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≡ The Oxford Handbook *of*
ORGANIZATIONAL
PARADOX

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

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Edited by
WENDY K. SMITH
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PAULA JARZABKOWSKI
and
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FOREWORD: PARADOX IN ORGANIZATIONAL THEORY

ROBERT E. QUINN AND MRUDULA NUJELLA

POETS and philosophers have long talked about paradox as being fundamental to human experience. By paradox they often mean the presence of simultaneous opposites, and associate the concept with words like contradiction, irony, inconsistency, and oxymoron. “I must be cruel to be kind,” said Hamlet (Shakespeare [1600] 1963: 3.4.199). Of joy and sorrow, Kahlil Gibran ([1923] 1951) wrote, “They are inseparable . . . Together they come, and when one sits, alone with you at your board, remember that the other is asleep upon your bed.” In ancient Greece, philosophers beginning with Parmenides wrestled with paradoxes of being and becoming (Plato, 428–348 BC; Bolton 1975), of unity and variety (Parmenides, c.515–450 BC), and of change and stasis (Zeno, c.490–430 BC). In art, we have examples in the endless staircase of Penrose (where by climbing up you find yourself descending) and the *Waterfall* of M. C. Escher (a perpetual motion machine).

In organizational scholarship, paradoxical thinking begins in the 1980s. The research of Quinn and Rhorbaugh (1983) demonstrated that the notion of organizational effectiveness was inherently paradoxical. A number of books soon followed. Smith and Berg (1987) argued for a paradoxical reframing of group relations. Quinn (1988) offered a consideration of how to master the paradoxes and competing demands of organizations. Quinn and Cameron (1988) brought together some of the most prominent theorists of the day to consider the role of paradox in organization theory and practice. In that book some leading scholars laid important foundations for our current thinking.

Van de Ven and Poole (1988) provided an initial theory of paradox and change. Ford and Backoff (1988) tied paradoxical theory not only to dialectical thinking but also to trialectical thinking and the notions of attraction and co-evolution. Bartunek explored the notion of reframing and the transformation of paradoxes. Eisenhardt and Westcott applied paradoxical thinking to just-in-time manufacturing. Siporin and Gummer introduced organizational thinkers to the role of paradoxical interventions in social work. Morgan explored how paradox could be introduced to the management classroom. Argyris wrote of the role of paradox in his own practice of crafting organizational theory.

In subsequent years, management scholars have used the paradoxical framework to successfully unpack a variety of organizational phenomena—tensions of exploration and exploitation (Tushman and O'Reilly 1996; Auh and Menguc 2005; Andriopoulos and Lewis 2009); competing identities in hybrid organizations (Battilana and Dorado 2010; Jay 2013); dichotomies of stability and change (Feldman and Pentland 2003; Farjoun 2010); paradoxes of control and collaboration (Sundaramurthy and Lewis 2003)—and so on (see Smith and Lewis 2011 for a more extensive review).

Since the turn of the century interest in the topic has intensified. Smith and Lewis (2011) note that scholarship in the paradox tradition has risen at an average rate of 10 percent per year between 1990 and 2011 and interest continues to climb. In the Academy of Management Annual Meeting programs the word “paradox” has received three times as many mentions in 2015 (84 mentions) than it did in 2012 (34), 2013 (26), or 2014 (34).

The emphasis on paradoxical thinking in understanding organizational phenomena is a result of two trends: one, we are living in an increasingly complex world characterized by uncertainty, change, and ambiguity; and two, we are reaching the ends of our theorizing limits using existing frameworks that are rooted in either/or thinking. As we increasingly confront questions of extremes (can too much of a good thing be bad?), and boundary conditions (when does what is true become false?) we see the limitations of either/or thinking.

In identity literature, for instance, we see a more complex perspective. People can be seen as having optimal distinctiveness or optimal balance. The individual is both uniquely individuated and sufficiently of a piece with larger social identities (Brewer 1991; Kreiner, Hollensbe, and Sheep 2006). Likewise, in the self-esteem domain, paradoxical tensions can be translated to the contingency model of self-worth. It recognizes that high self-esteem is not a uniformly positive good, worthy of pursuit, but that self-esteem is as much a source of vulnerability as it is a source of motivation (Crocker and Knight 2005; Crocker and Park 2004). In more macro domains, paradox has emerged as a necessary tool to theorize about organizations' responses to complex environments that impose competing demands such as simultaneous social and financial obligations, or flexibility and stability.

In essence, this renewed emphasis on paradox and both/and thinking augurs well because it signals a certain maturity of the field and propels us toward wholeness via more holistic theories of management. As we move forward in this direction, here are three things we can collectively do to enhance the generative potential of paradox theory:

1. Provide a unifying definition of paradox, an issue that has remained problematic since very early days of paradox theory. Clarify and emphasize the both/and perspective, that paradox is not a contingency question but is the simultaneous presence of contradictions that are mutually codependent.
2. At a meta-level, take a both/and perspective toward paradox theory itself because paradox theorists themselves are divided along either/or lines, for example,

should we accept paradox as an inherent feature of organizing versus should we actively resolve it; is it intrinsic to group life or is it a social construction? (Smith and Lewis 2011)

3. Finally, engage in empirical work that fully makes apparent the paradoxes of organizational life. Paradox is a counterintuitive concept that makes it difficult to comprehend using rational logic but when made apparent and explained we resonate with it at an experiential level, which is why the need for researchers to make visible invisible currents of paradox is especially high.

This handbook is a sizable effort toward generating a greater understanding of the tensions and transformations of organizational life. It brings together some of the finest thinkers of our time. It will accelerate the current interest in paradox and will do much to achieve the above three goals and more.

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INTRODUCTION

The Paradoxes of Paradox

WENDY K. SMITH, MARIANNE W. LEWIS,
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ORGANIZATIONS are rife with paradoxes. Persistent and interwoven tensions emerge from and within multiple levels, including individual interactions, group dynamics, organizational strategies, and the broader institutional context. Examples abound such as those between stability and change, empowerment and alienation, flexibility and control, diversity and inclusion, exploration and exploitation, social and commercial, competition and collaboration, learning and performing. These examples accentuate the distinctions between concepts, positing their potential opposition; either A or B. Yet the social world is pluralistic, and comprises multiple, interwoven tensions, in which it can be difficult even to distinguish between A and B. This book thus seeks to elicit some of the ways that paradox, pluralism, tensions, and contradictions are represented in the literature and provide a range of lenses and tools with which to understand and conduct research into such phenomena.

Early management scholars advanced contingency theory as a means of addressing tensions, such as those between flexibility and control, or between differentiation and integration. This perspective depicts competing demands as dilemmas posed by alternative options and advances tools to make trade-offs that resolve the tensions (Lawrence and Lorsch 1967; Woodward 1965). Over the years, scholars built on this framework to develop increasingly sophisticated models that would result in “better” choices amongst alternatives. Such either/or approaches depict tensions as external to the individual. They advocate responding to uncertainty and choice with conviction and resolution, diminishing anxiety and inspiring confidence.

Yet not all tensions can be resolved by contingency reasoning. As we delve into the nature of tensions, we surface complex dualities that are not only contradictory, they are also interdependent. Tied in a web of mutual interactions, these complex tensions cannot be disentangled. Schneider (1990) depicts the human experience as

an elastic band that exists in an ongoing push and pull between expansion and contraction. Smith and Berg (1987) note the paradoxical relationships between the individual and the collective; group identity emerges from, while also subjugating the unique contributions of each of its members. Follett (1996) emphasizes the reciprocity of power in leader/subordinate relationships, noting how advancing subordinate power increases, rather than diminishes, leaders' power. Similarly, Giddens (1984) stressed the mutually interwoven processes of structure and agency to build and reinforce systems. Indeed, social order comprises multiple, coexisting value systems (Weber, see Kalberg 1980), orders of worth (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006), or logics (Friedland and Alford 1991), grounded in the family, religion, the economy, community, etc., which together may imbue organizational and individual life with pluralistic meanings and demands. Contemporary society, marked as it is by rapid change, blurs boundaries and scarce resources and further exacerbates interwoven contradictions (Smith and Lewis 2011).

Reducing these complex types of interactions to simple either/or choices neglects critical interdependencies which can fuel ongoing vicious cycles. Choosing one pole of a tension may defensively trigger its opposition. By contrast, paradox scholars expand potential approaches to tensions by appreciating the contradictory *and* interdependent aspects of competing demands. Such approaches highlight ongoing processual dynamics as multiple poles ebb and flow in relation to one another, sometimes in opposition and other times aligning. Existential philosophy and psychology, for example, proposes that life is defined by death so that those who have come close to their own death report experiencing a greater vividness of life (Schneider 1990). Tomorrow is defined by and eventually becomes today, so that invoking arguments about the future can profoundly impact our actions today. Stability enables change, as stable structures can serve as boundaries within which greater and more fluid shifting can occur (Farjoun 2016; Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld 1999). In these dynamic interplays, interwoven tensions challenge static structures and systems. Scholars contributing to this volume question whether tensions emerge from our systems or our understanding of these systems, and explore how actors and organizations cope, even thrive with plurality, tensions, and contradictions.

Paradox studies date back to the Ancient Greeks and Eastern Mystics. Scholars of philosophy, psychology, and physics have long explored the paradoxical essence of human existence (e.g., life–death, knowledge–ignorance, self–other), human nature (e.g., expansion–constriction, independence–dependence) and nature itself (e.g., time–space, particles–waves) (Capra 2010; Schneider 1990). Such works stress that interdependent contradictions are inherent in our lives, ourselves, and our organizations. Motivated by our natural inclination to delineate and distinguish, we tend to create our own tensions. In seeking order, we impose abstract distinctions and boundaries reinforced by our discursive and/or analytical tendencies. Doing so may, paradoxically, exacerbate the interwoven complexity, as tensions morph, shift, and change (Benson 1977). As our ordered world disintegrates, we find coexisting contradictions to be surprising, absurd and perplexing—paradoxical. Yet similarly motivated by our

defensiveness, anxiety, and need for simplicity, we uphold distinctions and separations, reinforcing the very paradoxical experiences we seek to minimize.

While dating back to ancient philosophy, only recently have organizational scholars started to explore paradox. Drawing from broad insights across disciplines including psychoanalysis (i.e., Freud, Frankl, Jung, Watzlawick), communications (Fairhurst and Putnam 2004; Putnam 1986), and macro sociology (i.e., Marx, Bakhtin, Giddens, Bateson), a handful of provocative theorists urged researchers to take seriously the study of paradox and thereby deepen our understanding of plurality, tensions, and contradictions (i.e., Benson 1977; Lewis 2000; Poole and Van de Ven 1989; Quinn and Cameron 1988). Scholars responded. Studies of organizational paradox have grown exponentially over the past two decades, canvassing varied phenomena, methods, and levels of analysis. In a recent review of top management journals, we reported that journal publications addressing paradox grew at an average rate of 10 percent per year between 1990 and 2014 (Schad, Lewis, Raisch, and Smith 2016; Smith and Lewis 2011). The growth of a scholarly community around these concepts is further evident in the overwhelming attendance at paradox-focused professional development workshops and symposia at the Academy of Management (AOM) and extensive submissions to a dedicated sub-theme at the European Group for Organizational Studies (EGOS). In addition, a special issue dedicated to paradox in the *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* (2013) received approximately forty submissions, and a special issue of *Organization Studies* (2017) embracing paradoxes, tensions, and dualities received over one hundred submissions, setting a record for this international journal.

This mounting body of literature provides increasingly rich and varied approaches to plurality, tensions, and contradictions. The growing catalogue of organizational paradoxes is impressive—spanning gender, identity, leadership, and modernity. The versatility of the paradox lens is also demonstrated by its application across levels of analysis. At the individual level, scholars explore how employees address tensions between work and life (Rothbard 2001; Trefalt 2012), achieve peak performance while engaging in steep learning (Dobrow, Smith, and Posner 2011; Edmondson 2012), enable democratic leadership while ensuring discipline and authority (Denis, Langley, and Sergi 2012; Lawrence, Lenk, and Quinn 2009), and embrace collective leadership styles while achieving coherent direction (Denis et al. 2012). At more macro levels, studies seek to understand how organizations can foster both exploration and exploitation (Andriopoulos and Lewis 2009; Knight and Paroutis 2016; Smith and Tushman 2005), social missions and financial outcomes (Jay 2013; Smith, Gonin, and Besharov 2013), global principles and local demands (Marquis and Battilana 2009), market competition and regulatory demands (Jarzabkowski, Lê, and Van de Ven 2013), or competition and cooperation (Brandenburger and Nalebuff 1996; Raza-Ullah, Bengtsson, and Kock 2014).

This growing community of scholars also applies a range of divergent and complementary lenses to gain insights into interdependent contradictions, including dialectics, critical theory, psychoanalytics, process theory, practice theory, and cognitive sciences among many others. Resulting studies explore self-referential dynamics that

facilitate change to encourage stability (Feldman 2000; Tsoukas and Chia 2002; Weick et al. 1999), and processually unfold through situated dynamics, embodied communication, and everyday actions (Jarzabkowski 2005; Jarzabkowski et al. 2013; Langley 1999; Putnam, Fairhurst, and Banghart 2016; Tsoukas and Chia 2002). Studies highlight alternative means of coping, such as sensemaking techniques to better understand paradox (Jay 2013; Lüscher and Lewis 2008), rhetorical approaches to surface and address tensions (Bednarek, Paroutis, and Sillince, 2017; Jarzabkowski and Sillince 2007; Putnam 1986), or to facilitate transcendence (Abdallah, Denis, and Langley 2011; Seo, Putnam, and Bartunek 2004), and structural approaches to delineate conflicting actors while facilitating interactions (Ashforth and Reingen 2014; Besharov 2014). In addition, they propose that contradictions and tensions are the norm in pluralistic contexts (Denis, Lamothe, and Langley 2001), such that we may learn much about responses to paradox from everyday practices (Fenton and Jarzabkowski 2006; Smets, Jarzabkowski, Burke, and Spee 2015). Further richness is imbued with distinct yet overlapping lenses accentuating dialectical processes (Ashcraft 2001; Benson 1977; Farjoun 2002; Seo and Creed 2002) and varied world views and logics (Besharov and Smith 2014; Boltanski and Thévenot 2006; Greenwood, Raynard, Kodeih, Micelotta, and Lounsbury 2011; Kraatz and Block 2008; Pratt and Foreman 2000; Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury 2012).

THE PARADOX OF PARADOXES

As the depth and breadth of paradox studies grows, new insights challenge foundational ideas, and raise questions around definitions, overlapping lenses, and varied research and managerial approaches. Alternative perspectives highlight fundamental divides while also inviting complementary approaches. As we reflected on the state of paradox studies, we soon became aware that we were surfacing the paradoxes of paradoxes—contradictory, yet interdependent perspectives on paradox enveloped in the core theoretical assumptions. We describe three paradoxes of paradox.

Paradoxical Origins (Paradox as Inherent versus Socially Constructed)

Scholars diverge in depicting tensions as inherently enmeshed within a system or as emerging and evolving through individuals' social constructions and relational dynamics. An inherent approach depicts paradoxes as living within systems, structures, processes, and routines and argues for increasingly informed responses to expected patterns. If paradoxes exist outside of individual agency, then improved outcomes depend on individual awareness, recognition, and management competency. Objectifying tensions also facilitates empirical research, as researchers can observe, measure, and

manipulate paradoxes separate from their responses. However, separating paradox from responses can risk over-simplification to the extent that scholars and observers succumb to the pressures to hold paradox static by assuming that paradoxes do not change and only our responses to paradoxes change.

By contrast, a social construction approach depicts paradoxes as arising from individual and collective sensemaking, discourse and relational dynamics. Our limited cognition, abstracted discourse, and emotionally infused relationships create, exacerbate, or diminish seemingly absurd oppositions. Paradoxes exist within our discourse, our cognition, and our relationships, not independent of them. Such a perspective complicates our research programs. Scholars cannot delineate responses from paradox, as responses are the paradoxes (Jarzabkowski and Lê 2017). In some cases, people may even discursively construct paradoxes with the purpose of legitimating proposed actions that seem to dissolve them (Abdallah et al. 2011). This view emphasizes and demands greater sensitivity, critical analysis, and appreciation for processual dynamics that depict paradox as consistently emerging, morphing, and changing. But assuming that paradox is only a construction of the mind imbues individuals with ultimate control over the construction and deconstruction of paradox, and diminishes both assumptions and experiences of their persistence.

Complementary insights highlight the interwoven nature of structure and agency (Benson 1977; Giddens 1984) or between inherent and socially constructed understandings of paradox. Organizational boundaries emerge from individual and collective sensemaking (Ford and Ford 1994), dividing holistic phenomena into distinct and oppositional elements, and embedding contradictory demands. Differentiating structures align people within divergent boundaries, perpetuating distinctions. Similarly, individual relationships that highlight distinctions become reinforced and ossified within structural features, again perpetuating dualities (Smith and Lewis 2011). Whether these interdependent contradictions emerge initially from structural divides or from individual and collective sensemaking may reflect the paradoxical chicken-and-egg problem.

Paradoxical Ontology (Paradox as Entity versus Process)

Alternative perspectives differentially accentuate paradox as a static entity or as a dynamic process; and as a duality or a plurality. More static depictions assume two poles of a paradox—A and B—and emphasize constancy in both the poles, and the relationship between them. Paradox becomes a noun—“the” paradox or “a” paradox. This perspective separates the entity of paradox from the approaches or responses to paradox. Studies of ambidexterity often adopt such an approach, depicting two poles “exploration” and “exploitation,” and holding constant each pole, assuming that the relationship between poles shifts episodically in response to key events (Andriopoulos and Lewis 2009). For example, environmental events or new technologies could generate an episodic shift in the ways that organizations address either their existing world or their

future world. A more static approach inspires typologies and categorizations that delineate across features of these tensions.

In contrast, dynamic approaches emphasize fluid movements and process, often depicted by cycles of attention to contradictory elements that might extend beyond two clear and well-defined poles of a duality to include shifting and reforming foci of tension over time that could be complex and multidimensional. In this case, the term paradox may be used as an adjective, describing movement over time: e.g., a paradoxical cycle, a paradoxical approach. Alternatively, when the emphasis is on process and shifting contradictions over time, reference may be made to a “dialectical” perspective (Benson 1977) reflecting an ongoing fluid motion between ever-changing dualities. From a dialectical perspective, the contradictory nature of elements in the social world may actually flow in and out of consciousness depending on power relationships and implicit taken-for-granted assumptions that can underlie the temporary dominance of one pole or another. One pole may further morph with another, creating new poles—the thesis and anti-thesis becoming a synthesis (Hargrave and Van de Ven 2016). In this case, the term “paradox” might be invoked to describe the momentary consequence of tensions that, at a certain point in time, come strongly into conscious awareness and are constructed as “a” paradox (in the more static entitative sense). In other words, from an integrative view that bridges static and dynamic perspectives, dialectical processes can be seen as generating paradoxes that lead to responses, which may in turn reconstitute the shape of ongoing dialectical and paradoxical tensions. Alternatively, inherent, systemic paradoxical tensions could surface within a particular instantiation, by which dialectical processes might inform and enable change. Yet even such processes may lead to novel outcomes, as the underlying paradox persists. Quinn and Cameron’s (1988) early articulation sought to understand organizational paradox as a driver of change and transformation.

Paradoxical Purposes (Paradox as Normative versus Descriptive Lens)

A final paradox of paradox is related to the tension between normative and descriptive purposes; that is, between those who study paradox, tensions, or dualities in order to find better ways to manage interdependent contradictions, and those who use paradox as a more explanatory lens without such a value-oriented purpose. In the first case, viewing the world in terms of paradoxes and accepting the coexistence of interdependent opposites rather than suppressing them is a credo with significant managerial implications that need to be brought to light, developed, and understood. The popular books of Charles Hampden-Turner and Charles Handy are classics in this genre (Hampden-Turner 1994; Handy 1995) and all of the editors of this handbook have to different degrees, at different times and in different ways thought about or analyzed how paradox might be mobilized productively for some normative managerial purpose (although some of us may be more optimistic and others more prone to see the dark

side). As management scholars, offering guidance is our bread and butter and inevitably structures to some degree the way we think.

At the same time, a descriptive perspective on paradoxical and dialectical processes might suggest that the capacity to “manage” paradox is an illusion precisely because paradoxes are encompassing, uncontrollable, dynamic, interactive, and ever changing. From this perspective, no one can ever stand outside or above paradox and deliberately manipulate it for specific ends. Benson (1977) uses the notion of “totality” to express the impossibility of externalizing contradiction. The descriptive perspective on paradox or dialectics would thus tend to emphasize the explanatory value of this framework for understanding the world, but remain skeptical of not just the simplistic defensive solutions of selecting and splitting but even of those that appear to involve acceptance, such as reframing and integration. If it is truly paradoxical, paradox resists integration, any form of deliberate “both/and” intervention may be an illusion. Langley and Sloan (2012: 266) express this paradox of paradox as follows, with particular reference to dialectics: “A dialectic perspective in the purest sense would suggest that any deliberate attempt by top managers to impose a social order that involved the nurturing of creative tensions is likely at some point to encounter its very own contradictions and resistance. In other words, the dialectic change process can never be perfectly contained within any managerial recipe, not even one that recognizes the dialectic nature of change.” From this perspective, it would defeat the point to attempt any form of integration of the opposing poles of this paradox of paradox!

SUMMARY

The Oxford Handbook of Organizational Paradox seeks to surface and engage with different perspectives on paradox, illustrating and illuminating the paradoxes of paradox introduced above. The handbook juxtaposes paradox insights drawing on diverse theoretical approaches and applying to a broad range of phenomena. Authors adopt a variety of lenses, theories, and language to describe contradiction, paradox, tensions, and dialectics. Doing so highlights similarities and differences.

Across these pieces we see several similarities emerge around the constitution of and response to paradox. First, across the pieces in the handbook, authors collectively address tensions that are both contradictory and interdependent. Authors use different labels to address these tensions including paradox, dialectics, and dualities. Key differences exist, explored in more depth in a number of the chapters. Yet the unifying elements of each reflect the dual (and paradoxical) features of being contradictory—oppositional, inconsistent, competing—and of being interdependent—interwoven, synergistic, mutually constitutive. Together, these authors recognize that it is these two interwoven (and paradoxical!) constitutive features that make these tensions different and more complex than other tensions such as dilemmas, trade-offs, and competing demands. Moreover, authors collectively agree that we experience such constitutive elements as absurd and perplexing, delighting to some and discouraging to others.

At the same time, important insights exist in the distinctions. With such a range of phenomena, lenses, and theories, authors highlight diverse assumptions, applications, and implications. We delineate some of these distinctions below as we explore the breadth of chapters in the handbook.

Through these similarities and differences we advance paradox studies, providing resources that enable scholars' learning and engagement, while complicating and enriching our insights. As such, we hope the collection will inspire, motivate, and deepen future scholarship of organizational paradox.

ORGANIZATION OF THE HANDBOOK

In seeking to be a resource to authors, *The Oxford Handbook of Organizational Paradox* is organized into three sections. The first section examines and extends foundations, drawing on a broad range of fields informing our views of organizational paradox. Doing so surfaces varied assumptions, definitions, and approaches and shows the rich theoretical pluralism with which we are able to conceptualize paradox. The second section illustrates paradox research across organizational phenomena and levels, while examining the interplay between paradox and varied theoretical lenses and approaches. In the third section, we explore scholarly engagement with paradox from research methods to teaching to business engagement. This section turns a paradox lens upon ourselves to reflect upon the paradoxical nature of scholarship.

Part I: Foundations and Approaches

The first section of the handbook draws from a variety of fields to identify foundational understandings of paradox (see Table 0.1). Doing so surfaces variety as well as linkages. Indeed, authors highlight similarities in constitutive features of paradox—exploring tensions that are both contradictory and interdependent. Further, they do so by depicting paradox as external to our own experience of the world as well as emergent from how we interpret, describe, and interact with the world. Taken together, these chapters accentuate the limits of assuming a formal either/or logic which prevents the fundamental appreciation, deeper insight, creative opportunities, and breakthrough thinking that lie in being delighted by absurdities and seeking the “grace” of intricate and fluid tensions.

Schad (Chapter 1) identifies multiple foundational philosophies from formal Greek logic, Eastern philosophy, dialectics, existentialism, philosophies of language, and political philosophy. This chapter highlights the varied definitions, assumptions, and implications of paradox across foundational philosophy, a heterogeneity which informs our work today. Schad argues for the value of this diversity, suggesting that together these foundational philosophies help inform a paradox meta-theory. This broad array sets the groundwork for the subsequent pieces which each do a deeper dive into particular areas.

Table 0.1 Section 1 overview

Chapter	Foundation	Reflective insights
1 Schad	Philosophy	"Ad fontes"—going back to foundational sources—informs the diversity of our assumptions, definitions, and approaches, while also arguing for a broader meta-theory. This chapter introduces insights from logic, Eastern philosophy, dialectics, existentialism, language, political philosophy.
2 Jarrett and Vince	Psychoanalytics	Paradoxes provoke unconscious emotions and anxiety, defence mechanisms, and awareness approaches. These dynamics highlight the challenges of engaging paradoxes entrenched within the individual.
3 Keller and Chen	Cognitive approaches	Our cognitive processing drives us toward categorizing, highlighting opposition, and surfacing paradoxes. These processes are informed by our cultural and social context, as well as by our individual affect.
4 Holt and Zundel	Linguistic	Language provides an efficient form of reasoning in which we are able to identify classes of people, things, and activities. Yet such distinctions exacerbate paradox, by overlooking the interconnectedness of the world, which is better understood through forms of reasoning that embrace notions of grace.
5 Clegg and Cunha	Dialectics	Dialectical thinking draws inspiration from Hegel's model in which a thesis is confronted by its anti-thesis and informs its synthesis. This process emphasizes ongoing change, becoming, and processes of transcendence.
6 Chia and Nayak	Eastern and Western approaches	Fuzzy and ambiguous paradoxical utterances such as those of Heraclitus and Lao Tzu enable people to reach beyond the limits of logical representation by seeing the "in-one-anotherness" of our concepts and ideas, allowing us to play with meanings rather than being bound by frozen categories that divide up the world.

Jarrett and Vince (Chapter 2) and Keller and Chen (Chapter 3) explore individual-level engagement and interactions with paradox, drawing on psychoanalysis and cognitive theories respectively. Jarrett and Vince highlight unconscious and emotional processing. Specifically they emphasize how paradoxical experiences surface unconscious emotions and anxieties, provoke defense mechanisms, and/or can enable awareness and

intervention. They depict such dynamics at varied levels—individual, group, and leader levels—highlighting the breadth of tensions, while also demonstrating patterns. Keller and Chen explore how individuals experience paradox, drawing widely on theories of individual cognitive processing, as well as insight about social conventions and culture. They argue that our cognitive processes inform how we categorize dualities and understand the nature of the relationship between them. Our social conventions, however, inform our approach to these relationships: i.e., the extent to which we welcome or resist contradictory yet interrelated tensions. Connecting individual cognition with broader cultural norms offers explanations for why there might be divisions between Eastern and Western views of paradox (see Chapter 6), as well as offering insight into the nature of paradox as both socially constructed—informed by our broader cultural narratives—as well as inherent within our narrative systems and structures.

Holt and Zundel (Chapter 4) challenge us to rethink our thinking. Drawing on Bateson, they explore how the abstraction of language creates and surfaces fissures between parts and wholes, or classes and their members. Language, through the ability to specify and articulate particular classes of things, provides a form of reasoning that enables us to generate distinctions between these classes. Yet such distinctions also exacerbate paradox as they overlook the immense complexity with which things interact, and which are beyond human ability to select and specify. They therefore offer an alternative form of reasoning, grounded in Bateson's notion of "grace," which emphasizes interconnections and interdependency. They apply these concepts to organizational routines, and the tension between routines as patterned experiences with a set of stable characteristics and as motors for ongoing change, in which the only thing that is stable is change.

Continuing to focus on more processual dynamics of paradox, Clegg and Pina e Cunha (Chapter 5) draw on foundational works by Hegel, Marx, and Bakhtin to explore the nature of dialectics. These authors suggest that dialectics reflects an ongoing processual view that explores change and becoming, as thesis and anti-thesis consistently morph into synthesis. They define the key element of synthesis as transcendence.

Chia and Nayak (Chapter 6) further point us to the role of language and abstraction, as they draw links between the Greek philosopher Heraclitus and Eastern philosophers such as Lao Tzu. They recognize divisions and distinctions that emerge from the abstractions of our mind, which leads to absurdities in our logic. Chia and Nayak conclude that oppositional characteristics need to be taken more lightly and playfully.

Part II: Paradoxical Phenomena in and beyond Organizations

In the second section, scholars apply paradoxical lenses to different organizational theories and phenomena, extending insights within each of these domains, while simultaneously stretching our understanding of paradox (see Table 0.2). The breadth of

Table 0.2 Section 2 overview

Chapter	Theory/ Phenomena	Reflective insights	Provocation
7. Van Bommel and Spicer	Critical theory	Critical Management Studies (CMS) aims to expose the darker side of organizational paradoxes, such as the way seemingly benign management practices serve as structures of oppression. CMS lenses, such as feminism and colonialism, can help scholars to study these hidden paradoxes.	What if we were able to reveal the darker sides of organizational life and use these analyses to design and develop more just forms of organizing?
8. Tracey and Creed	Institutional theory	The intersection of paradox and institutional theory challenges us to address critical issues around social status, race, gender, etc. Whereas institutional theory depicts features that reinforce extant social order, paradox theory explores where such fault lines exist. <i>Institutional paradoxes</i> surface such rifts and fault lines in taken-for-granted, reinforced social order.	What if we could investigate "grand challenges," particularly around social order? How would the intersection of institutional theory and paradox inform these insights?
9. Besharov and Sharma	Organizational identity	Paradox and organizational identity share underlying ontologies, but have proceeded independent of one another. Highlighting the contradictory yet interdependent nature of features of organizational identity (stability and change, social actor and social construction) can surface novel, valuable insights.	What if we understood organizational identity as imbued with interdependent contradictions that surface over time and across multiple parties in organizations?
10. Comeau-Vallee, Denis, Normandin, and Therrien	Pluralism	Pluralism and paradox often occur together. The study of both these phenomena may be enhanced by drawing on insights from CMS and complexity theory. Doing so may expand the focus of paradox studies beyond managerial concerns and recognize interdependent tensions beyond bipolarity.	What if we expanded the notion of paradox beyond bipolarity? How would we then think about ways of handling multiplicity and interdependence simultaneously?

(Continued)

Table 0.2 Continued

Chapter	Theory/ Phenomena	Reflective insights	Provocation
11. Cameron	Positive organizational scholarship	Positive organizational scholarship explores positive processes and outcomes. Yet, positivity to an extreme can be negative. And negativity can lead to and provoke positivity. The path of virtuousness therefore lies in balancing the positive and the negative.	What if we explore the paradoxical relationship between positivity and negativity? What if we recognized the human tendencies to overemphasize negative events and explored how the emphasis on the positive can overcome these experiences?
12. Gond, Demers, and Michaud	Economies of Worth	Most paradoxes have a moral dimension which is largely overlooked in existing studies. An Economies of Worth (EW) approach embraces multiple, plural moralities and so provides paradox scholars with a means of analyzing how people's responses to paradox comprise moral elements.	What if we acknowledge the complex moralities involved in organizational life and gave both scholars and organizational participants a means of acknowledging and understanding the plural moral dimensions of action?
13. Sillince and Golant	Rhetorical theories	Rhetorical approaches enable us to evaluate the two sides of organizational change. Specifically, rhetorics of metaphor enable us to bring together elements of change, even as rhetorics of irony enable us to appraise the ambivalence people feel toward change.	What if we acknowledged the ambivalence people feel toward organizational change and provided them with ways to reflexively engage with that ambivalence?
14. Badham	Modernity	(Re)interpreting the foundational work of Jim March surfaces inherent paradoxes in the nature of rationality, the pursuit of performance, and the value of meaning. As Badham argues, March's insights offer richness and complexity to understand the contradictory interdependencies in organizational life.	What if we recognized the inherent paradoxes within our understanding of organizational life as rational, outcome-driven, and successful?

Table 0.2 Continued

Chapter	Theory/ Phenomena	Reflective insights	Provocation
15. Bengtsson and Raza-Ullah	Coopetition	Coopetition is an inter-organizational paradox that may be less easily "manageable" than organizational paradoxes. Cooperation and competition should be considered as orthogonal dimensions rather than a continuum. These tensions are cognitive and emotional phenomena that arise as managers face paradox. Moderate levels of tension are desirable in coopetitive situations.	What if we considered "tension" to be the subjective experience of paradox, separating out the paradox itself from the way it is experienced cognitively and emotionally?
16. Raisch and Zimmerman	Ambidexterity	Ambidexterity literature identifies structural, contextual, and sequential approaches to managing exploration-exploitation tensions. Yet each create certain path dependencies that fuel momentum, while sparking reinforcing dynamics that impede flexibility over time.	What if sustained paradox management entails shifting between and combining approaches to balance the duality of path-dependent and path-breaking activities?
17. Putnam and Ashcraft	Gender	Gender studies have viewed paradox in two different ways. While modernist views highlight double binds and inequality, postmodern feminist research casts paradox as an opportunity to negotiate new identities and organizational forms. Feminist studies suggest a need to theorize organization as both realist and constructivist.	What if we embraced a theory of organizations that is grounded in paradoxical ontology combining realism and constructivism as suggested by feminist theorizing?
18. Jay, Soderstrom, and Grant	Sustainability	The sustainability agenda is fraught with paradoxes, due to the competition for scarce resources amongst multiple stakeholders. Yet, by enabling people to become champions of ambivalence we can achieve the win-win that enables long-term success.	What if we aimed for a genuine win-win with sustainability by embracing its fundamental paradoxes rather than seeing these as a trade-off?

(Continued)

Table 0.2 Continued

Chapter	Theory/ Phenomena	Reflective insights	Provocation
19. Slawinski and Bansal	Temporality	Time embeds multiple dualities, such as short-term and long-term, clock time and event time, fast and slow. Approaching these dualities as either/or trade-offs can limit organizational performance, and lead to unsustainable environmental impacts. Several literatures have already challenged us to think about time as paradoxical.	What if we approached time as both contradictory and interdependent? How might such an approach shift how we think about organizational performance and environmental sustainability?
20. Tsoukas and Cunha	Vicious and virtuous cycles	Paradoxical relationships trigger vicious and virtuous cycles, the nature of which depends on how we engage and approach competing demands. Organization depends on balancing both virtuous and vicious cycles. Circular phenomena are ubiquitous, easy to create, difficult to understand, and impossible to completely master.	What if circular (rather than linear) thinking was fully incorporated into organizational practice and into organizational theorizing and empirical research?
21. Aust, Brandl, Kegan, and Lensges	HRM	Paradoxes are ubiquitous in HRM, nested and challenging as systematic methods (e.g., compensation, job design) and collide with human intricacies (e.g., emotions, identities, power). While such tensions—as well as their provoked defenses and reinforcing cycles—are frequently studied, applications of paradox theory remain rare in HRM research.	What if we approached HRM with a paradox lens, purposefully seeking out interdependent contradictions, exploring the interplay of organizational and human intricacies, and fostering more fluid, inclusive and paradoxical approaches to their management?
22. Miron-Spektor and Erez	Creativity	Creativity is inherently paradoxical, surfacing interdependent contradictions between novelty and usefulness, incremental and radical, learning and performance, etc. A paradoxical approach can surface these tensions and enable more creative outcomes.	What if we adopted a paradoxical approach to both understand and enable increased creativity?

Table 0.2 Continued

Chapter	Theory/ Phenomena	Reflective insights	Provocation
23. Sheep, Kreiner, and Fairhurst	Individual identity	Reviewing "identity work" from a paradox lens surfaces four fundamental and interwoven paradoxes of identity: (1) characteristic vs. process (paradox of entity); (2) sameness vs. difference (paradox of conformity); (3) current vs. past/future (paradox of temporality); and (4) expanding/pulling apart vs. contracting/holding together (paradox of elasticity).	What if we move beyond and transcend a separate elaboration of identity paradoxes, applying a post-structuralist lens to open our understanding of how identity paradoxes can be nested, knotted, and dynamically interwoven?
24. Crosina and Bartunek	Academic–practitioner relationships	The academic–practitioner divide raises some of the greatest tensions around how to address core problems. We can shift our perspective on this challenge, however, if we recognize that individuals may not play only one role, and note how scholars practice and practitioners theorize, and together they inhabit a common world around problem solving.	What if we stopped dividing the world into scholars and practitioners, and instead explored how problems are solved through the mutual contributions of rigor and relevance, of insight and application?
25. Lê and Bednarek	Practice theory	A practice–theory framework, based on social construction, everyday practice, consequentiality, and relationality can generate new understandings about and methods of studying paradox.	What if we took the social construction, dynamism and the descriptive nature of paradox seriously, so ceasing to seek transcendence and resolution?

applications across levels of analysis demonstrates the utility and versatility of a paradox lens. Such expansion stresses the role of paradox as a meta-theory, offering insights toward how we think about theory. Yet it also offers us insights in paradox as a tool for theorizing. Exploring the tensions within our theories and across our theories invites novelty in our thinking. In early conversations about paradox, Jean Bartunek, past president of the Academy of Management provoked us, "What if every management theory had an equal and opposite theory?" Perhaps doing so would surface our greatest insights.

In Chapter 7, van Bommel and Spicer provide a critical theory perspective on paradox. As they note, Critical Management Studies (CMS) has long had an emancipatory agenda of exposing the paradoxes of organizational life, such as the structures of oppression incorporated within seemingly benign management practices. They provide a range of critical theory lenses from feminism to colonialism as potential resources for uncovering the hidden paradoxes that shape organizational life. In doing so, they suggest that paradox studies and paradox scholars have, as yet, shied away from these darker or more difficult paradoxes. This chapter thus provides critical theory resources for analysing often-unseen dynamics, even as paradox theory also provokes CMS scholars to examine how we might develop more just forms of organizing.

In Chapter 8, Tracey and Creed argue that the intersection of paradox and institutional theory raises provocative issues about how the structures and architectures of society reinforce often troubling social institutions such as race, gender, sexuality, and socio-economic status. They challenge organizational research, and particularly both the paradox and institutional theory communities, to address these “grand challenges.” Drawing from two vignettes around 1) slave trading by administrators at Georgetown University in the 1800s, and 2) dining rituals at Cambridge University to reinforce existing social class stratification, they depict institutional paradoxes as those instances where fault lines or slippages emerge to confront well-established institutional order. They provoke scholars to explore in more detail the nature and dynamics of such fault lines, and their implications for the “grand challenges” we face in our world today.

In Chapter 9, Besharov and Sharma argue that research on organizational identity and paradox share similar underlying ontologies, but have proceeded as primarily distinct and disconnected literatures. They point to key paradoxical tensions within organizational identity, between stability and change, as well as inherent and socially constructed features of organizations, and suggest how insights into the contradictory yet interdependent nature of such tensions can introduce novel ideas into our understanding of organizational identity.

Chapter 10 by Comeau-Vallée, Denis, Normandin, and Therrien on “Alternate prisms for pluralism and paradox in organizations” addresses directly at least two of the paradoxes of paradoxes we introduced in the previous section. Specifically, by drawing on complexity theory, they expand the notion of paradox to a more pluralistic perspective that reaches beyond bipolar opposites. Their lens also challenges managerial perspectives on paradox by mobilizing insights from Critical Management Studies to consider the social embeddedness of paradox, calling for approaches that might view pluralism and paradox as an opportunity for more profound social change.

Cameron (Chapter 11) examines the paradoxes of positivity and negativity. As a theoretical lens, Positive Organizational Scholarship explores approaches toward increased generative, creative, and virtuous outcomes. Yet as Cameron notes, experiencing excessive positivity in the absence of negativity can become self-reinforcing to an extreme that can be dysfunctional. He quotes an Arab proverb, “All sunshine makes a desert.” Similarly, research points us to how positive, life-affirming outcomes can emerge

from tragic events. Cameron challenges us to explore how positive and negative forces together can lead to virtuous outcomes, especially in light of research suggesting that we tend to over-emphasize negative experiences.

Gond, Demers, and Michaud (Chapter 12) note that paradoxes often comprise a moral dilemma that has, to date, been largely overlooked in organization studies. They juxtapose paradox theory with Boltanski and Thevenot's Economies of Worth (EW), which provides a framework for analyzing how actors engage with the multiple moral dimensions they face. They bring the two bodies of literature together, comparing and contrasting their fundamental assumptions and core questions. Their chapter advances a research agenda in which the EW framework can provide a more nuanced understanding of the dilemmas underpinning responses to paradox, even as paradox theory provides an opportunity for EW to examine actor's responses to the tensions arising from multiple moralities.

Sillince and Golant (Chapter 13) provide us with a set of methodological resources for analyzing paradox, based on the application of rhetoric. Using the example of organizational change, which is fraught with paradoxical instances between present and future states of the organization in transition, they show how the rhetoric of metaphor enables integration of such tensions while the rhetoric of irony provides grounds for differentiation. They suggest that cycles of metaphor and irony enable organizational participants to identify their ambivalence toward change, even as they are also able to engage reflexively with their own part in the change.

Badham (Chapter 14) surfaces paradoxes of modernity and rationality through a (re) interpretation of the foundational organizational scholarship of Jim March. As Badham argues, embedded within March's work are: 1) paradoxes of rationality—the irrational ways in which we reinforce a (mis) belief in rational organizational behavior; 2) paradoxes of performance—which raises the dilemma to live within the experience of uncertainty in organizations, while demanding the communication and appearance of certainty; and 3) paradoxes of meaning—in which we acutely recognize the challenge between pursuing success and knowing that such a pursuit can be elusive at best, fruitless at worst. By recognizing March's work as inherently paradoxical, Badham invites us to reconsider the richness of March's ideas, while provoking greater complexity with our own understanding of managerial dilemmas, pursuits, and understanding.

Bengtsson and Raza-Ullah's Chapter 15 on coopetition (the integration of collaboration and cooperation at the inter-firm level) innovates in at least two ways. First, it introduces the notion of "degrees" of coopetition by allowing the two poles of the competition–collaboration tension to vary on orthogonal scales, rather than seeing them as situated along a continuum. Secondly, it addresses the first paradox of paradoxes introduced above by treating the inherent degree of coopetition separately but interdependently with the cognitive and emotional tensions it gives rise to among managers. This enables the authors to develop an insightful typology of more or less ambiguous and tension-ridden situations with different consequences; an idea that may well have potential beyond the specific situation of inter-firm paradox the authors are addressing.

Raisch and Zimmermann, in Chapter 16, develop a process perspective on ambidexterity. Distinguishing stages of ambidextrous organizations—initiation, contextualization, and implementation—they illustrate alternative pathways for navigating tensions of exploration and exploitation. The resulting model depicts a dynamic balancing of path-dependent and path-breaking approaches to paradox management.

In Chapter 17, Putnam and Ashcraft review the way in which a paradox perspective has been mobilized in gender studies. The authors contrast modernist studies that emphasize dualities resulting in double binds and inequality, with postmodern feminist research that focuses on the doing or performing of gender and casts paradox as an opportunity to negotiate new identities and organizational forms. The tension between static and entitative approaches to paradox (the modernist view) and more dynamic perspectives (the post-modernist view) is palpable in their analysis.

In Chapter 18, Jay, Soderstrom and Grant examine the pertinent topic of paradoxes of sustainability. The aim of the sustainability agenda is to achieve a “win–win” for business and society, encompassing the short- and long-term goals for humans and our natural environment. However this agenda often encounters paradox arising from scarcity of natural and financial resources, and the plurality of perspectives from the multiple stakeholders involved. Drawing on a range of examples, they show how achievement of the sustainability agenda requires the development of trade-off-breaking innovations and supporting people to become “champions of ambivalence,” so enabling contradictory motivations to be realized.

Time represents a critical aspect of understanding paradox, while paradoxes inform our engagement in time. In Chapter 19, Slawinski and Bansal address these relationships. They surface the dualities of temporality, including tensions such as objective and subjective, clock time and event time, short-term and long-term, and fast and slow. Approaching these dualities as separate and distinct negatively impacts organizational performance and prevents societal sustainability. Slawinski and Bansal point to a number of key literatures that approach time as both contradictory and interdependent, and provoke us to explore how we can integrate these paradoxes across our research.

Tsoukas and Pina e Cunha (Chapter 20) further expand upon processual insights, emphasizing how opposing forces drive ongoing circular dynamics, the nature of which depends on how we approach these tensions. Drawing on organizational scholars such as Weick and Senge, these authors demonstrate both vicious and virtuous cycles in areas such as leadership, change, culture, and growth.

Applying a paradox lens, Aust, Brandl, Kegan, and Lensges (Chapter 21) re-examine existing studies of tensions that pervade human resource management (HRM). Delving into the dynamics of alternative response/coping strategies, they explore processes that fuel reinforcing cycles and contribute a paradox framework to the study of HRM. A case study illustrates use of the framework to unpack nested paradoxes and resulting vicious and virtuous cycles of HRM in practice.

In Chapter 22, Miron-Spektor and Erez surface the paradoxical nature of key creativity tensions—between novelty and usefulness, incremental and radical, learning and

performance, individual and collective. By depicting these tensions as both contradictory and interrelated, this chapter calls for approaches to creativity that integrate and engage these paradoxical tensions. In doing so they surface the complexities of creativity, and call on future research to embrace and extend such insights.

Sheep, Kreiner, and Fairhurst (Chapter 23) seek to render the paradox–identity link explicit, presenting identity work as a fluid web of knotted tensions. Applying a paradox lens, they depict intricate, interwoven processes of language and discourse. The resulting view is one of identity appearing as a set of stable characteristics, and as a continual work in progress, realized in situ through an interplay of sensemaking, discursive interaction, and negotiation. As individuals and those around them negotiate self–other understandings and juxtapose opposing and interwoven aspects of identity, they construct amalgamations of persistent tensions.

The partnerships between academic and practitioner surfaces ongoing paradoxes between rigor and relevance, short-term and long-term, understanding and application. In Chapter 24, Crosina and Bartunek emphasize the paradoxical nature of these tensions by depicting not only their contradictions but also their interdependence. As they note, academics practice and practitioners theorize. They argue that our overemphasis on the two roles as distinct and divided misses key mutually informed relationships. To demonstrate the value of the scholar-practitioner, they draw from both Saul Alinsky's insights about integrating multiple communities by noting their collective interests amidst a broader universe, and Donald Schoen's work on the reflective practitioner to help demonstrate greater value in the contributions of rigor and relevance together.

Lê and Bednarek (Chapter 25) provide a practice-theoretical perspective on paradox. Arguing that the two have a shared ontological approach, they develop a framework of four key practice principles—social construction, everyday activity, consequentiality, and relationality—that have implications for the way we understand paradox. Their approach is thus firmly grounded in the notion of paradox as socially constructed, dynamic, and descriptive. Using rich examples, they lay out a research agenda that explores the mutual interests of the two approaches and enables practice theory to address some of the underexplored elements in paradox studies, such as the way that paradoxes are materialized in the artefacts of organizational life.

Part III: Engaging Paradoxes

The final section shines a spotlight on our own experiences as scholars, teachers, and consultants (see Table 0.3). These chapters offer insights into how we work with paradoxes within each of these roles, while also uncovering the paradoxical nature of these roles. The paradoxes of paradox introduced above suggest perplexing questions about how we study, teach, and mobilize these dynamics in our own work. The chapters in this section address some of these tensions. Andriopoulos and Gotsi (Chapter 26) draw on extant studies of paradox to both surface and address some of these core challenges and thereby help guide empirical research. Suggested approaches illustrate means of

Table 0.3 Section 3 overview

Chapter	Domain	Reflexive insights
26 Andriopoulos and Gotsi	Empirical research	Studying paradoxes requires rethinking our empirical methods, asking questions around what, who, how, and where? Illustrated approaches help sharpen methodological rigor and creativity.
27 Knight and Paroutis	Teaching	Paradox is a threshold concept—that is transformative, irreversible, integrative, and bounded—fundamentally changing how students engage tensions. We can teach such a threshold concept through facilitated, reflected experiences.
28 Kayser, Seidler, and Johnson	Practice; consulting	Transforming organizational dynamics depends on surfacing underlying paradoxical tensions. This chapter depicts how we can do so using Polarity Partnerships' Polarity Map, and their process to engage multiple stakeholders in surfacing and accepting these paradoxical tensions.

providing evidence of paradoxes in empirical settings, developing reliable and flexible protocols for paradox identification, exploring paradox across levels, practicing reflexivity, staying close to the context, and leveraging multi-modality.

Knight and Paroutis (Chapter 27) turn our attention toward the classroom. They depict paradox as a “threshold concept,” which irrevocably transforms the way that individuals think about and respond to competing tensions. Through the example of a capstone MBA course, they propose pedagogical strategies for enabling students to embrace paradox.

Finally, Seidler, Kayser, and Johnson (Chapter 28) demonstrate tools for helping introduce paradoxical principles to change mindsets, practices, and systems in organizations. They reflect on how they used Polarity Partnership's Polarity Map to surface paradoxes and transform the dynamics of the police department of Charleston, South Carolina (USA). Their work proved valuable several years later to help the city quickly, collectively, and positively respond when a gunman sadly opened fire and killed nine African Americans during bible study in one of the city's churches. Taken together, these authors provoke us to introduce paradox into our own work, offering us tools, models, and examples to help us do so.

CONCLUSION

The *Oxford Handbook of Organizational Paradox* accentuates the paradox of knowledge—the more we know, the more we know we do not know. By cataloguing and

analyzing what we know, the authors in this book also uncovered how much more there is to learn. By doing so, we hope these chapters will spark new research questions, motivate future collaborations, and inspire provocative research.

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PART I

FOUNDATIONS
AND APPROACHES

CHAPTER 1

AD FONTES

Philosophical Foundations of Paradox Research

JONATHAN SCHAD

PARADOXES inspire. These puzzles, inconsistencies, and impossibilities have attracted the greatest minds in history. They are a central theme in Bach's music, Escher's lithographs, and even in the earliest human writings, such as Eastern teachings and the Judeo-Christian Bible (Capra 1975; Hofstadter 1979; Smith and Lewis 2011). Paradoxes provoke thought, spark curiosity, and can be a source of novelty. In this context, philosophy has contributed the most profound treatises. These writings span hundreds of years. They offer rich roots in the domains of logic, language, and dialectics, but they have also informed many other fields from economics and psychology to the natural sciences. Furthermore, these philosophical foundations have influenced management research, advancing our understanding of organizational tensions.

In traditional management research, tensions are often treated as trade-offs or dilemmas. Framing a tension as a paradox—a “persistent contradiction between interdependent elements” (Schad et al. 2016: 10)—opens a whole new world to debate and responds to these opposing forces. Using a paradox lens goes beyond an either/or logic (Smith and Lewis 2011) and enables scholars to detect the synergistic potential of a tension's elements (Farjoun 2010) to guide new ways of theorizing (Poole and Van de Ven 1989). By applying this lens, scholars have advanced our understanding of tensions in a variety of research fields, such as hybrid organizations (Jay 2013), organization design (Raisch and Birkinshaw 2008), and strategy practices (Smets et al. 2015).

The foundational writings on paradox in management build explicitly on the rich intellectual heritage that philosophy offers (i.e., Lewis 2000; Poole and Van de Ven 1989; Quinn and Cameron 1988; Smith and Berg 1987). These roots have been used in three ways: to define paradox (Lewis 2000; Smith and Berg 1987), to illustrate different response strategies to paradoxes (Van de Ven and Poole 1988), and to distinguish

between different types of paradoxes (Poole and Van de Ven 1989). All these insights helped initial theory building in management research.

By shifting the focus to more abstract aspects of organizational tensions, such as their origin, the relation between oppositional elements, and their dynamic evolution, paradox research is now moving toward a meta-theoretical perspective that applies to a variety of phenomena and contexts (Lewis and Smith 2014). This reflects the situation in philosophy when paradox is not an independent stream, but is widely discussed across different traditions. Furthermore, paradox in management research serves as a “theorizing tool” that combines multiple paradigms (Lewis and Smith 2014). This development implies that philosophy’s role is changing: While the integration of philosophical insights was necessary in the early years of theory building (Lewis 2000), the emergent meta-theoretical approach builds on the multiplicity of philosophical roots to gain new insights (Schad et al. 2016). Since a central aim of paradox research is to understand how a tension’s elements relate to one another (Smith and Lewis 2011), understanding the roots is critical.

Paradox scholars draw increasingly on philosophy (e.g., Chae and Bloodgood 2006; Chen 2008; Lado et al. 2006; Li 2014a), but research has thus far mostly focused on single aspects. This approach can lead to incomplete insights. For instance, contrasting Eastern and Western traditions, such as the logics of integration and separation, ignores the similarities we find in the two traditions (Li 2014b). Moreover, the field risks singling out the “right” philosophical sources and possibly imposing a best-fit approach (Ford and Ford 1994). This potential polarization might reproduce the tensions between the different intellectual roots and, at worst, create new “paradigm wars.” Understanding the philosophical paradigms’ respective aspects and contributions can help advance an integrative meta-theory by clarifying individual contributions and facilitating insights across paradigms. Nevertheless, the literature lacks a systematic overview of the philosophical traditions and their links to different elements of paradox research in management.

To fill this gap, I return to the sources (“ad fontes”): The philosophical roots. *Ad fontes* was a normative principle of Renaissance humanism. Its proponents warned scholars to take the sources of thought seriously and learn from them, which subsequently had a significant influence on school and university education (Howard 2006). By going back to the sources, this chapter’s aim is to offer a concise overview and to serve as a guide for future research. To avoid “paradigm wars,” I present the philosophical foundations as lenses. This approach serves a dual purpose: On the one hand, it allows selecting the lens that fits best in order to further explore the elements of a paradox meta-theory. On the other hand, lenses can enable fruitful cross-fertilization in a multi-paradigmatic approach. To this end, the chapter is organized in the following way: I start by introducing the philosophical roots as lenses, each of which provides different insights into paradox. Thereafter, I link these lenses to elements of a paradox meta-theory, providing a systematic overview. I clarify each element’s links to the philosophical foundations and highlight avenues for future research.

PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS

Paradoxes are central to a variety of philosophical traditions, each with different emphases and uses. For instance, Plato uses the term paradox to state that something was against (para) popular opinion (doxa). He argues that action should follow rational examination rather than feeling. Other traditions, such as logics, use the term in a much narrower, more formalized way. This section introduces the key aspects of six philosophical lenses dealing with paradoxes and persistent tensions: logic, Eastern philosophy, dialectics, existentialism, philosophy of language, and political philosophy.¹

Logic

Logic is primarily concerned with (formal) reasoning. The field had a strong impact on our current understanding of paradoxes. In logical systems, paradoxes are rare, which is why their implications are taken seriously. The roots date back to pre-Socratic thinkers. Zeno of Elea was a pioneer of working with logical puzzles. He illustrated a famous theoretical puzzle in his “racetrack paradox” by arguing that a runner starting after his opponent will never be able to overtake the opponent, no matter how fast he runs, because by the time this runner reaches his opponent’s point, the latter will have moved on (Hughes and Brecht 1976). Zeno’s reasoning about the infinite divisibility of time and space led to the conclusion that motion was ultimately impossible—since, prior to motion, an infinite number of other motions needs to be performed. This paradox provided great insights into the role of time and space in paradoxes. Although Zeno’s premises of time and space were individually sound, the conclusion (i.e., the impossibility of motion) seems absurd. Aristotle was one of the first to take Zeno’s paradoxes seriously instead of treating them as simple riddles (Sainsbury 2009). By developing a system of logical reasoning (syllogism), Aristotle is often considered the founder of formal logic (Rescher 2001). According to Aristotle, inconsistencies can be avoided by examining the premises: While the racetrack paradox’s conclusion is correct, the premises also need to be correct. Aristotle introduced the “law of non-contradiction” to argue that contradictory premises cannot both be true (Priest 1995). This system of logical reasoning influenced modern scientific inquiry, which treats contradictions as systemic anomalies. Consequently, logicians prefer to solve paradoxes.

Contrary to this view, Kant (1998) presents four antinomies in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. An antinomy is a pair of logically sound arguments leading to contradictory conclusions. According to Kant, one cannot choose one or the other side in such a case, since both arguments are based on sound premises. He thus points to the limits of

¹ The six lenses are not philosophical traditions in the strict sense. Some lenses group several areas and traditions in philosophy. The lenses’ definitions are therefore intentionally broad.

science and pure reason. By using exclusively theoretical or empirical arguments, it is impossible to decide in favor of one side of the antinomy, because neither of them provides all the insights. Kant thus proposes a transcendental approach that engages both arguments. His antinomies present opposing premises that cannot be resolved.

Another historical root in logic is Epimenides's liar paradox: A person who maintains that "I am lying" cannot be telling the truth. The statement is only correct if the person is not lying. Conversely, if the person is lying, the statement cannot be true. Either way, something is always false. The liar paradox disrupts the standard classification of true and false statements, because it is simultaneously true *and* false. Some logical contradictions can therefore be both true and false at the same time (Sorensen 2003). Modern logicians, such as Russell, Whitehead, and Gödel, were inspired by Epimenides's paradox. By translating this ancient paradox into mathematical terms, Gödel produced his "incompleteness theorem." In this theorem, Gödel states that some statements in a system must be true, but cannot be proved to be true. He proves that we cannot prove everything (Hofstadter 1979). Questioning the basic assumptions of logical systems can lead to an infinite regress, which underscores the persistence of paradoxes.

Eastern Philosophy

Eastern philosophy is rich in paradoxes. In Eastern thought, paradox is the norm rather than the exception. I briefly present three main streams of Eastern philosophy, although this tradition admittedly goes far beyond the points mentioned here.² My focus is on philosophical streams that originated in the "Axial Age" (800–200 B.C.) (Jaspers 1953): Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. These three teachings encompass religious and ethical systems concerned with the conduct of life, as well as with the relation between the individual/particular and the whole/universal.

Taoism regards opposition as empowering. In his text *Tao Te Ching*, Lao Tzu explains that there is an underlying harmony between opposites guided by the tao. While "tao" signifies path, Lao Tzu refers to it as the origin of all being (Fung [1948] 1966). This holistic view encompasses a purposeful acceptance of the world. Taoism is thus *the* way of life. It is associated with the yin and yang symbol. The black and white parts of the yin and yang symbolize interdependent opposites: The black surface contains a white dot and vice versa (Morgan 1986). Their relation is not static, but one part can only grow by diminishing the other. Yin and yang thus represent "correlative thinking" that simultaneously carves out similarities and distinctiveness (Graham 1986). As such, Taoism embraces opposites and indicates their underlying wholeness.

While Taoism is more concerned with nature and its origins, Confucianism is concerned with social organization and individual conduct. Confucianism seeks a life in

² I am well aware that it is difficult to take Eastern philosophy into account as an entity. The insights provided here highlight the different emphases and how these traditions are generally perceived.

harmony. One of the core ideas is presented in Confucius's four books: "The doctrine of the mean" implies that moral conduct lies in a balanced, middle way by following the "Golden Rule" to do only things to others that one finds desirable oneself (Confucius 1977). As such, Confucianism comes very close to Aristotelian ethics (Hamburger 1959).

Finally, Buddhism also promotes the middle way. According to Buddha, suffering marks human life. The constant struggle with flux and stability characterizes this state of suffering. Transcending this state means changing one's perception to reach "nirvana"—a state of individual liberation. Changing one's perception is complemented by one's moral behavior, which can be identified by aiming at the middle way between two extremes (Capra 1975). Confucianism and Buddhism both emphasize the role of balancing extremes.

Dialectics

The term "dialectic" has a long tradition. It is found in the Socratic dialogues, and Aristotle also referred to a logical argument's structure as dialectic (Stokes 1986). Kant uses the notions of thesis and anti-thesis to describe the two contradictory arguments in his antinomies (Kant 1998). Our contemporary understanding of dialectics mostly refers to the theoretical works of Hegel, Marx, and Engels. In general, dialectics describes a triadic progression from the tension between a thesis and an antithesis to their resolution through synthesis (Sorensen 2003).

Hegel's dialectics accept contradictions in formal logic. He takes an idealistic perspective and views dialectics as a path toward greater truth—or "the absolute idea" (Hegel [1812] 1998). Hegel regards dialectics as a dynamic process of contradiction's evolution—contradiction is the source of movement and progress. Development is a dialectical process during which a thesis is confronted with an antithesis, whose contradiction leads to their synthesis. The contradiction is not resolved, since the synthesis contains elements of truth from both sides of the contradiction. Dialectics is thus a process of becoming, because each side of a contradiction contains parts of a greater, underlying whole. Eventually, the synthesis forms a new thesis, which is in turn confronted with a new antithesis (Sorensen 2003). Hegel's dialectics is holistic and teleological, because it progresses toward a greater truth (Cunha et al. 2002).

Marx explicitly refers to Hegel in the development of his dialectics. While the basic triadic structure of the argument—thesis, antithesis, synthesis—is similar, Marx's writings differ from Hegel's. Whereas Hegel regards dialectics as rooted in logics, Marx perceives it as rooted in the material world. He uses dialectics as a method to identify the main contradictions in a society and to trace their evolution's processes (Russell [1945] 2004). Engels (1946) summarizes the main principles underlying Marx's thought and formulates the principles of materialist dialectics. In particular, Engels stresses the deterministic evolution of societal change through contradictions and their synthesis, but also emphasizes a potentially destructive shift if one side is over-emphasized (Morgan 1986).

Existentialism

Existentialists place the individual at the center of their research to account for human life's different struggles. Rescher (2001) summarizes the core "existential paradox" as follows: "Birth . . . is automatically the start of an unavoidable transit towards death" (120). The existentialist tradition's authors contribute to the issues of human existence from this awareness. Existentialism is not (only) pessimistic, but is a movement in reaction to predominant determinism (Joullié 2016).

Kierkegaard, one of the founding fathers of existentialism, deals primarily with death and the meaning of life. In his book *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard refers to the incompatibilities of life. He formulates a paradox between the finite and infinite in human life: While the finite refers to restricting oneself (e.g., following moral norms), the infinite refers to mobilizing oneself (e.g., exploring one's freedom). Both orientations are contradicting activities, but interdependent, and need to be balanced throughout life (Schneider 1990). Kierkegaard also conceived the idea of the "dizziness of freedom": Anxiety or angst is not rooted in fearing evil, but in the possibilities freedom offers (Kierkegaard [1844] 1981). While humans are "condemned to be free" (Sartre [1943] 1992: 623), the positive side is that this freedom enables them to be author of their lives.

Camus serves as another example of an existentialist author. In his book *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus ([1942] 1955) deals with the "absurd": Tensions, or paradoxes, arise from humans' quest to find an answer to the meaning of life, although they find this an impossible task. Human nature is structured in such a way that it seeks to reach unity and the absolute, but the human condition's limitations do not allow this. According to Camus, recognizing and acknowledging this absurd state are the only defensible options. Kierkegaard and Camus both introduce us to the paradoxicality of human existence and individual responses to it.

Philosophy of Language

Here, philosophy of language is used as a lens to illustrate the role of language in paradox. While drawing on the traditions of philosophy of language, I also include rhetorical paradoxes.

Logical and rhetorical paradoxes are often distinguished from each other, but they frequently stem from language and subsequently inspire logical analysis (Rescher 2001). The liar paradox ("I am lying") is also an example of a rhetorical paradox (Ford and Backoff 1988). This statement causes a "strange loop" (Hofstadter 1979). Similarly, Russell's barber paradox asks who shaves the only barber in a village if the barber shaves all "villagers who do not shave themselves" (Rescher 2001: 143). If he shaves himself, the statement that the barber shaves all but those who shave themselves, is no longer true. Such paradoxes are contradictory and self-referential statements leading to a vicious

circle (Smith and Berg 1987). Any proposed solution to either side simply reproduces the problem (Priest 1995).

Subsequently, some philosophers examined the understanding of language (Priest 1995). Wittgenstein is one of the most prominent proponents of the philosophy of language and deals with the structure of language and its meaning. In his treatise *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein ([1922] 1995) claims that the limits of thought are primarily the limits of language. Language can only be understood to the extent that it can be visualized in reality. This is how ideas are communicated—through pictures and analogies. The wrong use of pictures in language can be the root of paradoxes (Sorensen 2003). Wittgenstein regards paradoxes as “something surprising,” something that can only be understood if contextualized (Wittgenstein 1956). In his later works, Wittgenstein ([1953] 1971) describes language as a tool and words as instruments. He uses “language games” to convey that words and expressions are embedded in practice.

Political Philosophy

Political philosophy is fraught with persistent tensions and contradictions. It is closely linked to ethics, and both fields deal with normative questions. Political philosophy examines questions on how a society can best be organized. Conversely, ethics concerns the systematic examination of values and norms.

Political philosophy is rich in dealing with tensions characterized by the contradictory, yet essential, elements of a social system. The core topics include individual freedom, fairness, legal rules, and responsibility. Philosophers elaborate on the ideal relationship between the individual and the society, discussing this mostly in terms of social contract theory. Long discussions have been held on the idea that individual freedom can only be reached by giving away some freedom (Locke [1689] 1988), and on the actual extent of power in a state (Hobbes [1651] 1981). Political philosophy thus deals with multiple systemic tensions. Furthermore, according to Rousseau ([1762] 1987), a society can only work if its citizens can distance themselves from their self-interest and take a different stance: They are simultaneously citizens (guided by the common interest) and “bourgeois” (guided by their individual interests). Individuals thus have multiple roles that can be in conflict with one another. Taking individual preferences as a starting point, political theorists also describe persistent contradictions when individual preferences are aggregated to the collective level (Arrow 1951).

In ethics, there are two main opposing approaches to assessing an action’s morality. On the one hand, deontologists emphasize that adherence to a specific rule—a rule that applies in any given context—determines the morality of an action. This group of philosophers is primarily linked to Kant’s writings (Kant [1785] 1997). On the other hand, consequentialists regard a moral action as determined by its consequences. The utilitarian Bentham ([1789] 1907) is the most important defender of this “outcome”-oriented approach. The main tensions in ethics stem from these incompatible approaches. Several attempts have been made to reconcile these different views. Mill (1863), for example,

distinguishes between the different qualities of desired ends (or “outcomes”), while Rawls (1971) states that fairness is rooted in the process that produces general rules.

PHILOSOPHICAL ASPECTS IN MANAGEMENT RESEARCH

The previous section dealt with paradox thought in philosophy. In management and organization theory, paradox research uses similar ideas, often without referring to the philosophical foundations. In this section, I clarify the links and show that multiple philosophical lenses are applicable at different levels of analysis. Some philosophical approaches are thus more appropriate for some managerial challenges, but add little to others. Neglecting the breadth of philosophical roots can lead to partial, or even erroneous, applications—for instance, paradox approaches that logic suggests do not fit with the way existentialism conceptualizes them. While the logical paradoxes arise from contradictory premises, existentialism takes an individual-level perspective and deals with the experience of paradoxes.

I propose a systematic overview to take stock of the paradox literature in management and to facilitate future research with philosophical foundations. I link the identified aspects from philosophy to core paradox meta-theory elements as identified in prior research (Lewis and Smith 2014; Schad et al. 2016; Smith and Lewis 2011). These elements can be categorized into four groups, each representing a key debate in paradox research: origin, concept, responses, and development. *Origin* refers to the nature of paradoxes. Are they socially constructed or inherent? *Concept* helps us define what a paradox is. How are the elements of a tension related to defining paradox? *Responses* illustrate defensive reactions and coping strategies with regard to paradoxes. How are paradoxes dealt with? Finally, *development* denotes movement over time. How do paradoxes evolve over time? Table 1.1 shows the connections between elements of a paradox meta-theory and aspects from philosophy along the four identified groups.

Together, these four groups can also be interpreted as a structured process of thinking about paradox: Researchers first need to be clear about the roots of paradoxical tensions and how they arise, or become salient. Subsequently, the central question is whether a tension truly forms a paradox. When paradoxes are identified, the research interest shifts to identifying potential approaches in order to address them. Finally, since paradoxes are dynamic, their development and recursiveness over time need to be taken into consideration. I will next discuss each of the four debates with respect to how aspects from philosophy are reflected in the different elements of a paradox meta-theory in management science. In addition, I will indicate areas for future research.