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Emic paradoxes, etic paradoxes, and paradox work[1]

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Abstract

The study departs from two assumptions. First, it considers that organizations and their leadership are inherently paradoxical and that, in that sense, dealing with paradox is a necessary component of the leadership process. Second, it explores whether the paradoxes of leadership may manifest differently in different contexts. We explore the emergence of paradox in the leadership of Angolan organizations. Angola is an economy transitioning from a centrally-planned to a market mode, and this makes it a rich site for understanding the specificities of paradoxical processes in an under-researched, "rest of the world", context. The findings of our inductive study led to the emergence of four interrelated paradoxes and highlight the importance of paradoxical work as a management requirement.

Keywords: leadership, Angola, paradoxes, paradox work, paradoxification.

INTRODUCTION

The idea of a "paradox turn" has not been articulated yet, but it is building momentum in the field of management and organization, in areas such as leadership (Fletcher, 2004; Ibarra, 2015; Warner, 2007), corporate sustainability (Hahn, Pinkse, Preuss, & Figge, 2014), the family firm (Ingram, Lewis, Sarton, & Gartner, 2014), organizational culture (Castilla & Benard, 2010; Takeuchi, Osono, & Shimizu, 2008), corporate strategy (Hundsnes & Meyer, 2006), and business education (Dobrow, Smith, & Posner, 2011). Recent research has revealed that paradoxes are pervasive forces in organizational and broad institutional processes at every level of analysis. *Institutions*, such as marriage, can be paradoxical, as they contain the potentially contrary demands of romantic involvement with the binding, non-romantic dimension of a legal contract (Nilsson, 2015). *Organizations* have been portrayed as paradoxical, as they necessarily imply opposing institutional logics, such as the logic of the family and the logic of the business, the logic of commerce and the logic education, the logic of service to the public and the logic of budgetary discipline, the logic of short term and the logic of long term (e.g., Pache & Santos, 2010; Schuman, Stutz & Ward, 2010). *Teams*, including top management teams (Amason, 1996), are paradoxical as they require a balance between collaboration and competition, dedication to the collective and a desire to stand out, and so forth (Smith & Berg, 1987; Silva et al., 2014). *Individuals* have also been presented as struggling with paradoxical forces, namely because their protection of personal excellence leads them to become rigid (DeLong & DeLong, 2011), because they have motives for being both good citizens and star performers (Bergeron, 2007), and are confronted with conflicting identity pressures, such as those coming out of work and family demands (Kets de Vries, 2012). The "paradox turn", in summary, stresses that organizing is replete with opposite demands that somehow need to be tackled and put to a productive use.

In this paper, we respond to a double theoretical call. On the one hand, we explore *paradox work*, a process that has been insufficiently appreciated in organizational research. On the other hand, we do so in the underexplored case of management in Angola, responding to the need to conduct research in the "rest of the world" (Ozkazanç-Pan, 2008), in this case in Sub-Saharan Africa (Jackson, 2004; Rivera-Santos, Holt, Littlewood & Kolk, 2015). Angola is characterized by high levels of power distance, collectivism, femininity, uncertainty avoidance, normative orientation, and indulgence (see http://geert-hofstede.com/angola.html), a pattern significantly different from the one characterizing most studied contexts, such as the

US and Europe. No cross-cultural comparison is carried out. However, although mainly adopting an indigenous perspective (Gelfand, Erez, & Aycan, 2007), the study seeks to contribute to the understanding of both emic (i.e., culture-specific, idiosyncratic of the Angolan context; Lee, Scandura, & Sharif, 2014; Pike, 1967) and etic (i.e., transcultural) elements of the paradox process.

In line with Zoogah (2008) we postulate that: (1) paradox may be a relevant organizational phenomenon *per se*, i.e. regardless of context, and that (2) the functional form it takes may express local and singular features. On the a-contextual side lies the assumption that organizations and their leadership are inherently paradoxical and fraught with opposite demands. This dimension does not depend on context, as every organization articulates paradoxical tensions. Contextually, we aimed to study the specific manifestations of paradox in a transitioning African context, Angola. This need is substantiated for example in Kiggundu et al. (1983), who noted that the contingencies confronting leaders in Western settings, including institutional contingencies (Musacchio, Lazzarini & Aguilera, 2015) are not necessarily valid for developing countries and, as such, do not conceptually exhaust the range of paradoxical manifestations confronting leaders. Cultural, economic and institutional idiosyncrasies of developing countries may produce paradoxical demands and challenges not identified in other contexts. Our research question is: *how do Angolan leaders handle the paradoxes confronting them in their work, and what are the emic and the etic dimensions of their management of paradoxes?*

To answer this question, we organized the study in the following sections. First, we briefly lay the theoretical ground for the discussion, articulating leadership and paradox with a particular attention to the African context. Next, we presented the methods, and subsequently the findings and their implications. We have uncovered four paradoxes, some contextual, others a-contextual. These paradoxes led us to conclude that researchers need to consider not only the presence of paradox, as well as the way managers *work* with and around paradox. This practice is called paradox work. We observed that it is not enough to be aware of the presence of paradox but also to transform such awareness into some productive outcome.

PARADOXES OF LEADERSHIP IN AN AFRICAN CONTEXT

Paradox has been identified as a central characteristic of contemporary organizations (Eisenhardt, 2000). Paradox refers to "contradictory yet interrelated elements that exist

simultaneously and persist over time" (Smith & Lewis, 2011, p, 382). In the case of leadership, the defense of paradoxical demands as intrinsic to practice is now well established (see, e.g., Costanzo & Di Domenico [2015] and Kets de Vries [2014] for recent discussions). In this study, we explore the paradoxes involved in leadership processes in an African context. More specifically, we study the likely manifestation of leadership paradoxes in Angolan organizations, through the conceptual support of three theoretical streams of literature: (1) paradox as intrinsic to leadership and organizing; (2) paradox as resulting from institutional contradictions, such as those found in transitioning contexts; and (3) leadership as an activity that renders paradoxes salient due to the need to articulate opposing organizational interests. We consider the contributions of these three streams of literature next.

First, on the basis of previous research, paradoxes may be thought of as inherent to leadership and organization (Smith & Lewis, 2011). Organizations may contain the forces of paradox because opposing but mutually constituting demands have to be articulated, such as the need for both change and stability (Farjoun, 2010), control and autonomy (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1997), innovation and routine (Feldman, 2000), positive and negative (Cameron, 2008). Leaders may have to lead these, as well as other contrasting demands, such as being authentic *and* not showing the true self (Goffee, & Jones, 2005; Ibarra, 2015), sharing power *and* exercising authority (De Vries, Pathak, & Paquin, 2011), and empowering *and* controlling (Warner, 2007).

Second, Angola, our national research context, has cultural idiosyncrasies (see above) and is undergoing an important transition from a centrally planned economy to a market economy. This suggests that Angola could provide a rich site for the study of leadership as paradoxical process, because the transition from a centrally planned to a market economy implies a number of deep changes that take time to stabilize. Transitions create instability which opens institutional contradictions between new logics and old ones (Seo & Creed, 2002). These logics operate over historically-constituted factors, such as weak states and ethnic identities (Michalopoulos & Papaioannou, 2015) that renders inconsistencies even more prevalent. Those divides are not exclusive of Africa but have specificities that should not be ignored. In the case of Angola, the historical circumstances, including a colonial past and a recent post-independence civil war debilitated the state and countered the solidification of independent institutions, the rule of law, and effective educational systems.

Third, we articulate the African context with paradox via leadership. Previous research indicates that leaders must confront paradoxes to be effective (de Vries et al., 2011; DeLong & DeLong, 2011; Goffee & Jones, 2005; Ibarra, 2015) and to build sustainable organizations (Hahn et al., 2014; Lewis, Andriopoulos & Smith, 2014; Manz, Anand, Joshi, & Manz, 2008). But we do not know much about how paradoxes manifest in the case of African organizations, where some challenges are different from those of the West, as discussed above. This seems to be a relevant research endeavor given that the poor quality of leadership and management processes in many African contexts has been presented as an obstacle to economic development and to human progress (e.g., Bloom, Lemos, Sadun, Scur & Van Reenen, 2014; Kamoche, 1997; Zoogah, Peng & Woldu, 2015). The above reasoning thus suggests that the research question is relevant for both conceptual and pragmatic reasons.

METHOD

Selection of the research setting and methodological approach

To explore both a-contextual (etic i.e., organizing and leadership necessarily involve elements of paradox and contradiction) and contextual (emic, i.e., specific forms of paradox emergence in a transitioning context) dimensions of paradox in the leadership process, we adopted the following methodological approach. We used an inductive analysis, in order to explore the process without rigid preconceptions. Angola offered a suitable research setting, given the country's deep transitions, first from a colonial to an independent condition, in November 1975, and then from a centralized to a decentralizing economy (Sidaway & Simon, 1993). Because we were interested in extending/modifying theory (Lee et al., 1999), an inductive logic could serve the purpose of building knowledge about the Angolan context in a conceptually unconstrained way. We put together an insider-outsider research team, with researchers combining diverse levels of familiarity with the setting, including two Angolan nationals, a foreigner with regular contact with Angolan organizations, and one unacquainted with Angola. The goal of this approach was to reach diverse perspectives that could counter biases and prejudices and help to build a balanced interpretive theorizing. Data were collected through both interviews with managers and a review of the literature dealing with Angolan history (Table 1). Another source of information (e.g., Kets de Vries, 2001) consisted in several forms of contact between members of the research team and Angolan people and organizations, as nationals and foreigners with diverse degrees of familiarity with the context.

The above procedures allowed us to triangulate sources and to reduce the pitfalls and prejudices caused by both proximity and distance.

Table 1 about here

Sample and data collection

We invited participants in a leadership development program in a management school to collect and to critically discuss the data coming out of semi-structured interviews with Angolan managers. Participants (31 male, 13 female) were asked to use four broad leadership questions as the core of the interviewing process: What are the major strengths of leadership practices in Angola? What are the major challenges confronting local leaders? What are the explanations for current strengths and weaknesses? How can leadership practices be improved? In this sense, we expected our informants to reflect about the *whats*, *hows* and *whys* of leadership in Angola.

The interviews and the critical analysis of the professional managers participating in the leadership development program thus constitute the central empirical material for the present study. We secured permission to use the data from the participants, and meta-reflected upon the reflections of our students in such a way that we build our interpretation upon previous interpretations, in an iterative process of collective sensemaking.

In total, 91 interviews and the reflections they elicited formed our primary data base. These managers were mainly male (n = 74), between 28 and 65 years old, operated in public and private organizations, both big and small, and presented different levels of seniority (from low level managers to CEOs). They worked in sectors such as banking, utilities, retail, mining, and services. Interviews were mainly conducted face-to-face in their respective work sites (with the exception of three interviews which, due to geographical distance, were conducted with electronic intermediation). The interviews lasted from 20 to 90 minutes.

Data analysis

Data analysis proceeded as recommended by grounded theorizing (Gioia et al., 2012; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). We coded the interviews, axially organized the codes and conducted an iterative interpretation, using the data to create bottom-up theory and the literatures on leadership, Africa and paradox to refine our theorizing. This allowed us to develop a data-led

and theory-informed emergent theorizing. This process permitted the construction of an inductive model characterized by progressive levels of generality and conceptual abstraction.

RESULTS

Four paradoxical tensions

Four tensions emerged from the data analysis and were clear in the explanations of the managers. A first tension opposed (a) the felt need to empower employees and (b) the fear that delegation and empowerment may be perceived as a weakness. A second tension opposed (a) the need to increase the followers' qualifications and (b) the possibility that more qualified and demanding subordinates would expose the limitations of leaders themselves. Third, respondents mentioned the tension between (a) respect for a tradition of communal welfarism and (b) the inclination towards paternalism. Finally, (a) a propensity for "muddling through" as a preferential problem-solving mindset was contrasted with (b) the limitations that it provokes in terms of perfecting efficient routines. Table 2 offers firsthand evidence in the form of quotations from the interviews that illustrate the thinking of the managers in the sample. Figure 1, at the end of the section, graphically depicts the tensions. We next elaborate the four emerging paradoxes.

Table 2 about here

Empowering vs. centralizing (paradox of organizing)

The data suggested a tension between the need to empower employees and the fear that empowering and delegating could actually be represented as a sign of leader weakness, a perception that emphasized the possible personal benefits of centralization. This can be interpreted as a paradox of organizing. The possibility that leaders are respected when they centralize and when they "own" power, and that they will be perceived as weak when they give up on centralizing power limits the motivation to empower and influences an organization's design. Structural empowerment (i.e. the managerially-inducted policies and processes aimed at cascading power and authority down to lower organizational levels [Sun, Zhang, Qi & Chen, 2012]), thus, is viewed as a double edge sword.

This tension is conceptually underpinned by the distinction between the reified representation of power as a thing, something powerful people "own", and the process view of power as a

circulatory process (Clegg, Courpasson, & Phillips, 2006). In the minds of some of our interviewees, the prevalence of the reified version of power constitutes an obstacle against the desire to invest in empowering employees. This reinforces the enactment of organizations as traditional hierarchies, as mentioned by two informants:

> There is *"an excess of hierarchical levels, too much bureaucracy, rules, internal regulations; all those add rigidity which inhibits creativity; team members do not feel confident or safe to bring new ideas."*

> *"One constraint to leadership is the distance between the leadership at the top and the middle management, which causes a lack of boldness. This reflects their results negatively."*

Yet, as Kamoche (1997, p. 554) pointed out, "managers will also need to be more proactive and pay more attention to developing and retaining the existing labor force owing to the scarcity of highly skilled labor. This requires more empowerment of middle and lower level managers who are currently unprepared to take risky decisions and prefer to rely on "higher authorities." From this perspective, managers may gain power by giving power away (Gloor & Cooper, 2007, p.81). In this case, power and, namely the power to decide, is not a privilege to conserve but a force to expand organizational talent, as our interviewees told:

> *"We should cultivate the habit of delegating detail to competent subordinates and not for convenience reasons only."*

> Leaders should *"help others become better members of the organization."*

In summary, the opposition between the need to develop and empower, the notion of power as a zero-sum game, and the deference to the higher-ups, seem to confuse the leaders in our study, as paradoxes typically do. While stimulating participation, managers may just abdicate too much authority (Seo, Putnam & Bartunek, 2004). Moving in the direction of a new organizational, post-hierarchical paradigm seems promising but risky.

Qualifying vs. controlling (paradox of learning)

Associated, in part, with the previous tension, yet distinct from it, this paradox relates the need to qualify people and the risk of losing control over them. Interviewees mentioned the

need to contribute to the qualification of their subordinates. But they also expressed fear that that qualification will expose the limitations of the leaders themselves. This constitutes a paradox of learning, in the sense that it influences the organization's capacity to enrich its action repertoire via new knowledge acquired by members. Given the knowledge/ power correlation (Foucault, 1980), transmitting knowledge may mean giving up on power. We interpret this dimension as being distinct from the "Empowering vs centralizing" tension in the sense that empowerment refers to authority and power distance (Hofstede, 1980) whereas this tension refers to development, more precisely self-development and the development of others.

In this category, interviewees mentioned the development and qualification of people as a major requirement for contemporary Angolan organizations. This may be facilitated by the adoption of new, more people-oriented management leadership styles. Here is how an Angolan manager explained such a need:

> *"We have to overcome the old dogmas that are based on the idea that the leader owns certain characteristics that make her/him more apt to lead the others on the execution of tasks, as the others play the role of followers."*

> *"The country is now letting a long destructive war behind, a system of centralized economy, with organizational fragilities in its public and private organizations. Over the years the investment in education has been very low (...) which explains the current lack of highly qualified human resources ..."*

On the other hand, managers who participated in the study considered that leaders may have reservations about supporting development because they fear that this will expose their own limitations as leaders, often trained in the old hierarchical mode mentioned above, in which *fiat* precedes persuasion. The situation was described as follows:

> *"We sometimes fear that our weaknesses be known."*

> *"When the leadership is unprepared, it is the blind leading the blind. This dimension is so important that some people claim that this is the only weakness of an organization. All the others derive from this one""*

Managers express *"Adverse response to criticism, lack of communication and worker recognition (...) are other weaknesses of the Angolan business leadership."*

Welfarism vs. paternalism (paradox of belonging)

This dimension contrasts (a) the community facet of business, welfarism, which Kamoche (1997) described as meaning that people expect to be "looked after" by an organization, with (b) a form of lenient paternalism. On the one hand, respondents mentioned the importance of the communal view of management, i.e. the fact that managers, *individually*, should be sensible to the specific needs of their employees as members of family and community. This self-other connection is now well-known as characteristic of the African ethos under the notion of the Ubuntu (Mangaliso, 2001). Kamoche (2001, p. 214) explained that "communalism stipulates that one does not merely exist as an individual separate from the community but as a member of a community which gives him/her a sense of identity and belonging." Managers are thus bound to communal activities, their relationship with employees extending beyond the work sphere.

We interpret this as a paradox of belonging, one that articulates the organization with its external environment. As one interviewee explained, managers should express:

"sensitivity toward the wellbeing of the employees and of the community where it [the organization] operates."

"The appreciation of the worker and respect for family life are characteristic of the Angolan society and have an impact on the management of organizations. Keeping that tradition will help to facilitate communication between managers and employees (...)"

This dimension is both similar and different from the situation in most Western organizations. In the West, the organization adopts a number of corporate social responsibility initiatives. In the representation of our interviewees, managers in Angola are expected to cultivate an individual sensitivity to the problems of their members at the boundary between work and non-work. Consideration for problems associated with personal matters, such as illness, and tolerance for non-work duties, are viewed as an obligation of a manager.

This, however, may have a downside. As an illustration, managers, especially foreigners, tell the joke that the same elder family member may die several times, given the number of occasions in which he/she is said to have been buried. In other words, a certain degree of leniency may result from the fact that individual discretion sometimes prevails over company rules. This is not specific of the Angolan or African context (Aram & Walochik, 1996), but it may be more widespread there, given the more personalized nature of the relationship. This "bad proximity", as another interviewee called it, may have the effect of mutual accommodation and protection between managers and employees. Here is how a manager explained the process:

> *"We need to promote a more professional and ethical attitude. I can care about the wellbeing of my employees, which is clearly good (...) but I have to impose limits. There can be no such a degree of familiarity that the employee will not adopt a careless way towards work"*

"Muddling through" vs. improvising (paradox of adapting)

This last tension echoes Kamoche's (1997, p.553) compact observation that "strategic management in Africa is a combination of short-term planning, 'muddling through', passive compliance and the use of politics." This propensity for reaction rather than planning may result from the perception that the environment is unpredictable and that it is better to "muddle through" and to "manage by deciding" (Kamoche, 1992), i.e. managing issues on *ad hoc* basis, instead of planning and anticipating (Munene, 1991). We see this as a paradox of adapting in the sense that it aims to maintain fit between an organization and its' unpredictable and sometimes hostile environment (Munene, 1991). We have found evidence of the presence of comfort with "muddling through" in excerpts such as:

> *"Even at the top level, sometimes we are focused on the day to day type of decisions"*

> *"Our recent past forged in ourselves creativity given scarcity and the difficulties of several sorts; these have only been overcome due to significant levels of creativity and ingenuity."*

But interviewees were also keenly aware of the downside of this operating mode. Respondents were generally confident that comfort with "muddling through" added

flexibility, but also that it carried a number of negative implications. The following quotation summarizes this view:

> *"There is need to "reinforce the long term planning (...) and execute accordingly, avoiding management of the firefighting type."*

Figure 1 about here

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Implications for theory and research

Results supported the theoretical prediction that leaders in Angola were confronted with relevant paradoxes. This is not surprising in itself given that, as discussed in the theory section, organizations can be understood as inherently paradoxical. As Bartunek and Rynes (2014, p. 12) explained, "tensions are core to organizing itself". We interpret the findings as meaning that leadership can be represented as paradox work i.e. as the tackling of opposing, mutually-contradictory demands, in such a way that a unit (team/organization) is kept functional. Such paradoxical work involves two axes. The first represents a tension between change and the preservation of stability. The second represents the tension between internal and external demands. The typology emerging from these conceptual axes covers emic and etic elements, and presents paradox work as constituted by interrelated rather than independent paradoxes.

The study uncovers three important contributions. First, the emergence of paradoxes of adapting to an uncertain environment led to the recognition of paradoxes at the boundary between the organization and its environment (paradoxes of belonging and of adapting), which were less salient in previous studies and that may be contextual. Second, these paradoxes relate to other paradoxes, an observation that opens interesting possibilities for future research in terms of the multiple connections between paradoxes. For example, our paradox of learning may be influenced by the management of the paradox of organizing. Third, we explored the idea of paradox work as a process that extends beyond the recognition of the paradox and that highlights the importance of a number of process elements in the unfolding of paradox treatment. For example, the way an organization is structured may stimulate the strategies for tackling tensions involved in learning in such a way that, over

time, a selection approach (Poole & Van de Ven, 1989) becomes a default mode of solving the qualifying vs controlling dilemma.

This observation may constitute a fruitful way of extending paradox theory as, so far, the cross-cultural elements of organizational paradoxes have been neglected, which creates possible conceptual blind spots, such as the importance of articulating paradoxes that reach out to the articulation between organization and its environment, in terms of community and high environmental uncertainty (Munene, 1991; Uzo & Mair, 2014). *Contextual paradoxes* include the response to specific Angolan features such as the practices associated with transition to a new economic model, as well as immature institutions that render predictability and planning less effective than in other contexts (the paradox of structured improvisation), or the supportive and dysfunctional sides of community (the paradox of dynamic community). *A-contextual* paradoxes may include the notion that leadership is an inherently paradoxical process, as well as a number of tensions associated with status (the paradox of reciprocal empowerment) and with development (the paradox of mutual growth).

In line with recent research, we observed that managers tend to feel confused or possibly to prefer selection, i.e. choosing one pole over the other, rather than other possibilities to handle paradoxical demands in a sustainable and persisting way, which may constitute a formidable practical challenge. As Jules and Godard (2014, p.125) pointed out, "managing paradox is hard and is not for the faint of heart." We derive this from the observation that very few times was some form of duality mentioned as need or possibility. This observation is consistent with previous research (Bartunek & Rynes, 2014), but selection does not constitute the most fruitful way of benefitting from the generative power of paradox. The fact that a tension was identified does not mean that tackling it will be easy or even likely, as managers may approach paradoxes via selection (Poole & Van de Ven, 1989), which impedes them from untapping the generative potential of paradox (Luscher & Lewis, 2008) by preventing the adoption of a genuine duality lens (Farjoun, 2010; Jackson, 1999).

As a general theoretical conclusion, our work suggests that managers are faced with the need to engage in paradox work and that paradox work may be inherent to leadership. By paradox work we refer not only to *what* (i.e. the paradoxes that managers have to solve) but also to *how*: how can paradoxes be approached and tackled, and how can paradox be viewed as process rather than as episode, as implied in concepts such as duality, synthesis and paradoxification (Bergstrom, Styhre & Thilander, 2014), as well as others that approach

tension as something to be embraced rather than a problem to be solved. Paradox work involves a component of reflexivity about paradox and its manifestation in organization. One of our informants, a 45 year old male, explained how paradox work may occur:

> *"Very often, the more we try to cover our weaknesses the more we make them visible and some people, recognizing that movement, use this artifice wans an opportunity for manipulating us and making us their hostages. Recognizing and accepting that we have competences that need to be developed help us to position ourselves better in front of situations."*

Paradox work can be defined as the development and maintenance of a state of comfort with paradox and the capacity to use tension in a generative way through recognizing, reflecting and acting over paradoxical tensions. Recognizing the presence of opposites is important, but is not necessarily generative, as the selection approach, for example, "solves" the paradox through denial without actually dealing with the core tension it contains. Our study suggests, in summary, that recognizing a paradox is only the beginning of the process of paradox work, a form of practice that needs to be considered along with other varieties of work, such as the ones identified by Phillips and Lawrence (2012).

Implications for practice

What practical implications can be derived from this study? We respond by revisiting the four major tensions uncovered in the previous section. In terms of "empowerment vs. centralizing", the study indicates that a hierarchical mindset tends to prevail, which is in line with previous work (Gannon & Pillai, 2013). The flattening of firms in the West (Rajan & Wulf, 2003) has been concomitant with the rise of knowledge-based economies and a new understanding of authority (Hirschhorn, 1997). In the case of the Angolan economy, most firms are now transitioning from a centrally-planned economy to a market economy. Empowerment, as our interviewees mentioned, is important but it should be done in a way that respects leader face. Leaders will need to pedagogically explain the role of empowerment in creating new, more nimble organizations better prepared to operate under conditions of market competition. Presenting empowerment as a response to changing environmental conditions will probably help to reduce the fear that it will represent a loss of authority. In addition, leaders can explain the importance of adopting new habits and organizational processes in response to markets that no longer offer the time to consult higher organizational

authorities. A combination of empowerment, clarification of boundaries for such a practice, perfected management systems, and pedagogy of new leadership models, will be appropriate to empower without appearing weak.

In terms of managing the "qualifying vs. controlling" tension, companies may simultaneously invest in two parallel processes. First, they can invest in leader development, not only in terms of technical skills but also on the personal and social dimensions of leadership. The adoption of coaching practices for top and low-level managers may offer a mix of challenge and support that will respond to the challenges at the core of this tension. If this occurs, managers may feel better equipped to respond to more demanding subordinates. In fact, preparing employees to operate in less hierarchical environments will imply preparing the leaders to be able to expose themselves to some personal discomfort. As Ibarra (2015) defended, discomfort may constitute a sign of readiness for personal growth.

With regards to the "welfarism vs. paternalism" tension, Angolan organizations may manage to protect a sense of community without being overly protective and paternalistic. Companies in other parts of the world may learn from Angolan firms about the importance of a spontaneous care for the communitarian side of organization, a common feature of companies in the African context (Adler, 1997), but a generative balance can result from a careful synthesis of challenge and protection (Cunha, Rego & Vaccaro, 2014; Sutton & Hargadon, 1996). As previous work indicated, organizations can use protection to create safety and a sense of safety to foster acceptance of challenge.

Finally, "muddling through" has been associated with some pre-modern features of management that tend to manifest in contexts with limited regulation and compliance (Cunha, Neves, Clegg & Rego, 2014). Some authors have underlined the fact that this measure of flexibility can be beneficial and context-specific (Cappelli, Singh, Singh & Useem, 2010; Uzo & Mair, 2014), but our interviewees defended the advantages of combining such flexibility with a higher degree of structuration. Introducing simple structures and substituting "muddling through" with structured forms of improvisation, which synthesize freedom to adapt with rules for organizing (Clegg et al., 2002; Kamoche & Cunha, 2001), may constitute a first step to increase structure without violating the need for "muddling through", which may be adaptive when facing highly unpredictable environments. In summary, the four tensions uncovered offer ample space for organizational intervention.

Limitations and avenues for further research

The design introduces some limitations. First, we aimed to collect data from a sample of managers operating at a variety of levels in a diversity of industries, in the public and the private sectors. The advantages of such an approach are obvious, but so are its disadvantages. We managed to overcome the boundaries of our personal networks, but the conclusions may be too broad to capture, with precision, the specific aspects of some particular type of leader (e.g., CEOs of private firms, leaders of state-owned companies). In addition, in this process of randomization, the data collection was conducted by a variety of different individuals. Differences between interviewers may have resulted in a less than homogeneous approach to data collection. This heterogeneity has disadvantages but allowed us to collect managerial representations in a broader way, overcoming the borders of our potentially small networks. It, in other words, reduced the researchers' bias as well as some possible liabilities of foreignness related to the composition of the research team. It was this weighing of advantages and disadvantages that led us to select this approach in spite of the problems it posed.

A limitation belonging to a different order can also be considered: we tried to build knowledge from our informants, on the basis of their information and interpretation. To stay close to our intention we composed an insider-outsider research team and use a grounded theory approach that seeks to build theory from data rather than from pre-existing theory. Nonetheless, the theories that framed our theorizing are dominated by a Western epistemology, which means that, at the end, we may not have escaped a "universalizing" mode of theory building rather than a truly endogenous understanding of the topic (Jackson, 2013). Our Western management theories may fail to capture non-Western concepts and philosophies (Holtbrugge, 2013).

Boundary conditions

This study explored the presence of paradox in the leadership process. It did so by considering the case of Angolan managers. The challenges faced by these professionals inevitably incorporates specific and contextual elements. The study was conducted to discuss and problematize these specificities, but they nonetheless draw a boundary to the applicability and generalization of the conclusions. Before considering the applicability of the results to other settings, we should consider that institutional and social-psychological factors vary worldwide

(Smith & Bond, 1993) and that the social-historical-institutional conditions found here may combine general and specific facets that may apply to some contexts but not to others.

CONCLUSION

As Andriopolous, Miron-Specktor and Smith (2014) pointed out, paradoxical tensions "provoke questions and confusion, encouraging both scholars and practitioners to pause and reflect." In this paper we reflected about the contextual and a-contextual paradoxical dimensions confronting managers in Angolan companies. Angola is a transitioning economy, a contingency that adds texture and complexity to the inherent presence of paradox in the work of managing. We concluded that managers recognize the tensions, and that paradoxes appear as intriguing and possibly, sometimes, paralyzing. This may lead to the preference of selection over other, more fruitful possibilities of articulating the poles of the paradox. We observed that some paradoxical features are associated with a-contextual elements belonging to the domain of the work of leadership, in general, whereas others seem to result from local conditions and institutions. The study points in two possible avenues for further research: a cross-cultural theory of organizational paradoxes, and the paradox work involved in the managerial profession.

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Table 1

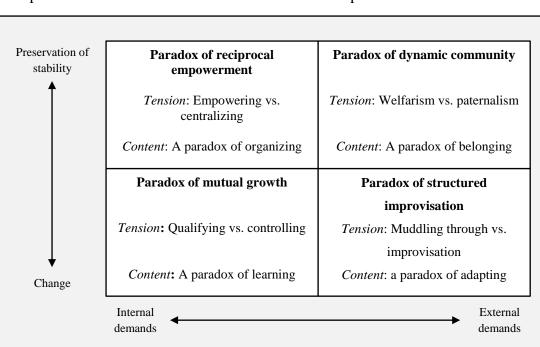| Method	Data sources and empirical examples
Interviews with managers	A total of 91 interviews with managers working in a variety of organizations, at different levels.
Review of literature on Angolan history	Documents of African history, culture and organization were consulted. These include typical academic sources but also companies' annual reports and other documents that could help to understand the context.
Different levels of personal experience in the context	We composed an insider-outsider research team (Bartunek & Louis, 1996). Members of the research team have a variety of exposure and knowledge of the Angolan context. This offers personal experience that is not irrelevant (see Kets de Vries, 2001). The team includes local a local national, a foreigner that travels regularly to Angola and that worked closely with several Angolan academics, and foreigners with no direct experience of the country. This combination of experiences was intended to provide a zooming in-zooming out approach to the topic (Nicolini, 2009)

Table 2

Illustrative firsthand evidence

(i.e., quotations from the interviews) representing the four paradoxes

Paradox	Poles in the paradoxical tension	Illustrative quotations
Organizing	Empowering	Leaders "should develop the habit of delegating."
		"Leaders incentivize members to participate in the discussions and in decision making"
		We need more communication and more decentralization of work."
	Centralizing	There is "an excess of hierarchical levels, too much bureaucracy, rules, internal regulations; all those add rigidity which inhibits creativity; team members do not feel confident or safe to bring new ideas."
		"we still are in an era of boss and subordinate, the boss occupies a very formal role and not often takes preferences and opinions into account."
		"Lack of humility and democracy (…) are the main weaknesses."
Learning	Qualifying	"We have to overcome the old dogmas that are based on the idea that the leader owns certain characteristics that make her/him more apt to lead the others on the execution of tasks, as the others play the role of followers."
		"We need to abolish the figure of the boss and to adopt that od the leader because the leader motivates, values the potential of each collaborator."
	Controlling	"We sometimes fear that our weaknesses be known." "When the leadership is unprepared, it is the blind leading the blind. This dimension is so important that some people claim that this is the only weakness of an organization. All the others derive from this one""
		Managers express "Adverse response to criticism, lack of communication and worker recognition (…) are other weaknesses of the Angolan business leadership."
Belonging	Welfarism	"sensitivity toward the wellbeing of the employees and of the community where it operates."
		"The appreciation of the worker and respect for family life are characteristic of the Angolan society and have an impact on the management of organizations. Keeping that tradition will help to facilitate communication between managers and employees
	Paternalism	"We have impose limits. The level of familiarity cannot be so high that people ignore their duties."
		"it is a very friendly leadership, a more personalized leadership, I mean, it is directly from person to person."
		"Familiarity sometimes becomes a problem"
Adapting	"Muddling through" as everyday practice	"Even at the top level, sometimes we are focused on the day to day type of decisions"
		"Our recent past forged in ourselves creativity given scarcity and the difficulties of several sorts; these have only been overcome

	due to significant levels of creativity and ingenuity."
Improvisation within structure, around plans	"There is need to "reinforce the long term planning (…) and execute accordingly, avoiding management of the firefighting type."
	"There has been great difficulty in planning work, which makes the emergence of great leaders more difficult

Figure 1

Four paradoxical tensions: contextual and a-contextual paradoxes

	Preservation of stability	
Paradox of reciprocal empowerment *Tension*: Empowering vs. centralizing *Content*: A paradox of organizing	**Paradox of dynamic community** *Tension*: Welfarism vs. paternalism *Content*: A paradox of belonging
Paradox of mutual growth *Tension***:** Qualifying vs. controlling *Content***:** A paradox of learning	**Paradox of structured improvisation** *Tension*: Muddling through vs. improvisation *Content*: a paradox of adapting

Preservation of stability

Change

Internal demands ← → External demands