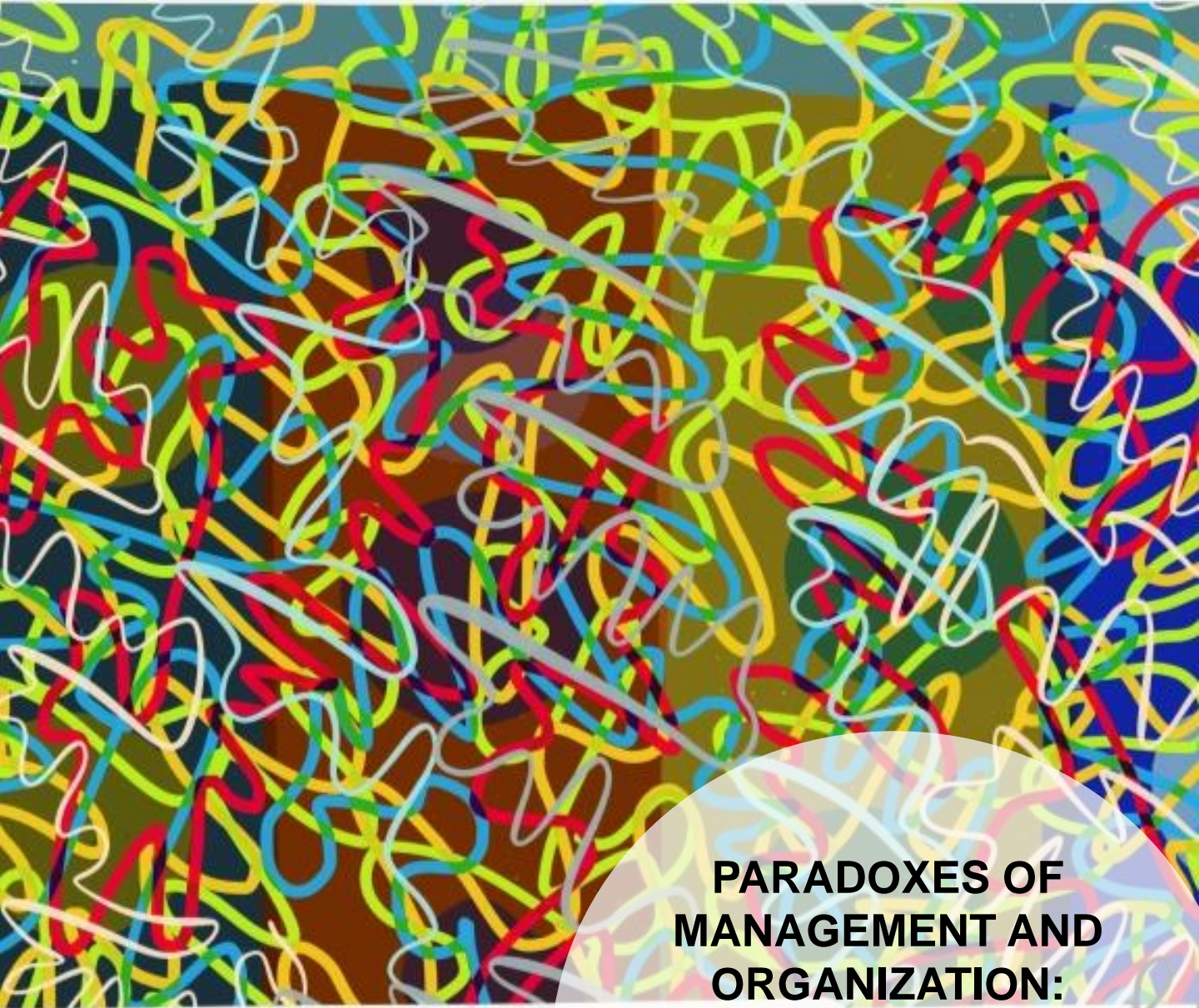




European Forum on Paradox and Pluralism

Nova SBE Twinning Project



PARADOXES OF MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATION:

Short cases for
pedagogical use



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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The world is rich in paradox, tension and contradiction (Jarzabkowski, Lê, & Van de Ven, 2013). For this reason, the capacity to handle paradox is being presented as an important management competence. With this series, the European Forum on Paradox and Plurality aims to contribute to the development of paradox management competences by producing teaching materials on management tension and paradox. In this short introductory note we define basic concepts for the beginner.

Paradox: A conceptual note and a short bibliography

The management of paradox, defined as the persistent interplay of mutually defining opposites (Smith & Lewis, 2011), such as stability and change or exploration and exploitation, constitutes a managerial imperative. Managers as well as organizational members in general, may assume or ignore the paradox lens but tensions and contradictions are unavoidable in complex systems. The exploration of the role of tensions, contradictions and paradoxes in organizations has now produced a rich bibliography (Putnam et al., 2016; Schad et al., 2016). For readers new to the theory of organizational paradox we present a brief introductory bibliography (see Box 1).

For this reason, organizations are in some cases trying to develop ways of dealing with challenges such as when they have to maintain resilience in face of crisis (Giustiniano et al., 2020), cultivate ambidexterity (Raisch & Birkinshaw, 2008) or try to go agile while maintaining robust routines (Rigby et al., 2020). When successfully balanced, the articulation of opposite demands may constitute a source of advantage. But their articulation is difficult and success in tackling opposition cannot be guaranteed, as some tensions cannot be integrated and their ongoing articulation is difficult. As Cunha and Putnam (2019) have pointed out, paradox cannot be tamed.



BOX 1: SAMPLE OF BOOKS OF PARADOX

The following resources may be helpful for the reader interested in starting the exploration of paradox:

Bednarek, R., Cunha, M.P., Schad, J. & Smith, W.K. (Eds)(2021). Interdisciplinary dialogues on organizational paradox: Investigating social structure and human expression. *Research in the Sociology of Organizations*, 73(B). Bingley: Emerald.

Bednarek, R., Cunha, M.P., Schad, J. & Smith, W.K. (Eds.) (2021). Interdisciplinary dialogues on organizational paradox: Learning from belief and science. *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* (vol. 73-A). Bingley: Emerald.

Berti, M., Simpson, A.V., Cunha, M.P. & Clegg, S. (2021). *Elgar introduction to organizational paradox theory*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Clegg (Ed.)(2002) *Management and organization paradoxes* (pp.11-40). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Cunha, M.P., Clegg, S., Rego, A. & Berti, M. (2021). *Paradoxes of power and leadership*. London: Routledge.

Kets de Vries, M. F. K. (2013). *Organizational paradoxes: Clinical approaches to management*. Routledge.

Quinn, R. E., & Cameron, K. S. (1988). *Paradox and transformation: Toward a theory of change in organization and management*. Ballinger Publishing Co/Harper & Row.

Smith, K. K., & Berg, D. N. (1987). *Paradoxes of group life: Understanding conflict, paralysis, and movement in group dynamics*. Jossey-Bass.

Smith, W. K., Jarzabkowski, P., Lewis, M. W., & Langlely, A. (Eds.) (2017). *The Oxford handbook of organizational paradox*. Oxford University Press.



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The cases in this volume aim to illustrate situations with paradoxical attributes. They are intended to discuss and problematize the difficulties in the management of paradox.

A definitional note

It is now canonical to accept that organizational paradox refers to persistent opposition between mutually defining forces, such as exploration and exploitation (March, 1991) or change and stability (Farjoun, 2010). The three conceptual building blocks are:

- *Opposition*: the two forces run against one another, they are contrary;
- *Interdependence*: in spite of opposition, these forces are mutually defining;
- *Persistence*: the forces are not temporary in the sense that they refer to deep forces that cannot be solved. Paradoxes can be managed but not resolved. Persistence does not mean that these forces remain in steady state: they can change qualitatively, for example when the tension originates some new synthesis that will form a thesis for a new cycle, illustrating the conceptual adjacency between paradox and dialectics (Farjoun, 2019).

These tensions and contradictions manifest at several levels:

- They characterize individuals, such as when elements of their identities collide, as happens when being a doctor and a military, being a parent and a professional or a leader and a servant (Sousa & van Dierendonck, 2017);
- They pervade teams such as when teams expect a measure of conformity and diversity (Silva et al., 2014);
- They occur in organizations, such as when they have to explore and exploit (March, 1991);
- They are typical of inter-organizational relations, which happens when organizations collaborate with organizations with each they also compete, the process sometimes called “coopetition” (Raza-Ullah, Bengtsson & Kock, 2014).

The cases presented in this booklet are intended to illustrate the presence of paradox in organization from a multiplicity of perspectives ranging from international management to the organization-culture interface. Students and instructors may take into account the idea that some cases do not have a solution. After all, as paradoxes, they cannot be solved.



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WELCOME TO THE SERIES

The world is rich in paradox, tension and contradiction. For this reason, the capacity to handle paradox is being presented as an important management competence. With this series, the European Forum on Paradox and Plurality aims to contribute to the development of paradox management competences by producing teaching materials on management tension and paradox.

The series results from the collaboration of management scholars from different schools and aims to support the work of educators with the free access to short teaching cases on the paradoxical side of organizations.

By design, the cases are intended not to focus on solutions or resolutions but rather on the discussion of ambiguous problems with no clear solutions. We hope that the cases will constitute a source of debate and energy in the classroom and that they will stimulate an appreciation for difference and dialogue rather than for the “discovery” of the right answer.

In case you want to contribute to the series please contact us at:

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Welcome and enjoy!

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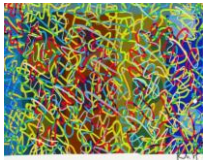
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