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***Third space environments: learnings from an intercultural inter-campus multiple
case study in one Australian university***

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University professional staff are arguably underutilised in the workplace. In the context of the increasingly complex and volatile global(ised) convergent/divergent higher education sector, underutilisation of *any* staff may reduce the ability of universities to harness their collaborative capabilities and predispositions that improve university performance and enhance its collaborative capital (Pham & Tanner, 2015). A recent comprehensive literature review of the diversification of the academic workforce (Marini, Locke, & Whitchurch, 2019), and empirical research into professional and academic staff collaboration focusing on professional staff contributions to diverse projects (Graham & Regan, 2016; Rytberg & Gerschwind, 2017; Botterrill, 2018), demonstrates that synergistic effort and wider contributions from all university communities are required to solve current and emerging higher education challenges. These studies recommended further research to explore how professional staff, working on collaborative *third space* projects, co-create and innovate; and to investigate how different the needs for cross-boundary collaborative competencies may be in various global contexts.

Involving one Australian regional university with campuses in Australia and in Singapore, this qualitative PhD study explored five diverse cases of professional and academic staff collaborative engagement. Cases were selected to cover different organisational contexts, drawing on a conceptual typology of the university *third space* environments (Whitchurch, 2008; 2018). The outcomes of each collaborative project were examined through the analytical lens of the Multilevel Boundary Crossing Framework (Akkerman & Bruining, 2016) with a particular focus on specific needs of professional staff for boundary skills and cross-boundary competencies (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011) and feelings of competency, autonomy and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000; 2017) in order for them to be better prepared and more predisposed to collaboration.

Co-constructing with project participants, the narrative case summaries with subsequent analysis and cross-case synthesis of emerged themes, offered invaluable insights into professional staff working across multiple boundaries of culture, geography and activity domains. Findings suggest that these professional staff are continuously renegotiating

professional spaces and identities. For example, although the opportunities to work on collaborative projects were claimed to be infrequent, with professional staff at times lacking confidence to take initiative, all five investigated projects were developed and executed by academic and professional staff who worked together to bring about innovation and change for the university within the continuously changing higher education environment.

One of the most significant pragmatic outcomes of this exploratory research was the development of a University Cross-boundary Collaboration framework. This framework was used to formulate practical recommendations for the university leadership, in terms of how to use the creative energy of professional staff through enabling them to be more predisposed toward collaboration: to continue championing, driving, and facilitating change and innovation.