A Practice Approach to Paradox

Paula Jarzabkowski
Professor of Strategic Management
Cass Business School
Problematising paradox

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Splitting</td>
<td>Lewis (2000) based on Smith &amp; Berg (1987) and Vince &amp; Broussine (1996)</td>
<td>A response that involves separating contradictory elements either temporally (dealing with one, then the other) or spatially (compartmentalizing elements into different areas or groups)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>Lewis (2000) based on Smith &amp; Berg (1987) and Vince &amp; Broussine (1996)</td>
<td>A response that involves returning to past understandings or actions</td>
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<td>Repression (Denial)</td>
<td>Lewis (2000) based on Smith &amp; Berg (1987) and Vince &amp; Broussine (1996)</td>
<td>A response that involves denial, i.e. blocking awareness of paradoxes and subsequent tension</td>
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<tr>
<td>Projection</td>
<td>Lewis (2000) based on Smith &amp; Berg (1987) and Vince &amp; Broussine (1996)</td>
<td>A response that involves transferring paradoxical elements or tensions to a scapegoat</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reaction Formation</td>
<td>Lewis (2000) based on Smith &amp; Berg (1987) and Vince &amp; Broussine (1996)</td>
<td>A response that involves focusing on only one element by excessively engaging in practices aligned with that element and opposing the other element</td>
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<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>Lewis (2000) based on Smith &amp; Berg (1987) and Vince &amp; Broussine (1996)</td>
<td>A response that involves understanding contradiction, tension and ambiguity as natural conditions of work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Confrontation</td>
<td>Lewis (2000) based on Smith &amp; Berg (1987) and Vince &amp; Broussine (1996)</td>
<td>A response that involves bringing tension to the fore and critically discussing it</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transcendence</td>
<td>Lewis (2000) based on Smith &amp; Berg (1987) and Vince &amp; Broussine (1996)</td>
<td>A response that involves altering or reframing thinking to see elements of the paradox as necessary and complementary (both/and thinking)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Suppressing</td>
<td>Jarzabkowski et al (2013)</td>
<td>A response that involves dominating or overriding one element of the paradox while fostering the other</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opposing</td>
<td>Jarzabkowski et al (2013)</td>
<td>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</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adjusting</td>
<td>Jarzabkowski et al (2013) based on Lindblom (1965)</td>
<td>A response that involves recognizing that both poles are important, interdependent and have to be achieved</td>
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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
### Core Principle of Practice Theory

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Social construction</th>
<th>Everyday activities</th>
<th>Consequentiality</th>
<th>Relationality</th>
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<tr>
<td>Social order is constituted within and by practice.</td>
<td>The starting point for study is the everyday activities of actors as they unfold in the moment.</td>
<td>Everyday activities are consequential. Organizational patterns and institutionalized practices are grounded in the everyday actions and interactions of people within and beyond organizations.</td>
<td>The world is made up of dualities (rather than dichotomies) that are mutually constitutive (Clegg et al., 2002).</td>
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### Implications for Paradox Theory

| Paradoxes are constituted within and by practices: simultaneously construction & response | The starting point for investigation of paradox are the everyday doings and sayings unfolding in the moment, within which actors construct paradox | 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 | 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