A Practice Approach to Paradox

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Problematizing paradox

Response	Origin	Definition
Splitting	Lewis (2000) based on Smith & Berg (1987) and Vince & Broussine (1996)	A response that involves separating contradictory elements either temporally (dealing with one, then the other) or spatially (compartmentalizing elements into different areas or groups)
Regression	Lewis (2000) based on Smith & Berg (1987) and Vince & Broussine (1996)	A response that involves returning to past understandings or actions
Repression (Denial)	Lewis (2000) based on Smith & Berg (1987) and Vince & Broussine (1996)	A response that involves denial, i.e. blocking awareness of paradoxes and subsequent tension
Projection	Lewis (2000) based on Smith & Berg (1987) and Vince & Broussine (1996)	A response that involves transferring paradoxical elements or tensions to a scapegoat
Reaction Formation	Lewis (2000) based on Smith & Berg (1987) and Vince & Broussine (1996)	A response that involves focusing on only one element by excessively engaging in practices aligned with that element and opposing the other element
Ambivalence	Lewis (2000) based on Smith & Berg (1987) and Vince & Broussine (1996)	A response that involves quick but marginal compromises
Acceptance	Lewis (2000) based on Smith & Berg (1987) and Vince & Broussine (1996)	A response that involves understanding contradiction, tension and ambiguity as natural conditions of work
Confrontation	Lewis (2000) based on Smith & Berg (1987) and Vince & Broussine (1996)	A response that involves bringing tension to the fore and critically discussing it
Transcendence	Lewis (2000) based on Smith & Berg (1987) and Vince & Broussine (1996)	A response that involves altering or reframing thinking to see elements of the paradox as necessary and complementary (both/and thinking)
Suppressing	Jarzabkowski et al (2013)	A response that involves dominating or overriding one element of the paradox while fostering the other
Opposing	Jarzabkowski et al (2013)	A response that involves parties working to each side of the paradox asserting their own needs, despite evidence that these would oppose the needs of the other party and occasion head-on confrontation
Adjusting	Jarzabkowski et al (2013) based on Lindblom (1965)	A response that involves recognizing that both poles are important, interdependent and have to be achieved

Images of paradox: dualities and 'struggle'
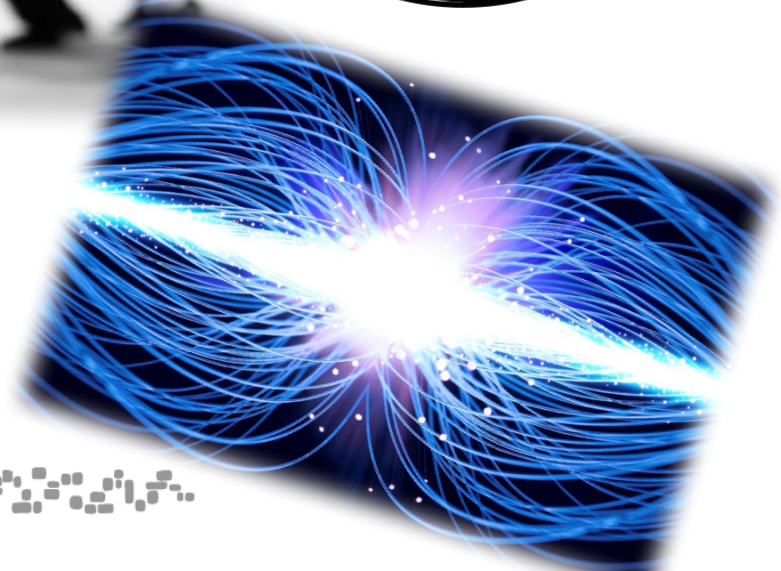
A practice approach

- Paradox just 'is' (unresolvable, persistent)

- Those entities we identify - 'organization', 'strategy', 'logics', 'paradox' – are collective practices that inhere only in the everyday practice of actors (Schatzki, 2001; 2002; 2006)

- Everyday, situated but not 'random' - a nexus of interconnected or relational "doings and sayings" that span time and space (Schatzki, 2002; 2006; Nicolini, 2013; Jarzabkowski, Bednarek and Spee, 2015).

- From paradox as exceptional, eventful, out there, multi level

- To paradox as everyday, constructed and enacted in the practices of actors

Practice Theory Approach

	Core Principle of Practice Theory	Implications for Paradox Theory
Social construction	Social order is constituted within and by practice.	Paradoxes are constituted within and by practices:: simultaneously construction & response
Everyday activities	The starting point for study is the everyday activities of actors as they unfold in the moment.	The starting point for investigation of paradox are the everyday doings and sayings unfolding in the moment, within which actors construct paradox
Consequentiality	Everyday activities are consequential. Organizational patterns and institutionalized practices are grounded in the everyday actions and interactions of people within and beyond organizations.	Paradoxes are situated within and constitute multiple levels of 'experiencing' paradox; paradoxes of performing are entwined with paradoxes of belonging, and consequential for paradoxes of organizing
Relationality	The world is made up of dualities (rather than dichotomies) that are mutually constitutive (Clegg et al., 2002).	Paradoxical elements have a mutually constitutive relationship; they are multiple, interdependent and their 'poles' need to be understood in relation to one another.

Adapted from: Le, J. K. & Bednarek, R. (forthcoming)

Some endeavours to study paradox as practice

- Enacting contradictory logics in the everyday practice of actors in Lloyd's of London (Smets, Jarzabkowski, Burke & Spee, 2015)

  - Patterned Segmenting, Bridging and Demarcating practices *in the moment*

- Constructing and Responding to Paradox through Humour (Jarzabkowski & Le, forthcoming)

  - Humour as everyday practice (57% of 889 humour incidents)

  - Patterned construction of and response to humour *in the moment*

- The contradictions 'fade' and the everyday, practical doing of paradox surfaces

So what should we study

- Relationality: privileges the study of "relations and practices over the individual or organization" (Chia and Holt, 2006: 638; Cooper, 2005; Nicolini, 2013; Schatzki, 2002).

- The everyday practices – discourses, emotions, actions, dress, materials, etc – within which actors construct paradox in their everyday 'organizational' lives

- Are paradoxes salient to them? E.g. when, why, how, what, where

  - Do they separate?

  - Do they join?

  - Do they balance/ compromise?

  - Do they construct or NOT as problematic
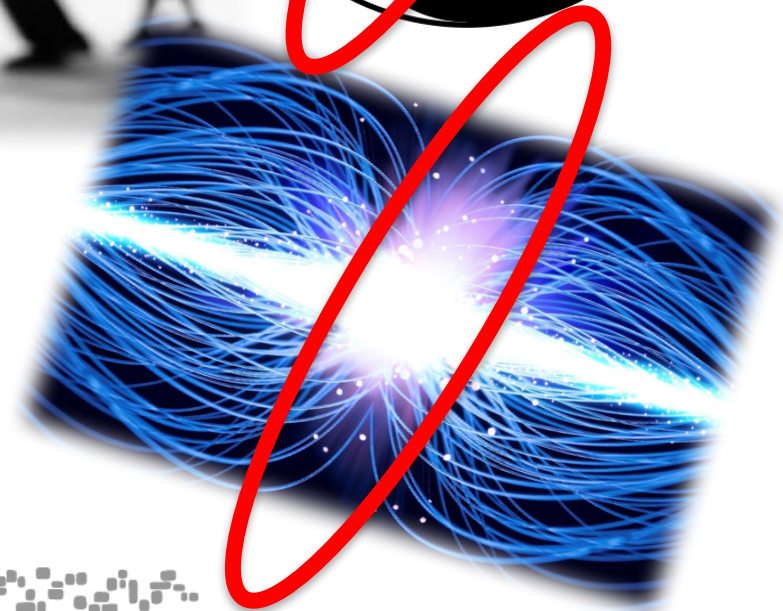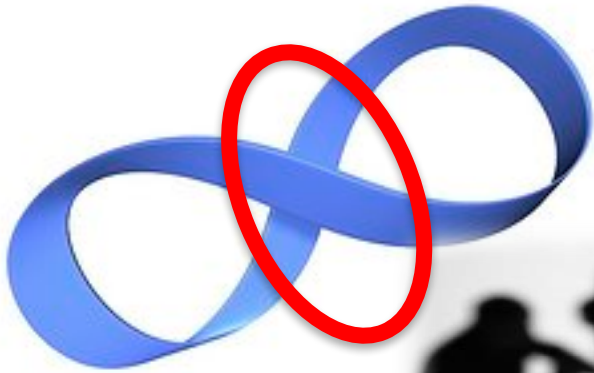
Studying paradox through language

- Language, action, emotion (Jarzabkowski, Bednarek & Le, forthcoming)
- Rhetoric as one particularly 'enabling' form of language
- Transcendence
  - Discursively constructing complementarity between interdependent commercial and social goals in arts organizations: "*aggressive commercial targets… would contribute to the "oiling" of the machine, providing the funds needed to fulfil cultural and social goals*" (Abdallah, Denis & Langley, 2011: 341)
  - Bundling of different rhetorical practices enables oscillation between *experiences of paradox* and *moments of transcending paradox* (Bednarek, Paroutis & Sillince, 2016)

Rhetoric-in-context

- Effortful accomplishment of a context in which it is possible to commit multiple, often contradictory goals (Jarzabkowski & Sillince, 2007)

  - Constructing synergy: "*If you can move from a 4 to a 5 [in research], it takes a lot of the income pressure off in terms of generating income through students, so it is an attempt to try and do both*"

  - High synergy rhetoric: "*In this place, the **self-evident fact** is that the academic strength of the University is growing as a direct result of its financial success*"

  - Ambivalent synergy rhetoric: "*There is a **real** contradiction here. Research funding brings the prestige, they bring the articles but they don't bring the overheads for the University*".

  - Reciprocity rhetoric: "*The Arts get more than their fair share. They're **beggars** in that sense. But they have to because of the funding, the opportunities to make sure they work. And they have **performed extremely well** [in research]*"

Rhetoric: Integration & differentiation

- Rhetorical cycles of metaphor and irony (Sillince & Golant, forthcoming)

- Metaphor (integration): Talking about the attributes of one object in terms of another facilitates conjunction of the familiar and the strange (Cornelissen et al., 2011; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Manning, 1979; Morgan, 1980; Oswick, Putnam and Keenoy, 2004; Sillince and Barker, 2012).

- Irony (differentiation): Highlights a fundamental discrepancy, "by *overturning* or *reversing* the meaning of the conventional image" (Oswick, Keenoy and Grant, 2002: 299). Disjunction not congruence.

  - *'[The CEO] will say do e-procurement globally but Australia just thumbs its nose at him because he doesn't kick butt… This is not an empowered company. The empowered one is the business unit leader, it's their territory'* (Sillince and Mueller, 2007: 160). [CEO appears powerful but is not powerful]

What does it give us

- Means of constructing and reconstructing situated experiences of incongruity, which may be more or less salient and 'better' or 'worse', *in the moment*

- Zooming in on everyday practice in situ – the specific sayings (& doings) and what they construct

- Zooming out to how this everyday practice enacts organizational life as paradoxical (Niccolini, 2013)

- Always relational: from discrete levels of analysis such as belonging, performing, organizing, to acknowledging the "primacy of relations and practices over the individual or organization" (Chia and Holt).

So what?

- Taking Lewis (2000: 761) seriously: "Rather than a linear progression marked by a distinct endpoint or resolution, exploring paradox is an ongoing and cyclical journey".

- The experience of paradox is dynamic, fluid and continuously unfolding ***in the moment***

- The potential to examine the multiplicity of incongruities as they are relevant to the actors who experience them

- ***Language***, emotion and action