Aalborg Universitet

Interacting Productively with Paradox Theory in Practice – Education, Interventions & Dissemination

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Professional Development Workshop

Interacting Productively with Paradox Theory in Practice
– Education, Interventions & Dissemination

ABSTRACT: Taking our point of departure in organizational paradox theory, this PDW explores pathways for productive interactions (Spaapen & Van Drooge, 2011) between complex theory and actionable practice. A group of experienced scholars, educators and practitioners discuss and share their experiences, tactics and tools for facilitating reflection and action through education, interventions and organizational development-initiatives informed by paradox theory. We pose the questions: How can we as scholars and practitioners realize the practical impact potential of paradox theory? And how can we as scholars and educators assist managers and other learners to pass the learning thresholds of paradox theory? This highly interactive session makes full use of the opportunities for participant involvement in a virtual conference format, including collaborative workspaces and small-group discussion. This workshop is particularly relevant for the paradox scholar community and well as other communities interested in accelerating the relevance and actionability of complex research. Knowledge-sharing and community building is central to the workshop design, and take-aways are distributed to participants after the workshop.

Primary sponsor: ODC

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WHY WE BELIEVE THIS WORKSHOP SHOULD BE OF INTEREST TO THE SPECIFIED SPONSORS

Paradox theory first emerged from organizational practice (e.g., Van de Ven & Poole, 1989), as scholars and practitioners simultaneously recognized that organizational life was full of contradictions, and preexisting organizational theories were insufficient in addressing those contradictions. Since then, paradox theory has grown considerably, as exemplified by multiple annual reviews (e.g., Schad, Lewis, Raisch & Smith, 2016; Putnam, Fairhurst & Banghart, 2016; Schad, Lewis & Smith, 2019) and special issues (e.g., Smith, Erez, Jarvenpaa, Lewis &Tracey, 2017; Waldman, Putnam, Miron-Spektor & Siegel, 2019).

With different processes involved in building theory and developing better practice, the rise in the legitimacy of paradox theory has been a double-edged sword. On one hand, there are far more tools available to help us understand issues facing practitioners and how to aid their development. On the other hand, the growing separation between theory building and practice creates divisions based on different languages, methodologies, and social networks. This creates both an opportunity and challenge for paradox theorists and practitioners - which we both address in this professional development workshop.

We believe that this workshop should be of particular interest to the paradox scholar community (in the ODC division and elsewhere), where there is an ongoing debate on pathways for engagement with non-academic audiences. At the same time, we believe that our deliberations and discussions will be equally valuable for other research communities interested in accelerating the relevance and actionability of complex research in order to help stakeholders such as "…*managers deal with the issues confronting them would be a valuable contribution to the world we live in*" (Hilman, 2020, first paragraph).

DESCRIPTION OF WORKSHOP FORMAT (*180 minutes*)

Introduction *(10 minutes)*

At the outset, the organizers will introduce the workshop goals providing a conceptual grounding to set the scene for the challenges, opportunities and strategies for facilitating productive interactions (Spaapen & Van Drooge, 2011) with paradox research in education, interventions and dissemination.

Setting the Scene with Presenter Vignettes 1-7 *(45 minutes)*

To set the scene for discussion in the break-outs, each presenter will give a short (4-5 minutes) elevator pitch of their take on *the challenges and opportunities involved in interaction productively with paradox theory in practice. Participants now choose to interact more closely there preferred presenters in break-out rooms.* (Should break-out room technology not be available, an alternative workshop design is outlined in the final section.)

Virtual Break-out Session Design *(30 minutes x 3 = 90 minutes incl 10 minutes "reshuffle"*

Taking their point of departure in the presenter vignettes, participants take part in three rounds of virtual break-outs. In the first two rounds, participants choose to interact with presenters in two break-outs (2-3 presenters per break-out room), where participants rotate between the rooms of their choice. In the third break-out round, participants are invited to share their own ideas and experiences using Padlet (or similar online application) as a collaborative workspace. A presenter will facilitate the discussion in the break-out rooms.

Wrap-up: Identifying Take-Aways and Next Steps *(25 minutes)*

In plenary wrap-up, the presenters and participants will identify take-aways and ways to continue sharing and publishing insights.

OVERVIEW OF THE WORKSHOP

"*As complexity, change and ambiguity intensify in organizations, so does the value of a paradox lens and both/and approaches to theory and practice.*"

(Schad, Lewis, Raisch & Smith, 2016, p. 5).

How can we as scholars realize the practical impact potential of paradox theory in productive interaction in practice? And how can we as scholars and educators assist managers and other learners to pass the learning thresholds of paradox theory? At the outset, the organizers will introduce the workshop goals providing a conceptual grounding to set the scene for the challenges, opportunities and strategies for facilitating productive interactions with paradox research in education, interventions and dissemination.

This workshop brings together a range of scholars and practitioners to help bridge the theory and practice divide:

Jean M. Bartunek, Professor, Boston College, Boston, Massachusetts, US. Mail: bartunek@bc.edu	Wendy Smith, Professor, University of Delaware, Delaware, US. Mail: smithw@udel.edu
Rikke Kristine Nielsen, Associate Professor, Aalborg University Copenhagen, Denmark. Mail: rikkekn@hum.aau.dk.	Josh Keller, Associate Professor, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia. Mail: j.keller@unsw.edu.au
Camille Pradies, Assistant Professor, EDHEC Business School, Paris, France. Mail: camille.pradies@edhec.edu	Michael Pingel Hansen, Head of Research and Development, The Royal Danish Defence College, Copenhagen, Denmark. Mail: miha@fak.dk.

Danielle Bjerre Lyndgaard, Head of Global Mobility, Confederation of Danish Industry, Copenhagen, Denmark. Mail: dbl@di.dk	Angela Greco, Post.Doc. Ivey Business School, Western University, Canada Mail: agreco@ivey.ca
Nkechinyem Omeife, PhD fellow, Technological University Dublin, Dublin, Ireland. Mail: Omeife.Nkechinyem@TUDublin.ie.	

At the outset, the presenter collective will present short vignettes on their view of *the challenges and opportunities involved in paradox theory-informed productive interactions with non-academic research end-users in practice.*

Using these vignettes as a springboard, presenters will discuss in more detail with participants in the break-out rooms focusing on the following questions: *How can challenges and opportunities be addressed in practice? What experiences, tools, and strategies can be used to capitalize on opportunities and avoid pitfalls? What are the advantages and disadvantages involved?*

The interactive break-out discussions are designed to facilitate informal group discussions in groups as well as permit more participation and idea-sharing among attendees. During and after short presentations, participants are encouraged to question, comment and contribute.

Interacting Productively with Paradox Theory – Education, Interventions, Dissemination: Break-Out Room Overview

The presenters will describe and discuss their pathway to productive interactions with paradox theory (including challenges) in virtual roundtables (break-out rooms) covering the following aspects:

First and second break-out round: Overview of rooms 1-3 (two to three presenters in each break-out):

Break-Out Room 1:

Camille Pradies, Assistant Professor, EDHEC Business School France: *Teaching Paradoxes to Different Audiences*. Prof Pradies has been teaching paradoxes to undergrads, master students and executive education students for years. She has been interested in how leaders and HR managers help others navigate tensions and has also explored the emotional dimension of engaging paradoxical demands. In this workshop, she will discuss the difference in audiences when unpacking the notion of paradox in class and in seminars.

Rikke Kristine Nielsen, Associate Professor, Aalborg University Copenhagen, DK: *Amplification and simplification in practitioner paradox learning*. Nielsen will present paradox intervention experiences from a 6-months managerial action learning research project. She will discuss strategies for engaging managers in paradox theory-informed paradox work without "de-paradoxifying" paradox, using simplification and amplification of complexity as a didactical strategy.

Break-Out Room 2:

Josh Keller, Associate Professor, UNSW Sydney, Australia: *Quantitative tools for paradox practitioners. A godsend or an oxymoron?* A/Prof Keller has been developing and publishing quantitative methods to assess managers' paradox mindset, paradoxical framing, and behavioral and emotional responses to paradoxes for years. He will discuss the opportunities and challenges in introducing these quantitative tools into practice.

Michael Pingel Hansen, Head of Research & Development, Royal Danish Defence College: *Mission paradox - paradox training in practice.* Hansen will share tools and experiences with training managers in the Danish Armed Forces in paradoxical thinking and acting over the course of 10 years working with the paradox-based Leadership Codex of the Royal Danish Defence.

Nkechinyem Omeife, PhD Candidate, Technological University, Dublin: *Paradox - unpacking the definitions, assumptions and strategies.* Omeife will present from ongoing PhD research looking at paradox through a plural lens of university and industry knowledge interaction. The research proposes a framework for understanding the different relationships, the gaps and the tension types therein. It unpacks the peculiarities and strategies by making room for both simplification and complexity through linear and collaborative/engaged approaches of knowledge interaction.

Break-Out Room 3:

Danielle Bjerre Lyndgaard, Head of Global Mobility, Confederation of Danish Industry: *Moving from individual leadership paradoxes to organizational paradoxes*. For most managers it is not that difficult to grasp the concept of paradox leadership when it comes to their individual leadership paradoxes. It gets much more complex and usually very difficult for managers to grasp their organizational paradoxes. Based on her developmental work with managers, Lyndgaard will outline five steps that facilitate the mental leap from individual to organizational understanding of paradox.

Angela Greco, Postdoctoral Researcher in Responsible Innovation at the Ivey Business School, Western University: *From lenses to portable tools: using paradox cards to change perspective*. Researchers have used paradox as a theoretical lens to understand organizational phenomena, whether organizational members were calling them paradoxes or not. Could managers deliberately use paradoxes to zoom-out to see complexity and zoom-in to navigate it? Greco will reflect on her experience at the Ivey Innovation Learning Lab using paradox cards in a learning setting with

executives, as a tool to see tensions and facilitate collaborative solution-finding to complex problems.

Third break-out round: Discussing and harvesting collective wisdoms

To facilitate mutual cross-fertilization across scholarly communities as well as in between scholars, scholar-practitioners and practitioners this third break-out round is designed to "open the floor" and give room for participants to share their ideas, experiences and questions about. A presenter facilitates the discussion and the use of a collective workspace, where ideas and take-aways are documented in "digital post-its."

Wrapping up: Collective Sensegiving and Sensemaking

The workshop concludes with a plenary warp-up and discussion. Professors Jean Bartunek and Wendy Smith will take the lead in giving and making sense of the outcome of this PDW focusing on ways to continue sharing questions, challenges and ideas about interacting productively with paradox theory in research, teaching and dissemination. Participants are invited to pose questions and share additional ideas. Subsequently, attendees will receive 1-2 page description of each of the concepts/methods or challenges presented in all break-out rooms (including room that the participant did not have time to visit). As a result, participants will be equipped with an "inspiration catalogue" of 7 pathways to paradox theory-informed productive interactions as well as an "executive summary" of ideas and main points from the final discussion led by Smith and Bartunek including the "collective wisdoms" from participants harvested in the third iteration.

Virtual Workshop Design – Alternative Delivery Model

This workshop format foresees the use of a virtual plenary with several presenters combined with virtual break-out rooms, polling and collective workspace applications. In the event, that break-out rooms are *not* available, the format will be changed to accommodate an all-plenary meeting style (alternatively webinar style) session: A short introduction (using polling to get an idea of the interests of participants) will be followed by 7 presentations in plenary. This alternative format leaves room for more lengthy presentations combining the pitches and break-out presentations of the original format. During presentations, a facilitator will solicit questions from the chat and conclude each presentation with a round of questions from the chat. After the presentation, a debate between panelists will be facilitated, and participants are invited to share their thoughts and ideas. The final wrap-up gives an overview of all the presented strategies and tactics for interacting productively with paradox research in practice as well as points to future development areas and knowledge-sharing.

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