty will eventually make them less effective negotiators with outside groups (Adams 1976). Future research on faultlines, and especially those focusing on differences in functional background, could study the optimal degrees of experience at either side of the faultline, which predict successful mediation by in-betweens.

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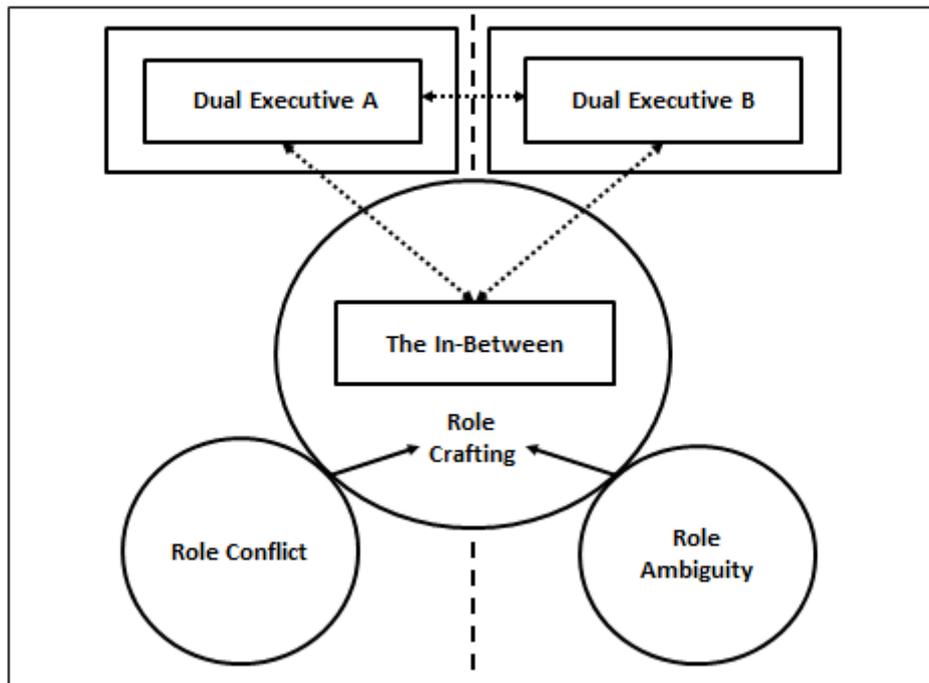
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# MODEL 1



**TABLE 1**  
**Representative quotations from 1<sup>st</sup> ADs**

Role constructs:	Quotations:
Role conflict	<p>“You have to make sure that you warrant your middle position, so that you are able to bow to the director one time and to the producer the other time” (1st AD F).</p> <p>“You always have two faces. You are constantly compromising. You are never able to fully support your director because you know you are there to represent the interest of the producer as well” (1st AD A)</p> <p>“It is a political game in which you must navigate between the wishes of the director and the opportunities that are provided by the producer. You are both the glue and the bumper between both superpowers. In some cases one has to play the role of devil’s advocate “ (1st AD D)</p> <p>“A director can say to you ‘it is so awful the producer is doing that’. Or the other way around a producer can say ‘hey, listen, we need to see how we can navigate the director a bit that way because he has an enormous set of demands that we cannot meet. Especially not within the limits of the budget and time. So can you do something?’ That is how they use you” (1st AD B).</p>
Role ambiguity	<p>“Producers and director often say: “during the shoot he is the boss”. This does not mean that I am in charge of the money, nor does it mean that I am in charge of the content because I really am not. However, you do intervene because you have to. You are involved in the money indirectly and the content indirectly and make a contribution” (1st AD H).</p> <p>“Sometimes I think that producers also don’t really know what to do with us. For instance, sometimes when you speak up you have the feeling that you are a pain in the neck, even though you are merely telling them that things are not going well. Then they say ‘[anonymous], you are rebelling’. [I say] ‘I am not rebelling, I have a problem. You are the line producer, help!’” (1st AD M).</p> <p>“You don’t know what to do and what is expected of you. You assume that there is a good working relationship between the director, the D.O.P. and the producer and that you only need to guide them. If that is not the case, you need to be very strong and confident. In the first year I cried so often, I was at a loss. You are going through hell and at some point you figure it out.” (1st AD F).</p> <p>So if I say things like ‘we are moving on so we will not do that shot mister director’ [I find it important] that I receive support. If the producer says [to the director] ‘do it anyway’ while I have been saying that it is not OK, I get angry” (1st AD E).</p>
Role crafting	<p>“I am not a crew member, I do not belong to the production team, I do not belong to the directing team. I am like an isolated island that needs to hold everyone together and have everyone make compromises, in order to ultimately obtain the best possible result” (1st AD M).</p> <p>It also depends on how individuals [directors and producers] enact their role and whether there is space left for me. It is possible that they are both very large and there is no way I can come between them.” (1st AD D)</p> <p>“When he [the director] feels the producer breathing down his neck I will try to bring relief where possible. By solving things, providing solutions that are acceptable to both. At that moment you are actually mediating. It’s not that I will act against the producer but more like searching for a solution or providing the director with arguments with which he can go to the producer ” (1st AD L).</p> <p>“I hardly ever discuss things with the three of us together. I either talk to the director or the producer. That’s why I can cheat a bit: say one thing to the one person and something else to the other...For example I give the producer advice on which points he can say to the director that it is possible to do it shorter” (1st AD G).</p>

**ANNEX 1**  
**Key characteristics interviewed producers**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Size in FTEs</b>	<b>Founding Year</b>	<b>(Other) role experience until 2008</b>
A	Male	5	1995	Producer (71)
B	Male	3.5	1992	Producer (59), production manager (1), actor (1)
C	Male	2	2000	Producer (6)
D	Male	4	2003	Producer (1)
E	Male	8	2001	Producer (46), production manager (5), <u>director</u> (1), assistant director (2)
F	Male	2	1989	Producer (19)
G	Male	5	1989	Producer (20)
H	Male	3	1999	Producer (15), actor (2), writer (2)
I	Male	4	2003	Producer (9)
J	Male	4.5	1999	Producer (25), <u>director</u> (3)
K	Male	5	1994	Producer (15), <u>director</u> (2), writer (1)
L	Male	1	1972	Producer (36), actor (3)
M	Male	4 1/2	1995	Producer (50), writer (1)
N	Male	12	2006	Producer (61), production manager (2)
O	Male	1.5	2001	Producer (10), writer (1)
P	Male	1	1993	Producer (5), actor (6), <u>assistant director</u> (4)
Q	Male	4	1981	Producer (66), <u>director</u> (2)
R	Male	3	1995	Producer (18), <u>director</u> (11), writer (2), assistant director (1), editor (1)
S	Female	3 1/4	1990	Producer (17)
T	Male	3	1988	Producer (20)
U	Male	8	1987	Producer (26), writer (5), <u>director</u> (4), actor (2).
V	Female	3	1979	Producer (10), <u>director</u> (11), writer (9), editor (1)
W	Male	4	1997	Producer (43)
X	Female	6	1999	Producer (13), production manager (1)

**ANNEX 2**  
**Key characteristics interviewed directors**

Code	Gender	Education	Entry year	(Other) role experience untill 2009
A	Male	Higher Vocational Education (Film School)	1996	Director (10), scriptwriter (7), actor (1), art department (1)
B	Male	University (Political Science)	1982	Director (11). Scriptwriter (11), actor (4)
C	Male	Higher Vocational Education (Film School)	2001	Director (7),scriptwriter (5), editor (2), composer (2), assistant director (1)
D	Male	Higher Vocational Education (Film School)	1992	Director (9), scriptwriter (2), editor (4), actor (1), <u>production manager</u> (1)
E	Male	Higher Vocational Education (Film School)	1973	Director (26), scriptwriter (2), boom operator (1)
F	Male	Higher Vocational Education (Film School)	1996	Director (14), scriptwriter (8), actor (7), assistant director (4)
G	Male	Higher Vocational Education (Film School)	1987	Director(31), scriptwriter (42), <u>producer</u> (1), actor (4), cinematographer (1), assistant director (1)
H	Female	Higher Vocational Education (Film School)	1989	Director (3), scriptwriter (6), actress (1), assistant director (1)
I	Female	Higher Vocational Education (Film School)	1996	Director (10), scriptwriter (1), <u>production assistant</u> (1)
J	Female	Higher Vocational Education (Film School)	1981	Director (11), scriptwriter (1), cinematographer (2)
K	Male	University (Sociology and Communication Science)	1986	Director (6), scriptwriter (6), actor (18), <u>1<sup>st</sup> assistant director</u> (3), assistant director (1), <u>producer</u> (3), composer (2), cinematographer (1)
L	Female	Higher Vocational Education (Film School)	1999	Director (6), scriptwriter (5)
M	Male	Higher Vocational Education (Film School)	1990	Director (16), <u>producer</u> (1), scriptwriter (1), editor (1)
N	Male	University (Film and Theater Studies)	1993	Director (10), scriptwriter (8), producer (18), actor (3)

**ANNEX 3**  
**Key characteristics interviewed 1st assistant directors**

Code	Gender	Education	Entry year	(Other) role experience untill 2012
A	Male	Higher Vocational Education	1999	1 <sup>st</sup> assistant director (19), 3 <sup>rd</sup> assistant director (2), 2 <sup>nd</sup> assistant director (1)
B	Female	High school	1989	1 <sup>st</sup> assistant director (2), <u>production manager</u> (2), <u>assistant director</u> (2), actress (2), scriptwriter (1)
C	Male	Higher Vocational Education	1992	1 <sup>st</sup> assistant director (9), <u>assistant director</u> (3) camera assistant (1)
D	Male	University	2000	1 <sup>st</sup> assistant director (40), scriptwriter (3), <u>assistant director</u> (2), actor (1)
E	Male	High school	1979	1 <sup>st</sup> assistant director (2), <u>production manager</u> (2), actor (1)
F	Male	High school	1991	1 <sup>st</sup> assistant director (49), 2 <sup>nd</sup> assistant director (2), 3 <sup>rd</sup> assistant director (2), <u>production assistant</u> (6)
G	Male	Higher Vocational Education	1993	1 <sup>st</sup> assistant director (27), <u>assistant director</u> (2), 3 <sup>rd</sup> assistant director (1), <u>production manager</u> (1), recording director (1).
H	Male	Unclear	1967	1 <sup>st</sup> assistant director <sup>1</sup> , light technician (2)
I	Male	University	1983	1 <sup>st</sup> assistant director (38), <u>production manager</u> (1) <u>assistant production manager</u> (1)
J	Male	High school	1995	1 <sup>st</sup> assistant director (3), 2 <sup>nd</sup> assistant director (1), 3 <sup>rd</sup> assistant director (1), <u>production manager</u> (1), location scout (1)
K	Male	High school	1996	1 <sup>st</sup> assistant director (13), 2 <sup>nd</sup> assistant director (4), <u>assistant director</u> (1), <u>production manager</u> (1), <u>production assistant</u> (1)
L	Female	Higher Vocational Education	1995	1 <sup>st</sup> assistant director (39), <u>assistant director</u> (3), <u>production manager</u> (1), camera operator (1), 2 <sup>nd</sup> assistant director (1)
M	Male	Intermediate Vocational Education	1992	1 <sup>st</sup> assistant director (43), 3 <sup>rd</sup> assistant director (2), 4 <sup>th</sup> assistant director (2), <u>assistant director</u> (1) extras handler (2), actor (2), <u>production manager</u> (1)
N	Male	Higher Vocational Education	1982	1 <sup>st</sup> assistant director (4), location manager (2), crowd control (1).

<sup>1</sup> No 1st AD record in IMDb. This is possibly related to the age of the respondent, who is by far the oldest.