The Lived Experience of Paradox: How Individuals Navigate Tensions during the Pandemic Crisis

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Introduction

Camile Pradies, Joshua Keller, Garima Sharma, and Simone Carmine

Organizational life has always been filled with tensions, but the COVID-19 pandemic is amplifying this experience in fundamental ways. Across the globe, employees were forced to quickly adjust to working from home, striving to remain productive while adapting to new technologies and work-practices (Lanzolla et al., 2020). Essential employees, such as medical personnel, have been grappling with the desire to deliver care to those with need without risking themselves (Kniffin et al., 2020). Leaders have been balancing optimism with realism and finding ways to engender psychological proximity despite managing their followers from afar (Gibson, 2020). These interconnected tensions have been accentuated not just within domains (e.g., work), but also across domains (Ladge et al., 2012). Working parents, for example, have been renegotiating boundaries as they pursue their work goals while home-schooling their children and caring for their elderly relatives (Power, 2020).

To address the multitude of tensions that employees are experiencing during the pandemic, we turn to paradox theory, which provides a metalevel approach to studying tensions across organizational contexts (Schad et al., 2016), including work–life boundaries (Peters & Blomme, 2019). Paradox theory addresses questions about how people perceive tensions (Sharma & Good, 2013), frame tensions (Keller et al., 2017; Miron-Spektor et al., 2011; Pradies et al., 2020), reason about tensions (Keller & Sadler-Smith, 2019), and feel about tensions (Ashforth et al., 2014; Pradies et al., forthcoming; Vince & Broussine, 1996). Paradox theory begins with the premise that employees' experience with tensions is shaped by both environmental factors and employees' cognitive and emotional processes (Smith & Lewis, 2011). The environmental factors do not only include macro-level conditions such as those stemming from a pandemic crisis (Schad & Bansal, 2018), but more proximal conditions within the organization, such as organizational systems (Keegan et al., 2019), leadership (Zhang et al., 2015), and social context (Keller et al., 2020; Pradies et al., forthcoming). Paradox theory therefore provides a holistic account of how employees experience and respond to tensions from major events such as the pandemic crisis.

In this article, we present seven short essays that focus on various aspects of the lived experience during the pandemic crisis through a paradox theoretical lens, providing new insights on the pandemic while also using the pandemic experience to push the boundaries of paradox theory. Bednarek and Lê (see below) discuss how the boundary between work and life has become blurred yet our sense of them opposed has peaked. To them, the pandemic invites us to expand our understanding of the concept of balance central to paradox theory. The next three essays focus on how managers shape

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individuals' experience with tensions during the pandemic. Sparr (see below) discusses how leaders have been tasked to provide a clear vision to their employees while themselves immersed in fog, thereby creating tensions that are difficult for both leaders and employees to manage. Nielsen, Cheal and Pradies (see below) examine how leaders can communicate to followers during the pandemic in a way that resonates cognitively and emotionally with them. Keegan, Brandl and Aust (see below) note that latent tensions between profits and health have surfaced during the pandemic, requiring human resources managers to create innovative solutions under constraint. Miron-Spektor (see below) explains that a paradox approach enables us to understand the ways in which employees can respond to tensions stemming from the pandemic. In particular, she stresses how a paradox mindset is even more critical during crises than during normal times. Finally, the essays by Gaim and Cunha (see below) and by Pouthier and Vince (see below) provide us with warnings. Gaim and Cunha (see below) invite us to be mindful of the dark side of a paradox approach and point to power dynamics between management and labor that the pandemic made more salient. Pouthier and Vince (see below) remind us that the tensions employees experience during the pandemic is quintessentially an emotional experience and should be examined as such.

In 2018, Miron-Spektor and colleagues invited us to move past a macrolevel understanding of paradox theory to explore the implications of paradoxes at the individual level, raising new questions such as "What conditions intensify the experience of tensions? What is the impact of tensions on one's workplace efforts, such as job performance? How do individuals' approaches affect their ability to cope with, or even benefit from, these tensions?" (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018, p. 27). The COVID-19 pandemic represents unprecedented conditions to further unpack those questions.

The COVID-19 Pandemic: Living the Work–Family Paradox

Rebecca Bednarek and Jane K. Lê

COVID-19 dramatically transformed the intersection between work and family life as childcare, office, and school merged into a single space. With the tasks associated with each often needing to happen simultaneously, for instance work meetings were conducted with babies, toddlers, and preschoolers in tow. The move from offices to the home led to the discovery of new workspaces, including those that involved toys underfoot and homework alongside (Figure 1). While employees are used to juggling work and family, and navigating the tensions between these, COVID-19 had an extreme impact. Transforming the relationship between work and family; and changing how we respond to the paradox. In the section below, we use the salient example of the

Figure 1. Site of conference calls during a pandemic.

work–life paradox to illustrate how the experience can enrich paradox theorizing.

Though work and family are central aspects of adult life, they are not always in harmony (Grzywacz & Smith, 2016). Work–family conflict refers to when fulfilling demands of work interfere with an individual's capability to fulfil the demands of family life and/or vice versa (Frone et al., 1992). Work–family conflict has been described as paradoxical, wherein both elements—while entwined in our lives—are often contradictory (Allard et al., 2007). This paradox is particularly pronounced for working women (King, 2008). This is our central focus.

The widely held answer to this problem is "work–life balance" (Beauregard & Henry, 2009), the definition of which generally comprises equilibrium, satisfaction, or fulfilment of multiple roles (Kalliath & Brough, 2008). A paradox perspective (Lewis, 2000; Smith & Lewis, 2011) suggests that there is generative potential within this balance: for instance, we may become better, more patient, educators because of what aspects of our nonprofessional life have taught us, or better parents because of the fulfilment we gain via our profession.

Given the centrality of "balance" in thinking about the work–family paradox, the discussion focus on how COVID-19 evolves our understanding of this concept and, simultaneously,

how paradox theory can expand our thinking in this regard. COVID-19 created situations in which parents and children were suddenly working, caring, learning, and playing together in the same space, disrupting all existing ways of balancing. This revelatory experience prompts broad considerations for paradox theory.

Specifically, COVID-19 challenges the utility of the notion of balance, and its assumption that we must achieve equilibrium or risk poorer outcomes in either or both realms of life. In some situations—like those generated by COVID-19, e.g., closed day-cares/schools and mandatory home working—this balance can be unachievable. For example, in a recent survey, almost half the respondents reported reduced performance at work as a result of managing these additional responsibilities (Krentz et al., 2020). COVID-19 shows that, during crisis, equilibrium might not be the lived-experience of paradox and tension. Indeed, when balance is impossible, it can be an emotional burden (Vince & Broussine, 1996) to believe that balance is necessary to attain virtuous performance cycles (Lewis, 2000).

However, paradox theory also offers dynamism (Smith & Lewis, 2011) via the notion of oscillation between paradoxical poles (Jay, 2013). This concept is helpful in moving us beyond idealized notions of work–life balance toward capturing real lived experience of paradox within disequilibrium (Cunha & Putnam, 2019). Paradox theory thus helps illuminate oscillations between the paradoxical elements of work and family during COVID-19. Specifically, as the structures previously separating work and family were eroded, the interweaving of practices that navigated the work and family poles were so frequent and blurred that they unfolded via subtly shifting oscillation between poles, e.g. negotiating with children to do worksheets while on a conference call in lieu of a reward later. Work-life scholars critical of the notion of balance (Thompson & Bunderson, 2001) suggest that this oscillation may not result in equal time dedicated to each sphere (e.g. 40:60 rather than 50:50). Contingent on the circumstances, balance may thus not exist at all or only hold temporarily. This "disequilibrium" may be appropriate when desired.

Yet, disequilibrium of the work–family paradox may also be forced, as was the case during COVID-19. This necessarily changed the construction of and response to (Jarzabkowski & Lê, 2017) the work–family paradox. As established practices collapsed, and people had to find novel ways of working through paradox, new ways of combining these roles quickly emerged through "micro" practices (Bednarek et al., 2017; Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Lê & Bednarek, 2017). For instance, as the practice of attending meetings changed to accommodate children sharing spaces with working parents, the paradox was reconstructed. Parents no longer had the externally imposed source of tension of having to create a completely child-free workspace. The shifting doings and sayings (Schatzki, 2002) that emerged during the COVID-19 crisis were thus consequential for reconstructing work–family life and its inherent tension. Whether this was experienced as positive or negative, depended on personal circumstance and preference.

Indeed, variations in our experience of the work–family paradox are central here: e.g. differences in family context (e.g., number of children, support from a partner) and work context (e.g., access to flexible workplace policies). While COVID-19 had a universal impact on the work–family paradox, there was variation in how this impact was experienced. The notion of paradox knots (Sheep et al., 2017), which are known to be born of constraint, may be helpful in taking these ideas further. It prompts us to consider how the work–family paradox was knotted with other tensions, for example, gender role tensions (Lewis & Humbert, 2010), or tensions with paradoxical professional, economic, or societal poles (for instance, as an essential worker also being a parent). Such interconnection and mutual dependence within paradox knots become starker during crises when paradoxes are extremely salient.

Our consideration of work–life balance ends hopefully. There is an opportunity to generate a positive legacy from COVID-19 in relation to the work–family paradox. In expanding the array of possible practices, COVID-19 may provide people with broader mandates to work through the work–family paradox in ways better suited to them. For instance, for some parents it was a positive thing to be able to virtually attend certain meetings with their children nearby. If this expanded array of practical possibilities continues, it will allow individuals to construct the work–family paradox in ways that best enable them to harness the generative potential of paradox (Radcliffe & Cassell, 2015).

Paradox and Leadership during Global Crises

Jennifer Sparr

COVID-19 pandemic hit organizations around the world unexpectedly. Work settings were abruptly changed to protect the workforce from the virus while sustaining the productivity. One of the most widely discussed changes was the rapid switch of many employees to working from home, requiring virtual leadership and teamwork on short notice, with far-reaching influence on employees' experiences and well-being at work (Kniffin et al., 2020). A paradox approach to leadership informs our understanding of leadership under these circumstances in important ways as illustrated in the following.

Paradox becomes salient when the environment changes and when actors are ready to engage in paradoxical thinking (Smith & Lewis, 2011). A core task for leaders in the pandemic was to provide direction and meaning to their followers, while empowering them to deal flexibly and creatively

with the changing circumstances and prolonged uncertainty. These seemingly contradictory but interrelated leader actions ensure that followers are able to perform well (Kearney et al., 2019; Pradies et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2015). On the contrary, leaders who tended towards a directive leadership style might have felt a loss of control over the work of their followers in the remote work setting, while leaders who favored an empowering leadership style might have been overwhelmed by the need of their followers for guidance. Interestingly, female leaders seem to engage more in paradoxical leadership than men, which made them stand out as leaders in the current crisis (see Putnam & Buzzanell in Sharma et al., 2021).

While extant research on paradox and leadership helps us to understand how single leaders can deal with isolated paradoxical demands at a given time (Schad et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2015), the reality is more complex. The current pandemic is an extraordinary setting for studying how leaders at all levels—from political leaders to organization leaders and leaders of small teams—respond to tensions between distance and closeness, health and profit, individual and collective welfare, and many more—and how their responses are interrelated. To better understand these complex and dynamic relationships in organizations, scholars have suggested changing focus from single leaders to complex and adaptive systems (Schad et al., 2016).

In particular, the idea of leaders enabling adaptive spaces in the leadership for organizational adaptability framework by Uhl-Bien and Arena (2018) might be useful in this regard. In the adaptive spaces, heterogeneous agents come together to create new, adaptive orders through conflicting and connecting processes facilitated by enabling leaders. Taking up this notion, research on the paradox approach to leadership could focus on how the creation of, and action in, adaptive spaces informs the successful management of multilevel, interwoven paradoxes. An example for an adaptive space is temporary teams responsible for handling the pandemic in organizations. These teams often bring together members from top management, human resource, and employees in order to bundle expertise, ideas and connections to different stakeholders inside and outside the organization. They gather advice from global and national institutions such as the World Health Organization or the Robert Koch Institute (Germany), monitor how other organizations handle the crisis and learn from them, analyze the situation in their own organization from the different perspectives (i.e., management, employee, legal perspective) and decide on measures to remain productive while protecting their workforce. These adaptive spaces enable a continued engagement with the pressing tensions and thus allow for learning and flexible adaptation over the course of the pandemic. For example, a common reaction to this tension was to ask people to work exclusively from home at the beginning of the pandemic. Later, as other protective measures were installed, such as wearing masks, limiting the number of people allowed in office spaces, acrylic glass between desks and many more, employees were gradually allowed back to the office, often sharing their time between the office and working from home. To date, experts do not expect that organizations will go back to working 9–5 in the office, even when COVID-19 will be defeated but will keep flexible working models to a certain extent. This illustrates the sustainability of dealing with paradoxical tensions, facilitated by leadership in adaptive spaces.

Fostering Paradox Resonance: Exploring Leaders' Communication of Paradoxes during Crisis

Rikke Kristine Nielsen, Joe Cheal, and Camille Pradies

The communication from leaders during a time of crisis significantly impacts how the crisis unfolds. Leaders also play a decisive role in fostering either virtuous or vicious dynamics when organizations are torn between competing demands (Pradies et al., 2020; Smith, 2014). But never has it been more pressing for organizational leaders to be mindful of *what* and *how* they communicate than in the COVID-19 crisis. In many cases, the current pandemic has surfaced the "invisible currents of paradox" (Quinn & Nujella, 2017, p. vii) operating within organizations, making it vital for leaders to craft messages that align people's beliefs and actions and mobilize them towards a common goal. Extant research evidences the importance of such messages. Portraying management and business reality as is it, not as it could or should be (Johansen, 2018), can foster durable decision-making (Smith, 2014); it can prompt employees to contribute their own views (Johnson, 2014; Sundaramurthy & Lewis, 2003) and thus unleash creativity by legitimizing and including diverse points of view (Miron-Spektor et al., 2011). However, a leader's communication may also result in a misalignment between them and their followers, especially during turbulent times, when employees may need simplicity and short-term solutions with clear answers, line of command and accountability (Grote et al., 2019; Waldman & Bowen, 2016), even though long-term sustainability may require the joint work of a broad group of employees who can tolerate contradictory relationships. How, then, can leaders walk the fine line of communicating effectively during a crisis characterized by contradictory, interdependent, and persistent demands?

Importantly, our collaborative work with executives has shown us that the answer to this question does not rest solely on the leader. Virtuous dynamics are also closely tied to the followers and their own experience of the paradox (Nielsen et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2015). With the right communication from leaders, followers may feel energized and positively challenged (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018). They may see their

managers as humble leaders who appreciate local complexities (van Dierendonck, 2011). They may also take a paradox-centered managerial communication as an invitation to *act* in difficult change situations and avoid paralysis (Beech et al., 2004). Hence, in the COVID-19 era, it has become critical for leaders to consider whether their messages resonate with relevant audience (e.g., followers, general public, etc.). Resonance, or an "audience's experienced personal connection with a frame" (Giorgi, 2017) may be especially important in "unlocking" the capabilities and resources of followers and in bolstering their commitment to work through paradoxical tensions alongside their leaders (Nielsen & Hansen, 2020; Schneider et al., 2020). Resonant messages may reduce employees' anxiety, disengagement or avoidance (Argyris, 1990; Cheal, 2020, p. 52; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008; Nielsen & Hansen, 2020), and minimize the perception of leaders' efforts as manipulative (Grant & Wolfram Cox, 2017) or as superficial impression management (Gaim et al., 2020). And yet, resonance, as it relates to paradoxical tensions, remains a complex and understudied concept.

The COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, offers a unique opportunity to study the paths that organizational leaders may follow to communicate in a way that resonates with relevant audience—mainly, their followers. In the realm of politics, for instance, we have seen leaders engage in extensive efforts to explain the need to balance financial health and physical health through ideas such as "flattening the curve" and "social distancing." These are portrayed as remedies to achieve the balancing act of bringing together competing demands. In Denmark, government has changed the national credo of "standing together" to "standing together apart" as a way to draw on a familiar motto and make the paradox more easily understandable to its people. In an organizational context, organizations that held values embracing paradoxical decision-making and action before the crisis such as the Royal Danish Defence (2008) or the Municipality of Billund (The Municipality of Billund, 2020) have the opportunity to place paradoxical tensions resulting from COVID-19 within a known frame of reference. Their leadership and governance code anchored in paradoxical injunctions allows leaders of such organizations to transfer preexisting paradoxical management strategies (tied to the organizationally mandated focus paradoxes) to other paradoxes such as paradoxes resulting from COVID-19. These cases exemplify leaders' use of cognitive resonance—resonance based on "an appeal to audiences' beliefs and understandings" (Giorgi, 2017, p. 711) by drawing on something that is already familiar to them to bring in the paradox.

But there is more to resonance than just a cognitive component. To rally employees around the challenges posed by COVID-19 in organizations, understanding a paradox is not enough. Leaders need to ignite a drive amongst their followers to drastically change their routines and to make them feel as central actors who are doing the right thing and fulfilling

a mission. Giorgi (2017, p. 711) refers to this pathway as emotional resonance—resonance based on "an appeal to audiences' feelings, passions, and aspirations." To this end, leaders have leveraged virtual channels in new and unprecedented ways, creating rituals that allow employees to not only understand what being together-apart means, but also to feel it and to identify with that message (Giorgi, 2017). For instance, an international consulting engineering company instituted virtual "CEO fire place talks," where employees can pose questions directly to upper management constitute one telling example whereby leaders are combining images that evoke the feeling of being "close" and "together" (e.g., the fireplace), while doing the actual communication physically apart. In the public realm, the Danish Broadcasting Corporation, a public-service broadcasting company, has created a number of collective rituals such as live televised sing-along community singing. The Friday evening versions of the program in April 2020 gathered more than one million viewers (out of 5.8 million inhabitants in Denmark) singing songs from the Danish songbook facilitating the public's identification with the common cause of being together while being apart (Danish Broadcasting Corporation, 2020). Singing together represents a musical pathway for fostering emotional resonance—or as the conductor and program host observes, "Music is a short cut to connectivity and cohesion and it strengthens a sense of belonging." (Authors' translation, Laursen, 2020, first paragraph).

Another example that showed the emotional component of paradox resonance is an extraordinary, live televised national address by the Danish Queen. The speech format itself is a reminiscence of a national ritual—the Queen's televised national address on New Year's Eve where Danes gather together with family and friends for predinner drinks and listen to the Queen's speech at 5.30 PM. Yet, the unusual timing of the speech echoed the rare instances where a Danish monarch has given public addresses, namely radio transmitted speeches during World War II thus arousing feelings of national emergency and standing together to face an enemy. The content of this extraordinary speech was itself highly personal and sharp, scolding noncompliance with lock-down regulations as "thoughtless" and "reckless", while at the same appealing to "citizenship", expressing empathy for the anxieties and concerns of the people as well as confidence in the public's ability to get through the crisis by "standing together apart" (Authors' translation, Queen Margrethe II, 2020). As national, political, or corporate leaders appeal to the audience's identifications, feelings and passions, they build on emotional resonance to foster collective actions of dispersed followers.

While paradox scholars have predominantly been occupied with understanding leaders' actions to make a paradox salient (Knight & Paroutis, 2017; Pradies et al., forthcoming), the paradoxical tensions heightened by COVID-19 such as "standing apart together" have highlighted that we should

not solely examine leaders. We need to unpack the relationship between leaders and followers as well as the mechanisms that sustain this relationship. This is particularly the case in a context, where people are expected to cooperate, while being physically dispersed. Paradox theory offers insights as well as sensemaking and decision-making resources for leaders, yet paradox leadership in theory and practice must include paradox followership and followers' resonance in order to understand and facilitate collective action during times of crises, grand challenges and continuous change in a VUCA-world.

Human Resource Management and Paradox: Lessons from the Pandemic

Anne Keegan, Julia Brandl, and Ina Aust

The decision by governments and public health agencies worldwide to use what virologists call "the hammer" (i.e., shelter in place orders, closure of nonessential business, physical distancing and new hygiene measures) has brought rapid and unimaginable changes to the world of work.

Employers have had to respond to the immediate crisis in ways including moving some or all of their workforce offsite and to a remote work mode, reducing hours and staggering shifts, and instituting layoffs. The response to the immediate crisis, though undertaken at rapid speed, has long-term consequences for organizations and their workforces. Never has time been so short for employers to consider both the long- and short-term implications at the same time, and never has it been so important for organizational survival and for social employment goals that they do so. The COVID-19 pandemic presents opportunities for researching paradox in human resource management (HRM) (Aust et al., 2017; Keegan et al., 2018b, 2019) and highlighting the contradictory, interdependent and persistent nature of tensions faced by employees.

HRM involves developing arrangements (e.g., HR practices) that enable productive coordination of human efforts while addressing (some) employee interests. The compromises that emerge from these arrangements are not always of equal benefit (or risk) for all parties (Keegan et al., 2019, p. 199), which has become particularly visible during the COVID-19 pandemic. It has laid bare tensions between the pursuit of health and profit at work. In its basic form, health is seen as a requirement for work, but health provisions for employees are associated with costs for employers. These costs reduce profits, a fact that often encourages employers to devolve risks (e.g., by hiring employees with health-seeking behavior) and/or to externalize the costs of ill-health to individual workers or to taxpayers. This does not contradict observations that employers sometimes prioritize both health and profit but rather suggests that the provision of health-related benefits depends on an individual employee's worth

to the business and/or institutional pressures. In other words, how employers approach the tension between health and profit hinges on power differences in the employment relationship. The pandemic has qualitatively changed the experience of these tensions, and how HRM managers can approach these tensions, as the following cases highlight.

The first case refers to tensions in compensation systems exposed by COVID-19. During the pandemic, we ask front-line workers who tend our loved ones, clean hospital wards or deliver essential food orders, to take huge risks with their own health. We—and they—are now more aware that those same people are frequently on precarious contracts and among the lowest paid workers. The division between the treatment of core workers with secure employment, and precarious workers with less security of income and tenure, is brought into sharp relief as low-paid workers have been catapulted into the "essential worker" status while their employment contracts, and the protections these afford, are unclear or inadequate. Examples include food delivery couriers and drivers working for ride-hailing services as gig workers (Meijerink & Keegan, 2019). HRM paradoxes are salient when the applause for taking risks is juxtaposed by requests to not use the elevator, or to fund their own personal protective equipment to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The mismatch between the essential nature of these precarious jobs and the value of these jobs based on normal production models presents (unexpected) opportunities for these occupations to renegotiate their compensation and employment conditions, and for socially minded HRM scholars to make visible the negative aspects of many employment relationships and work models. These "value" paradoxes that are evident during the pandemic raise general questions about how organizations classify the relative value of workers, and how contextual changes prompt us to consider the sustainability of such designations as well as assumptions, often premised on financial concerns, that underpin them (Ehnert, 2009).

The second case refers to tensions in employers' approaches to worker health exposed by COVID-19. Aguinis et al. (2020) describe how Amazon decided to adopt a CSR perspective during the crisis by expanding online grocery delivery to provide service to those affected by the pandemic. Simultaneously, reports highlight Amazon workers' experiences in responding to huge demand for Amazon services, and their vulnerability due to the lack of protective equipment needed to perform new tasks and work more intensively than ever before. This case is one of several linked with the pandemic that suggests allocating health-protection services based on conventional models of worker value is wholly inadequate. Insufficient protection for all workers undermines public health and business models as well as raising questions regarding organizational legitimacy. Defending traditional boundaries that differentiate between flexible workers and contractors on the one hand, and "regular" employees on the other, and using such boundaries to

allocate health protection, gives rise to vicious cycles (Smith & Lewis, 2011) that facilitate the rapid spread of COVID-19. The results are factory shutdowns and quarantine for large parts of the workforce and, as a consequence, for local communities. The health/profit paradox is salient when workers with short-term contracts and insecure income are fearful of sharing their symptoms because they do not benefit from sick pay, live in cramped housing with other (precarious) workers, and believe they have few options to respond to their own health due to employment models that downgrade their status and undermine their collective rights to decent pay and protection (Schrage in Carmine et al., 2021). While we have lived with questions about such employment models for many years, paradoxes of health/profit have been exposed by COVID-19 in an unprecedented way.

A third example illustrates the dynamic nature of tensions during COVID-19 by highlighting the complex interrelationships between work performance and health protection for vital frontline workers. During this pandemic, employees are asked to simultaneously strive to meet performance targets (e.g., sales targets, time-keeping) whilst applying novel hygiene directives (e.g., issued by health agencies or based on corporate rules) such as wearing masks, hand-sanitizing and maintaining as well as enforcing physical distance from coworkers and clients. In interactive service work (e.g., waiters, care workers, retail workers, actors), workers struggle to integrate competing requirements on a day-to-day base (Francis & Keegan, 2020; Schneider et al., 2020). They must be creative and learn from varied and often ambivalent customer views and feedback on their efforts. Paradox is salient when customers applaud rigorous adherence to hygiene standards but complain about lengthy queues and new restrictions (e.g., having to wear face coverings) that service workers must enforce. Where performance criteria are still anchored in normal views of work (e.g., satisfying customers), tensions emerge for workers that can undermine their confidence, make them question their priorities, and even endanger their safety.

Conceptually, the pandemic invites us to reflect on our understanding of the interrelatedness of health and profit, or more broadly economic and social HRM goals, and the responsibilities of HRM actors in pursuing these goals (Kozica & Brandl, 2015). Much existing HRM paradox theorizing takes for granted that HRM goals are relatively stable opposites, with economic goals reflecting the interests of employers and social goals the interest of employees. HRM managers design arrangements that attempt to integrate these goals. These assumptions limit our analyses of paradox to how actors trade tensions between "their" goals for a pragmatic compromise and how they adjust arrangements in the light of changing power relations.

A more developed paradox perspective on HRM recognizes that HRM goals can be interrelated in multiple ways and that the positioning of social actors in terms of their experience of tensions is highly complex and dynamic (Keegan et al., 2018a). As COVID-19 develops and renders tensions salient in novel ways, the pandemic reveals the persistent, contradictory, and interrelated nature of both the pursuit of employee well-being (health) and organizational performance (profit), which while always present has never quite been so obvious. It also suggests that achieving integration between contradictory and interrelated HRM elements is a dynamic and fragile process that requires ongoing efforts from employers and employees. It directs us to pay attention to the persistent interrelationships between HRM elements (e.g., health and profit) so that we can better appreciate the effects of addressing or neglecting tensions (e.g., by externalizing health costs). COVID-19 offers an opportunity to enrich and advance the study of the complex dynamics of HRM paradoxes and the implications this has for HRM actors and for the employment relationship. These implications include the need to communicate more explicitly the values underpinning HRM systems in times of paradox.

Paradox Mindset and Coping with COVID-19 Tensions

Ella Miron-Spektor

As discussed throughout this issue, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a major source of tensions. The rapidly expanding research on the role of a paradox mindset offers insights into managing such tensions. Early research suggests that tensions can be a double-edged sword, and the way people approach and make sense of tensions determines whether they will suffer or thrive in the situation (Bartunek, 1988; Smith & Berg, 1986). Experiencing tensions can be threatening and lead to dysfunctional defensive reactions if individuals approach tensions as dilemmas, seeking to alleviate their anxiety by resolving the conflict (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018). However, attempts at resolution offer a temporary reprieve. Tensions are likely to resurface again (Lewis, 2000). For instance, regardless of employees' choices today, tensions of work and family continue, and tomorrow will present a new challenge. However, when individuals have a paradox mindset– the tendency to value, accept, and feel comfortable with tensions (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018, p. 27)—they accept paradoxes as a natural part of life, appreciate their interwoven nature, and develop comfort with the discomfort they elicit. Energized by contradictions, they proactively confront tensions in search of both/and alternatives.

Research on paradox mindset has offered insights that can inform the way employees, managers, and even policy-makers cope with the pandemic related tensions. For example, new evidence suggests that leaders who were more effective at controlling the crisis, combined realism with care, agency

and communion, and implemented short term interventions with long-term recovery plans (Coscieme et al., 2020; Leung et al., 2020; Zheng et al., 2018). There is also anecdotal evidence of a role of paradox mindset in the management of the crisis at the national level, as East Asians, who have been found to have an overall higher paradox mindset (Keller et al., 2017), have had relative success in managing tensions between economics and public health (see Schad and Etter and Sheep in Sharma et al., 2021).

Furthermore, several studies suggest that approaching tensions with a paradox mindset is particularly conducive to creativity. In a series of studies, activating a paradox mindset (or frames) improved the ability of individuals to juxtapose competing elements and create novel combinations and solutions to given problems (Miron-Spektor et al., 2011). The creative benefits of adopting a paradox mindset are particularly evident in situations of scarcity (e.g., time and funding, Miron-Spektor et al., 2018). When resources are limited, allocating psychological and financial resources toward achieving one goal reduces the available resources for other purposes (Kanfer & Ackerman, 1989; Shao et al., 2019). By embracing tensions as inevitable and persistent, however, adopting a paradox mindset frees mental and emotional resources and broadens one's thought-action repertoire (Liu et al., 2020). By taking a paradox approach to tensions, individuals, teams, and their leaders can become more innovative (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009; Liu et al., 2020; Shao et al., 2019). The pandemic crisis has proven to be a major exemplar of such a scarce condition, as the crisis and its consequences have depleted many of our material and psychological resources. For scientists, it has been a race against time to try to develop treatments (see Lê and Pradies in Sharma et al., 2021). For frontline health care workers it has been a race against time to save lives (see Raza and Keller in Carmine et al., 2021). For managers and employees, it has been a race against time to adjust to an online working environment. And for workers with children, it has been a race against time to adjust to a changing dynamic between work and family responsibilities. This suggests that having a paradox mindset is even more important for coming up with creative solutions during this pandemic period. One contemporary example relates to the scarcity in testing for active SARS-CoV-2 infection. With limited availability of test kits, the need to quickly survey large populations to trace asymptomatic COVID-19 carriers, while efficiently producing reliable test results has posed a significant challenge. Approaching this challenge with a paradox mindset, a group of scientists came up with a creative solution. Instead of testing individual samples, they pooled several samples together. In their dual-stage test, a negative result of the pooled sample implied that all samples in the pool are negative, while a positive result indicated that at least one sample in the pool is positive and required additional testing. This creative solution enabled faster and reliable testing of larger populations

with fewer test kits (Ben-Ami et al., 2020). Another creative solution addresses the growing need to reopen universities while many students continue to study from home. By combining elements of classroom teaching with distance learning, dual-mode teaching enables professors to engage students in class and at home simultaneously.

The crisis and its consequences have not influenced everyone equally. Several studies point to a dramatic increase in the tensions experienced by women, especially mothers who are carrying most of the burden of unpaid care work at home (Power, 2020). A paradox mindset may offer help in managing this situation as well. New findings from a cross-cultural study in Singapore, Israel, and the US demonstrate that adopting a paradox mindset enables women to view their career and motherhood as mutually enriching goals (Huang et al., 2020), and to set more realistic expectations for achieving both (Gino, 2020).

In the current crisis, a paradox mindset it is a helpful way of thinking. Acknowledging that our life and work have become more challenging in many ways and that tensions are here to stay, adopting a paradox mindset is even more necessary for our productivity, creativity, and well-being.

The Dark Side of Organizational Paradoxes and the Pandemic

Medhanie Gaim and Miguel Pina e Cunha

Owing to the pandemic, individuals, organizations, and nations are dealing with myriad paradoxes that denote a persistent interdependence of contradictory demands (Schad et al., 2016). Central to the paradox is the challenge of simultaneously protecting the economy while saving human life: attending to short term needs of saving lives while attending to the long-term economic and mental health effects. In orchestrating the global response, World Health Organization's recommendations, which turn into restrictions and prohibitions when operationalized, triggered paradoxes at multiple levels. For example, the restrictions and prohibitions to keep the public safe, in most case, came at a cost to economies and livelihoods. In developing economies, the experienced paradoxes were even more intense. In such a context, work required the physical presence of workers, which meant social distancing was impractical. Lockdown was inconceivable for those who must work today to eat today. Thus, the gap between what "should" and "can" be done; the former in principle the later in practice was wide. We argue that the gap lay bare the dark side of paradox, those mostly overlooked in the mainstream literature, and their destructive potential in the absence of proper paradox work.

First, when embracing paradoxes become a stretch too far, actors tend to cut corners and engage in false mastery where paradoxes are embraced only discursively but not substantively (Gaim et al., 2019). For example, to keep a business

going while "protecting" its employees, Chinese businesses in Zambia were accused of what was called a "forced quarantine," barring workers from leaving their workplace. This "helping-by-enslaving" was the epitome of unintended consequences of (mis)managing the business-human life paradox (see Schad and Etter in Sharma et al., 2021). With the understanding that embracing paradox discursively but not in practice (Gaim et al., 2019) we could be watchful of those who touted to have done so during the pandemic: not only looking at the surface but deep down into what is truly unfolding.

Second, in understanding the dark side, we can be mindful of oversimplifying the challenge of positively responding to paradoxes especially when actors lack the mindset to hold oppositions and agency to respond to paradoxes (Berti & Simpson, 2019). As Lê and Bednarek (see above) highlighted above, balancing work–family paradox has taken a different shape for working mothers given the normative expectations and access (or lack thereof) to resources. Although Miron-Spektor et al. (2018) noted the importance of mindset, it "may not solve all problems" (see Miron-Spektor above). Without agency, experienced tensions will most likely lead to pragmatic paradoxes where organizational conditions restrict the ability of actors from making a legitimate decision when faced with paradoxes (Berti & Simpson, 2019). Thus, if actors lack agency, even though they have the mindset, they will resort to short-lived defensive responses. It is also important to be mindful of the dark side when paradoxes change their form across hierarchical levels. As can be illustrated by the Chinese businesses in Zambia case, when paradoxes are decoupled and transferred across hierarchies what is paradoxical framing discursively at the top can be a pragmatic paradox at the bottom.

Third, understanding of the dark side puts decision-makers in a good position to understand the paradox that resides in the space between pre- and post-pandemic (as temporary holding space) and inform the transition. As actors respond to the pandemic, what they do in the temporary holding space (Powley, 2009) will have a repercussion. The temporary holding space is "a brief, unresolved period in which work activities "suspend" thus creating a space for organizational members to readjust and reorient themselves" (Powley, 2009, p. 1299). Thus, the decisions made during such a period also set a tone for what is to happen following the pandemic and other similar crises. Decision-makers can, therefore, minimize the long-term unintended consequences of short-term decisions by creating a generative space for negotiation and a shared sense of purpose (Wilson, 2020).

Thus, the pandemic has shown, first, that managing a paradox is not easy. As multiple demands intensify, expecting actors to accommodate all demands without access to needed resources and mindset rooted in established coping mechanisms would be akin to preparing oneself for zemblanity (Giustiniano et al., 2016), self-inflicted bad luck. This period might necessitate reducing expectations (Li, 2020) or, non-paradoxical as it is, abandoning one side of the demand in the face of an unyielding reality to avoid unintended consequences, at least in the short term.

Also, the pandemic has brought forth the fallibility of humans. Those who brought the human-centric approach were better off than those who were bumptious. Thus, the crisis has heartened us to bring in compassion and empathy when dealing with paradoxes (Gaim & Clegg, 2020). Awareness of the dark side of paradox can promote human-centric approaches. People tend to rely on leaders who would tell the truth and rely on science rather than those with an anti-intellectual sentiment. However, following science and fact can be overwhelming. Thus, facts complemented by empathy could balance the message. Jacinda Ardern's demonstration of empathetic connection weaving "directing" with "mobilizing," the formal with the informal, the hard fact with understanding (Wilson, 2020, p. 287) is a case in point (see Putnam and Buzzanell in Sharma et al., 2021). Thus, bringing the universal human value of caring for others, rather than promoting one group's agenda at the cost of excluding another's needs could be a way to go.

Moreover, one of the questions that many might ask is how to restart after the dust has settled. The issue of activating resilience is, therefore, central. Notwithstanding the difficulty, the pandemic has also presented an opportunity for organizations to reframe their value propositions. With a paradoxical approach and understanding of its dark side, organizations need to engage in reframing and see beyond the crisis: adapt in the short term and adjust in the long-term. Doing so could enable actors to simultaneously zoom in and out: have their eye to the horizon while their feet are on the ground and think of how to "resume, bounce back and positively adjust" to the pandemic (Powley, 2009, p. 1292).

Finally, the crisis has unearthed deep-rooted hidden paradoxes. The importance of "low skill" hourly workers (essential workers during the crisis) in the elderly care and health care was visible: something that was invisible in the past. Not attending to the basic needs of those "low skill" workers disrupted a system in the "developed world" since a system can only be as strong as its weakest link. Thus, the pandemic is a call for more work on paradoxes that are not yet articulated and constructed as such.

Paradox, Emotions, and COVID-19: What Can Our Tears Teach Us?

Vanessa Pouthier and Russ Vince

> Heaven knows we need never be ashamed of our tears, for they are rain upon the blinding dust of earth, overlying our hard hearts.
>
> Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*

Tears have become more common with the COVID-19 pandemic. We heard of spontaneous crying in hospital Emergency Departments (ED). We saw the tears in videos posted by health care workers, who feel like they are working in a war zone, with limited resources. They are tired, afraid to go to work and yet compelled and proud to keep going. As academics working from home, we too can feel like crying. Our increased work and family demands can be overwhelming. We are not quite sure we can cope. The days feel longer, the days are longer. There is little space to talk about these experiences, let alone to challenge the increase in workloads, when so many have lost their jobs. We are asked to soldier on, to pretend we can do this without impact.

The ED workers' tears, our tears, are bodily signs of anxiety, discomfort, stress, and frustration. To paradox scholars, they are palpable manifestations of internal contradictions. We look for such indicators of the experience of paradoxical tensions to validate the presence of a paradox. Some scholars encourage looking more closely at the expression of emotions through bodily performances and the role they play in the surfacing of (and responding to) tensions to avoid "shoving emotions into the background of paradox research" (Putnam et al., 2016, p. 136). Emotions are more than an epiphenomenon.

Our ED workers' lives have always been full of tensions, which the pandemic has magnified. They weep from the intensification of tension between care and finite resources, between inclusion and safety, or between allegiance to patients and allegiance to one's family. Afraid to fall ill and bring the virus home, they feel conflicted in their responsibility to provide care to anyone, including highly contagious COVID-19 patients. The mere contemplation of withdrawing from one's role as an institutional custodian leaves them feeling ashamed of not honoring their value commitment to do what's right (Wright et al., 2020).

What of our tears as academics seeking to navigate the challenge of working, living and playing under the same roof? We are no strangers to the blurring of the work–life distinction. With demands increasing and support decreasing, the conflict between both domains is exacerbated (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018; see Bednarek & Lê above). While we may all experience guilt, there are differences in the "emotional landscape of men's and women's conflict regarding work and family" with women's tears flowing from their felt ambivalence and self-doubt about their competence (Padavic et al., 2020). For men, unwept tears (we are not really supposed to cry) cover anxieties about broader roles and shared responsibilities in a world that we want to change and yet to remain the same.

Negative and mixed emotions have been associated with vicious paradox dynamics. Fearful health care workers may start privileging safety at the expense of inclusion (Wright et al., 2020). Many of us may respond defensively to the increased anxiety and stress about meeting conflicting work–family demands (Miron-Spektor & Smith, 2020), and quite possibly through unconscious splits that mirror gendered norms about the division of labor (Padavic et al., 2020). The emotional conflicts experienced during the pandemic could indeed shift couples' work–family dynamics, in what some have called "a disaster for feminism" (Rudolph et al., 2020).

To avoid getting trapped into emotionally fueled and emotionally costly vicious cycles during the pandemic, paradox scholars recommend cultivating a paradox mindset (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018), which enables both acceptance of and comfort with tensions associated with competing demands and increased creativity. Our well-being and resilience may improve if we remain open to exploring, alone and with others, the mutually enriching aspects of work and family experiences (Miron-Spektor & Smith, 2020).

However, the emotional intensity of our experiences, our tears, tell us that it is clearly not easy to free oneself from feeling we are not doing enough, to let go of shame and self-reproach. Research has suggested that productive and sustainable approaches to paradox means exploring people's "psychological investments in cherished identities" (Padavic et al., 2020, p. 103). Unconscious emotional investments may interfere with cognitive interventions to address paradoxes (Voronov & Vince, 2012). Methods that surface emotions, such as drawing and collective inquiry (Vince & Broussine, 1996), can offer a useful complementary intervention to paradox mindset training. To date, documented paradox interventions tend to say too little about emotions, betraying a bias for overly rational approaches (Fairhurst et al., 2019; Putnam et al., 2016). Tears and affective dynamics might encourage paradox scholars to expand their methodological toolkit. We may find value in confessional accounts and semifictional autoethnography (Ashcraft, 2017; Thompson & Willmott, 2016), taking our affective experiences into consideration.

Our individual and collective tears effectively constitute invitations to explore more fully the varied roles emotions may play in paradox (Schad et al., 2016), challenging us in particular to look at how our emotions may enable virtuous dynamics, and not simply feed vicious ones. A focus on emotions and affect helpfully addresses the power relations that shape individual response capabilities. Our feelings are situated in sociopolitical contexts about which they can reveal a lot. While emotions are complicit in the reproduction of power relations and oppressive regimes, they may also be the site of their undoing (Jarrett & Vince, 2017; Thompson & Willmott, 2016).

We may experience the exacerbated tension between work and life demands, with work hours extended in the name of solidarity during the crisis, as an undiscussable tension, especially when surrounded by increasing precarity, talk of job losses, and actual cutbacks. We accept the increase to our workload without voicing our concerns. Our tears

though can speak on our behalf and become a site of critical agency. We have witnessed incredible moments of affective sharing during the pandemic. Health care workers post videos revealing the emotional and physical pain they are suffering, in courageous displays of vulnerability. Colleagues dare crying together or venting their spleen from sensing similar pain and frustrations in others. What may happen through these repeated moments of affective sharing is a reclaiming of our capacity for compassion and love; an acceptance of our fundamental vulnerability—an intimate reawakening to the fragility of life; and perhaps the mobilization of a politics of anger against existing power structures (Pouthier & Sondak, 2019).

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