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## “ORCHESTRATING COLLABORATION ACROSS EXPERTISE DOMAINS THROUGH BUREAUCRACY”

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### ABSTRACT



Building on an ethnography in the engineering division of an aeronautical organization, this paper examines how complex collaboration across expertise domains—i.e., large-scale work of multiple specialist groups interfacing—is orchestrated. On the one hand, organization design research has examined the structural mechanisms supporting large-scale interdependent work yet overlooked how these structures are enacted. On the other hand, while more recent research examined how collaboration is achieved in practice, it backgrounds the role of formal structures and focuses on the interactions across a few specialist groups in discreet collaboration episodes. This paper bridges these two literature streams and examines how multiple specialist groups orchestrate their interdependent work by bureaucratizing their collaboration. The paper is based on 15 months of fieldwork of aeronautical product development including 96 interviews across ranks and departments; observation of 160 technical and administrative meetings; and shadowing of 8 product managers. Drawing on this substantial corpus of data, it examines how employees and managers build, inhabit, and repair bureaucratic structures to support their collaborative effort to design and support planes. I theorize these practices as a form of articulation work—or “work to make collaboration work”—and show how employees and managers craft these structures and uphold them. These findings advance our understanding of organizational collaboration in large-scale undertakings and the situated mechanism through which employees design and support bureaucratic structures contributing to discussions on collaboration, knowledge work, and organization structure.

**Keywords:** bureaucracy; collaboration; knowledge work; work across expertise domains; organization structure; product development; ethnography