



Six Paradoxes in Managing Creativity: An Embracing Act

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Initiating and sustaining creativity in the workplace is a delicate and difficult process and often commercial pressures do not make it any easier. This article aims to identify the practical tensions, mixed messages and oppositions that characterise the management of organisational creativity. It explores how three successful creative organisations embrace the paradoxes resulting from these tensions. The case studies illustrate six key paradoxes in managing organisational creativity. Success lies in acknowledging the interdependency of the contradictory tensions involved in these six paradoxes rather than in treating these tensions as separate phenomena.

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Introduction

Companies of all sizes increasingly recognise that ideas are their most precious commodity and employees who produce them are sought-after resources. They understand that competitive advantage depends heavily on their ability to capitalise on employees' ideas and unleash creativity within their working environments. The management of organisational creativity has become a corporate priority. Academics and practitioners in the area argue that companies now have to deal with a growing number of pressures that propel the importance of unleashing organisational creativity into new heights. Customers are becoming more demanding and less loyal. Fierce competition and shorter product lifecycles force organisations to understand real time strategic changes and be ready to rearrange their resources to meet the new demands. Globalisation has also generated an unprecedented speed of change where ideas are brought into the market at much faster speeds and lower costs.

All these pressures have a direct impact on the increasing uncertainty that organisations have to face, a situation reflected in the outbreak of paradoxes that confront them. Companies must therefore adopt proactive practices in order to mobilise creativity within their working environments and innovate. In other words, opportunities in the future will be discovered by companies that perpetually stretch their potential in every situation rather than habitually react to their environment.

Background

Early creativity theorists focused to a large extent on the personality dimensions of creative behaviour.¹ Studies have attempted to list personality correlates of creative performance as well as to collect biographical information that might predict creative behaviour. Over the years, academics have moved from the individual level to the group and eventually to the organisational level to explore conditions that enable creativity in organisational settings. For instance, studies have researched the importance of the working environment as a precursor to creative achievement.² They have also identified processes including empowerment and participative leadership, discretion, collaborative cultures, effective reward systems and adequate resources as factors that support employees to enhance their creative contributions.³

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Paradoxes threaten that order.

What we know less about is how organisations can mix the aforementioned individual and contextual factors and manage them in a way that promotes creativity within the workplace. In order to extend current understanding on the management of organisational creativity, this study adopted an alternative strategy for theory building. In particular, the research searched for practical tensions, mixed messages or oppositions that are part of the everyday reality of managing creativity and used them to stimulate the development of a more encompassing theory. The generated theory aims to identify how organisations embrace the paradoxes resulting from these tensions and thereby to extend thinking beyond the traditional and limited perspectives on managing organisational creativity.

The concept of ‘paradoxes’ is an intriguing and valuable one, since by identifying and resolving them one can gain a greater understanding of the principles behind the obvious contradictions. But, what is a paradox?

*Paradoxes denote contradictory yet interrelated elements—elements that seem logical in isolation but meaningless and irrational when emerging simultaneously.*⁴

A paradox may denote a wide variety of contradictory yet interwoven elements: perspectives, feelings, messages, demands, identities, interests or practices.⁵ The contradictory elements that are the heart of paradoxes make most people uncomfortable by forcing them to choose between elements such as leading or following, long-term or short-term decisions, centralising or decentralising and creativity or efficiency. Humans are usually looking for certainty and order in their actions. Paradoxes threaten that order. A common way to cope with a paradox is to try to see the world as ‘either/or’ rather than to reconcile the two polarities with ‘both/and’ thinking.⁶

Lewis’ extensive review of organisation studies identifies three common types of paradoxes within working settings. These refer to learning, organising and belonging in the work environment.⁷ Learning paradoxes revolve around processes of sensemaking, innovation and transformation that reveal interwoven tensions between old and new. Paradoxes of organising highlight contradictory yet concurrent demands for control and flexibility. They are usually evident in studies of organisational performance, empowerment and formalisation. On the other hand, paradoxes of belonging suggest multifaceted relationships between self and other, stressing the challenging nature of individuality, group boundaries and globalisation.

Tapping the power of paradoxes is difficult; however, it requires exploring, rather than suppressing the tensions that they generate.⁸ Theorising paradoxes therefore entails developing a frame that encompasses opposites: this will enable a better understanding of their coexistence and interrelationships.⁹

Methodology

In order to understand the practical tensions, mixed messages or oppositions that characterise the management of organisational creativity and explore how organisations embrace the paradoxes resulting from these tensions, an inductive research design was adopted. A qualitative approach was selected because this study seeks *'to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world'*.¹⁰ Specifically, the author used the case study approach to examine the aforementioned issues in the context of three organisations where success greatly relies on creative achievement.¹¹ A topic guide with open-ended questions was used to gain insights on the different ways through which these companies manage the creative process. Topics included asking employees to identify the key challenges that they face in their creative endeavours and to elaborate on any tensions that they feel are part of this process. Project and senior managers were also asked to comment on the ways through which they resolve the tensions evident in the creative process. The author aimed to identify whether employees and managers are aware of these issues and explore how they achieve their resolution. To increase the validity of the information gathered, the author also spent more than four weeks in each of the first two companies and approximately two weeks in the third company observing and documenting employees' interactions, companies' rituals and social events, as well as employees' daily routines. Findings from the observation aimed to confirm employees' and managers' frustrations and resolutions on the creative process.

Data collection

The research involved in-depth case studies of three successful creative organisations. These included an international corporate identity consultancy (London), a multidisciplinary design consultancy (Glasgow) and an architectural practice (Glasgow). The author conducted in-depth field studies in these three creative organisations, which involved 47 interviews with founders, CEOs, heads of departments, consultants, project managers, graphic designers and architects (see Exhibit 1 below). For commercial confidentiality reasons, none of the companies involved in the study is identified in this paper.

The selection of these three creative organisations was based on the following rationale:

- Their primary source of income comes from the generation of ideas, which help their clients distinguish themselves from competition. These ideas may take the form of a new corporate identity, an innovative interior design or a new building.
- They have been in business more than one decade and they are still profitable.
- They have gained industry awards. The first company has won in the Design Effectiveness Awards in the category of the best corporate identity over £1 million. The multidisciplinary design consultancy has won the Best Workplace Interior Award for a Glasgow-based computer-games company. Finally, the third company has won two awards from the British Council Offices Awards in 1998.
- An adequate level of access could be achieved so that different types of data could be collected.

Data analysis

The author analysed the data gathered by applying the grounded theory method.¹² This methodology was selected for two main reasons. First, taking into consideration the complex nature of organisational creativity, thorough exploratory research was required if the phenomenon and its management implications were to be understood. Second, the practical tensions, mixed messages or oppositions that are part of the everyday reality of managing organisational creativity are processes occurring within the working environment and hence the research had to be undertaken within organisations rather than on the fringes.

Exhibit 1. Field research

Corporate Identity Consultancy

The corporate identity consultancy

- was founded in 1965
- employs 160 staff in offices in London, Madrid, New York, San Francisco and Tokyo
- has an annual turnover in the region of £17m

The research involved 24 in-depth interviews with consultants, graphic designers, project managers, senior executives and the founders of the company. These were conducted over a period of two months. Interview findings were complemented by observation.

Multidisciplinary Design Consultancy

The multidisciplinary design consultancy

- was founded in 1986
- is based in Glasgow
- employs 15 staff
- has a turnover in excess of £1m

The company's reputation for creative excellence attracts challenging projects commissioned by European, Asian and US companies. The research involved 16 in-depth interviews with graphic and interior designers, project managers, heads of departments and the founders of the company. These were conducted over a period of two months. Interview findings were complemented by observation.

Architectural Practice

The architectural practice

- was founded in the late 1950s in Edinburgh
- serves its international clientele through its regional offices in the UK (Cambridge, Newcastle, Glasgow) and abroad (Hong Kong, Thailand, Dubai and Philippines)

The company's Scottish subsidiary (employing approximately 100 staff and with a current annual turnover in the region of £12 million) agreed to participate in this research.

The research involved seven in-depth interviews with architects and the company director. These were conducted over a period of two weeks. Interview findings were complemented by observation.

The six paradoxes in managing organisational creativity

To gain a sharper focus on the practical tensions, mixed messages or oppositions that characterise the management of organisational creativity, the next sections will present the paradoxes identified in the three case studies and explore how they can be embraced to unleash creative potential within organisational settings.

Paradox 1: Support employees' passions, but achieve financial goals

Ensuring a continuous flow of projects that employees find challenging and are passionate about is not always the route to financial success for creative organisations. The companies studied often need to balance employees' requirement for exciting projects (that often reflect their personal interests), with the need to achieve financial goals (which sometimes dictates monotonous and uninspiring, but money-making projects).

But how can managers ensure a perpetual pool of challenging and interesting projects within their organisations? Given the importance of stimulating work, managers need to be responsible

Managers need to identify projects or clients that their employees will consider interesting and allow for creative thinking to flourish

for identifying projects or clients that will be considered by their employees as interesting and allow for creative thinking to flourish. In an attempt to explain the process through which his company selects challenging projects, the head of interior design of the multidisciplinary design consultancy said:

‘We are trying to create the opportunity to design better work. To have projects with a variety of potential outcomes, which are relatively open. There are difficult problems with fantastic solutions, like being original, direct, different, or even that give us the opportunity to change how things are done.’

Managers and project leaders within the organisations studied choose to select certain projects over others either because they find them commercially promising or creatively interesting.¹³ This can happen either through ‘active initiating’ or ‘passive selecting’. Active initiating refers to management’s conscious and deliberate actions towards the generation of commercial and creative projects. The cofounder of the multidisciplinary design consultancy, for instance, discussed how the combination of both personal aspirations and the understanding of emerging trends lead to the initiation of new, challenging projects within her company.

‘At the moment, we are trying to rely more on ourselves and generate more projects, become our own customer rather than depending on the client to be brave enough to give us the briefs. We are unlocking opportunities by initiating projects all the time (first develop an idea and then look for funding).’

Passive selecting on the other hand refers to the decisions taken regarding projects that are considered suitable for the company’s portfolio and which have been derived from existing clients or are the result of referencing. The managing director of the multidisciplinary design consultancy gives an example.

‘Sometimes we have to turn down a client in order not to compromise the mix of the projects. For instance, we are working now on two bars, coffee shop and night-club so we will have to turn others down because we don’t want more clubs at this point.’

However, identifying challenging projects is only one part of the creative equation. What is also essential is to match employees to challenging projects that utilise and, at the same time, stretch their skills, passions and capabilities.¹⁴ To achieve an optimal result, managers therefore need to be aware of their employees’ skills, interests and passions. For instance, a designer in the corporate identity consultancy explained how projects are appointed in his company:

‘..the job comes in and then it is decided whether this project is appropriate for a particular person, meaning that there is an awareness of individuals’ skills and capabilities.’

Through the processes of working closely within the open-plan workspace and managing by ‘walking around’, project leaders and managers can become aware of their employees’ skills, needs and aspirations and can therefore accommodate challenges to satisfy them.

Paradox 2: Challenge employees, but build their confidence

Promoting challenging tasks is also important in a creative environment. Data from the three case studies suggest that involving employees in multiple and diverse projects or work stages is a means of nourishing their creativity. Unsurprisingly, employees who have been involved in the same task for a long time tend to become unproductive. The creative director of the multidisciplinary design consultancy explained why she encourages staff to get involved in different projects simultaneously:

‘Sometimes, there isn’t always enough time, you would wish that there were more time or more quiet time for reflection, more hours in the day. But generally it is good to work between projects, moving from one project to another because what you find in one project can be applied in a new way in another project; so there is cross-fertilisation. It is also a good way for resting one bit of your brain and using another, it is refreshing. From an academic point of view it is more like real life; you don’t do the same thing all day long, you tend to do different things; it feels more natural this way.’

A consultant from the corporate identity consultancy shared a similar view on the importance of variety:

‘People are given variety, so their mind is more fertile, and more adventurous, more outward looking; it’s then easier to experiment.’

Identifying and assigning challenging projects is therefore a key ingredient for creative success. But there is a thin line between challenging people and creating a culture of fear and insecurity. Employees should feel challenged by their working environment but not threatened by the fear of losing control.¹⁵ The case studies have illustrated that the level of uncertainty that surrounds creative employees must be counterbalanced by assisting them to build a belief in themselves and their work. Organisations need to show a belief in employees’ work, in order to help them stretch their creative thinking. This can be achieved through overt reassurance, which refers to explicit forms of encouragement that exist within the working environment. Praising employees encourages them to be more comfortable when implementing their ideas, as described by an architect of the architectural practice:

‘..one of the important things about being creative is to be encouraged, to be told that what you are doing is valuable so that you know you have done something good and do the same next time.’

The case studies highlighted that people also need to be equipped with adequate resources to precipitate innovative solutions, otherwise chaos and disorder are likely to prevail. In all three organisations there were two forms of ‘resourcing’ that managers felt assisted employees to experiment, namely contextual and conceptual. Contextual resourcing refers to resources that are necessary for enhancing employees’ creative contribution. These include supplying appropriate software and hardware, rewarding employees through share ownership and bonus schemes and setting realistic deadlines. Conceptual resourcing refers to resources that are necessary for the development of creative thinking, what one could call ‘teasers for inspiration’. These may include subscriptions to relevant magazines and journals as well as attendance at related seminars, conferences and participation in other appropriate external activities. Supplying employees with an adequate pool of contextual and conceptual resources can strike the balance between the required experimentation associated with challenging tasks and a culture that does not promote fear and insecurity.

Employees should be consistently given challenges if they are to remain confident in their creative ability

Building employees' confidence must also be considered a continuous process. Employees should be consistently given challenges if they are to remain confident in their creative ability. As the cofounder of the multidisciplinary design consultancy noted, employees need to feel that they are in control and capable of coming up with solutions that really work and of which they are proud.

'Confidence is a very fragile thing, and I think that it is important to continue giving yourself challenges if you want to remain confident. I want to continue feeling that I am in control and feel capable of giving solutions that really work, of which I will be proud and will work for the client; you have to continue challenging yourself or you become fearful of what you suggest and it is very important to continue doing it for your own benefit.'

Organisations, however, need to avoid building employees' confidence up to the point where they are, in effect, encouraging egocentricism. The importance of understanding this thin line, which distinguishes creative confidence from egocentricity, is expressed by the cofounder of the multidisciplinary design consultancy.

'Building employees' confidence is important but in the context of personal authentication. Encouraging individuality is important, but it is important that this is not the same as encouraging the ego or eccentricity, which has a negative factor within team building. It is very difficult to draw a line between personal egocentricity and creative confidence. Sometimes, designers get confused between the two things, they are confused between the design solution and their personality.'

The propensity of employees to become egocentric can be minimised by consistently involving them in new and more challenging projects. The managing director of the multidisciplinary design consultancy explained the problem of dealing with egocentric personalities within his project-based environment:

'You need a degree of self-belief so that you are confident. The person who is able to be confident has greater belief in himself rather than an egocentric one. Because there are many prima donnas in design; the media demand that. But this is a destructive force within a design team. It precludes proper thought and precludes the design process.'

Paradox 3: Encourage personal initiative, but maintain a shared vision

Humans are endowed with a unique individuality that seeks expression.¹⁶ Creativity within organisations strongly depends on self-expression and personal initiative. Companies that aim to thrive in idea generation should therefore provide individuals the freedom to 'do their own thing'. This process needs to encourage employees to face problems or opportunities where answers or routes to solutions are not obvious. The process involves working from 'what is already known' to 'generating possible routes' and finally 'choosing the most appropriate route to overcoming the creative challenge'. In order for employees to find out 'what is already known', they are required to identify 'what they do not know'.

The companies studied here recognise the importance of allowing employees to capitalise on their creative endeavours. Employees are encouraged to identify the norms or gaps associated with a problem or an opportunity identified and then break them down and try to highlight all potential opportunities for innovation. The cofounder of the multidisciplinary design consultancy explained why:

'To gain a viewpoint so that you have your own developed set of arguments or ideas about what the world is, how it looks and what is important; to develop a platform.'

But creativity is not only about getting creative people to be more creative and 'do their own

thing'. It is also about keeping other, less creative people away from creative lethargy. It can be argued that on the whole, managers want people who will do what they are told. They want employees to follow the objectives and norms of the organisation, while at the same time allowing employees the choice about what they do and how they do it. As the managing director of the multidisciplinary design consultancy said:

'Creativity involves discipline, it is a systematic process, it does not happen tactically – we cannot afford undirected creativity.'

Allowing employees unlimited pursuit of new and interesting problems can be damaging for the company unless they directly address organisational objectives. Although employees may make it up in the long-run with better ideas, they set a bad example for other individuals. The difficulty therefore lies in managing the balance between creative freedom and organisational order.

The way the companies involved in this research dealt with this paradox was by creating a sense of ownership. This is all about developing a collective sense of achievement that balances personal initiative with the need for direction and discipline towards the common goals. They have worked to develop a culture whereby every member working in a successful project receives recognition and feels part of 'the big picture'. An architect from the architectural practice illustrated this by noting that:

'Everybody is a part of the team. If a project is successful, everybody takes part in the success. Recognition is more like a collective thing.'

Creating this sense of ownership helps organisations communicate the message that work should not only be about the creative endeavour per se. It should be about undertaking creative endeavours around the company's values and objectives.

Paradox 4: Encourage diversity, but build cohesive work teams

If employees are expected to formulate new ideas, they should be given the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities, skills and personality in order to gain more personal initiative within the working environment. They need to be able to put forward and support the viewpoints that make their ideas unique, which will in turn help the organisation implement these ideas into new products, services or processes. This tension was highlighted by an architect who said that:

'Autonomy makes work easier because you can focus, you can be completely in control but a lot of projects are big so I need to involve more people, management and co-ordination are essential.'

This requires an organisational culture of empowerment, self-development and diversity within the working environment. Employees must feel comfortable within their working environment and the work that they are doing. Organisational culture should therefore cherish diversity and non-conformism by valuing each employee's individual skills, abilities, expertise and personality. Employees who feel comfortable in such an environment will be able to show their real selves and abilities. A graphic designer from the corporate identity consultancy explained how diversity is encouraged in her project-based environment:

'Music playing around, people shouting, clients being in the middle of the room. This is the way it should be done, this all helps creativity. If you are stuck in a desk and everyone is quiet and you are not allowed to have people running around, how can you do anything; you need this madness around you and sometimes you need to sit and concentrate and it can be infuriating, but it is all about different forms of expression, there is noise, everything is going on and I thought that is a place that I can work quite easily.'

The encouragement of diversity within a working environment also helps to maximise employees' tolerance threshold. The more employees are exposed to co-workers with different background, skills, education and abilities, the more they become used to diversity in their workplace. This in return helps to minimise conflicts among employees, since negative stereotypes tend to disappear when people work in close collaboration, especially on problems where co-operation increases their chances of success.¹⁷

Creative organisations, as project-based environments, are however often faced with the challenge of balancing diversity among their employees with the requirements of effective team building within the working environment. Although the creative spark requires diversity and autonomy, people in such competitive project-based environments also need to feel that they can associate with colleagues who 'talk the same language'. The creative process can be a lonely adventure so people often want to be part of a team. Of particular interest is the finding that when employees feel they have similarities with colleagues and hence find it easy to work together in teams, they are less likely to become protective of their own ideas and are in a better position to accept criticism and feedback for their work. Unsurprisingly, employees who bring their ideas forward for criticism are also more likely to develop a belief in their work, as their ideas can become more robust through this process.

The task of building cohesive teams is therefore a key challenge for managers of creative organisations. They need to ensure that team members can trust each other and share a sense of common purpose that each member can support. However, simply building cohesive teams may prove insufficient. Managing the balance between diversity and team cohesiveness requires careful handling. Effective teams do not only require people who 'talk the same language', but members who are also prepared to share and acknowledge their different viewpoints and critically challenge each other's ideas.

Paradox 5: Learn from the past, but seek new areas of knowledge

Past successes and failures are a valuable reservoir of knowledge for everyone within a company. Knowledge acts as a store of building data for novel combinations, which means that without 'input' there can be no 'output' because there is nothing to build upon.¹⁸ Knowledge of past actions also prevents mistakes from reoccurring and reminds people of the regular 'traps' of the creative process. But to what extent should employees follow their reservoir of knowledge from past successes and failures rather than seek solutions from new areas of knowledge? Is there a cut-off point between learning from the past and creative conditioning?

Employees must constantly question ideas rather than take them for granted

Within creative environments there is a hidden danger of conditioning in the sense of providing employees with the easy solution of imitating previous work. Employees must constantly question ideas rather than take them for granted. They need to use their experimentation and research to reorganise current knowledge into new forms, shapes and processes. In other words, employees must be encouraged not to react habitually to a challenge by reproducing 'what is already known' but rather to consider it as an opportunity to be further exploited.

The creative process requires employees to be inquisitive and perpetually pursue new areas of knowledge. A consultant from the corporate identity consultancy suggested that:

'What I would like to do is to organise more foreign travel, more adventures to go to in order to get more inspiration. I think that this is a good idea, because you can only output what comes in, so the more experiences you have the more creative you become.'

In fact there is evidence from the three organisations studied that it is important for their employees to seek expressions of creativity outside their particular interests or ‘knowledge comfort zone’. The cofounder of the multidisciplinary design consultancy explained why:

‘I would rather we did not read magazines and become bogged down with what happens in design, it is important to be much wider than that and have an interest in economy, current affairs, music, anything.’

In order for organisations to become learning-orientated and encourage employees to seek new areas of knowledge, their culture has to emphasise the importance of learning within the working environment. In particular, the culture must encourage a participative form of organisational learning by involving everyone in the company to explore alternatives and eventually reach consensus. Knowledge-creating companies cannot exist when there is an assumption that one party or group has the answers, which must be communicated to a less informed constituency.¹⁹ On the contrary, knowledge-creating organisations need to develop informal networks for promoting participation in organisational learning.²⁰ As creativity within organisations greatly relies on employees’ confidence to produce novel and useful ideas, this culture of empowerment and perpetual learning also needs to concentrate on enhancing employees’ morale.

There are three major benefits associated with encouraging such a knowledge-creating environment. First, gaining new knowledge can minimise mistakes that may occur in the creative process. The way things are done within a specific industry changes all the time. Therefore the continuous update of knowledge can save time and effort, as employees become more efficient in avoiding major pitfalls. Second, employees who update their knowledge are more likely to think about issues that are currently important for the industry within which they work. Last, employees’ morale can be enhanced as they can add more interesting perspectives to what they are doing and hence produce more creative work for which they will be rewarded formally or informally.

Paradox 6: Take incremental risks, but break new grounds

The element of calculated risk must be taken into consideration during the experimentation stage that employees have to go through in their creative endeavours. Most of the time, employees are aware of the risks associated with their work and they act in a proactive way by considering the potential pitfalls so that the danger of massive exposure is minimised. For creative organisations, this entails the hidden danger of developing a risk-averse culture. Creativity and innovation often occur when conventional routes are challenged and this implicitly involves an element of risk-taking.

Creative organisations must balance conventional wisdom with thinking ‘outside of the box’

This research has shown that although the creative organisations studied communicate the importance of calculating the risks of creative endeavours (it is after all part of the commercial reality), they also perpetually instill a belief in their employees that their work should (at some point) break new grounds. That it should greatly contribute to the success of their clients’ businesses or should significantly influence the way things are done in the industry.

People working in creative environments need to feel that they are doing something monumental, something worthy of their best selves.²¹ A graphic designer of the corporate identity consultancy reflects his observations with regard to how his company deals with this issue.

‘It is very much design-led, in the belief where the design works in our culture, how it changes our society and that is the culture of our company. Because we can see the value of what we are doing in society, how it changes it and how it is always about people’s understanding.’

This paradox describes conflicting demands from the organisation - between incremental risk-taking and the 'freefalls' involved in radical innovation.²² The cofounder of the multidisciplinary design consultancy, for instance, explains her company's attitude towards this balancing act.

'I think that we try to encourage people to take chances, because without risk there can never be innovation. Other consultancies play it safe and they would not allow for proper experimentation; they allow redecoration but not major structural changes. What we try to do is to encourage people to be dangerous. The company takes risks. But I think that we try to use our own experiences to minimise the dangerous bits. We try to calculate risk every time when you incrementally push a job that much further, so we are constantly in control, there is no clear and absolute freefall.'

What managers can do to achieve a balance is to develop a culture that promotes both incremental risks but also encourages employees to come up with breakthrough ideas, products or processes. This can be implemented by having formal or informal procedures or goals in place, which encourage both types of thinking. More specifically, creative organisations must balance conventional wisdom with thinking 'outside of the box'. If this kind of balance is not achieved, then creative organisations could face the danger of communicating the message that they support only one of type of thinking; either that the company is risk-averse and hence creativity is likely to suffer or that a 'free-fall' climate is encouraged and hence the commercial reality of the company may be in danger.

Discussion

Understanding the six aforementioned paradoxes in managing organisational creativity is relatively easy; managing them is another matter. Think of these paradoxes as conflicts between opposing principles.²³ How can we manage these conflicts? The literature suggests that there are three often interrelated ways of managing paradoxes: acceptance, confrontation and transcendence. Acceptance of paradoxes is all about learning to live with them. This approach offers a sense of freedom and helps its members to avoid debates.²⁴ Confronting paradoxes on the other hand is about discussing their tensions in an attempt to construct a more accommodating understanding or practice. Authors suggest that this approach often raises the chances of employees escaping paralysis.²⁵ Lastly, transcendence implies the ability to think paradoxically. To follow this approach, people need to adopt new logic and behaviours, which will entail critically examining entrenched assumptions in order to construct a more accommodating perception of opposites.²⁶ Paradoxes therefore need to be viewed as a dialectical process and organisations need to adopt dialectical instead of binary logic.²⁷

An organisation built and managed around creativity must also aim to minimise unnecessary control mechanisms

So what are the three creative organisations studied doing to manage these paradoxes? They do not only accept the fact that managing creativity is a complex process, but they also go one step further and adopt new logic and behaviours. The findings have shown that their success lies in acknowledging the interdependency of the contradictory tensions involved in the six paradoxes rather than in treating these tensions as separate phenomena (for a summary of the key findings see Exhibit 2 below).

There is no doubt that initiating and sustaining creativity in the workplace is a delicate and difficult process and the pressures of commercial reality do not make it any easier. Most companies try to fit creative processes and conditions conducive to creativity to their existing organisational structures and management processes. Perhaps the most creative challenge managers and project

Exhibit 2. Managing the paradoxes

Paradoxes	Insights
<i>Support employees' passions, but achieve financial goals</i>	Consistently involve employees in more complex and diverse range of projects
<i>Challenge employees, but build their confidence</i>	Strive to drive out the fear of insecurity
<i>Encourage personal initiative, but maintain a shared vision</i>	Create a sense of ownership
<i>Encourage diversity, but build cohesive work teams</i>	Create a community of trust and openness
<i>Learn from the past, but seek new areas of knowledge</i>	Reorganise previous knowledge into new forms, shapes and processes
<i>Take incremental risks, but break new grounds</i>	Promote a culture that accommodates both incremental and ground-breaking creative thinking

leaders will need to face is to consider doing the exact opposite - to design their organisations around creativity.²⁸ This requires managers to realise that creativity cannot simply emerge by passively responding to environmental pressures and following traditional expectations, but rather by creatively integrating environmental inputs into their work and encouraging behaviours that help creativity flourish.

Moreover, taking into consideration the chaotic nature of creativity, strategists need to concentrate on developing an organic type of organisation, which is able to adapt to unstable conditions when new and uncommon problems emerge. The findings of this study illustrate that this organic form of organisation will allow communication and interaction to occur at any level and encourage a much higher degree of commitment to the aims of the organisation. An organisation built and managed around creativity must also aim to minimise unnecessary control mechanisms, while permitting risk-taking and emphasising personal fulfilment. Each of the proposed six paradoxes must be successfully addressed so that managers and project leaders within creative environments can design a dynamic organisation around creativity.

This study also has implications for management academics. Specifically, the absence of integrative explanations by previous research in the organisational creativity area is mostly influenced by the fact that studies have approached the area either conceptually or by testing hypotheses based on others' findings or writings. Furthermore, their research outcomes tend to be descriptive by focusing on 'what' is happening in the issue in question. This study illustrates that the management of organisational creativity is a much more complex process. Further research into the study of paradoxes should therefore be encouraged as they provide a holistic and dynamic view of the phenomenon under investigation.

Conclusions

This article focused on understanding the practical tensions, mixed messages and oppositions that characterise the management of organisational creativity. The study explored how three successful creative organisations embrace the paradoxes resulting from these tensions in practice. The research illustrated that the current ways of understanding and managing creativity appear to ignore valuable knowledge about an embracing act of paradoxes that needs to be addressed if creativity is to be enhanced within the working environment. The difficulty often lies in understanding and embracing these opposing management practices that help to unleash creative potential, while at the same time ensuring financial soundness.

By recognising and resolving the paradoxes involved in managing organisational creativity, managers and project leaders can gain a sharper view of the dynamics within creative environments.

Still, they need to be very careful and systematic in the way they approach these tensions; otherwise organisations are likely to immerse into chaos.

By cracking the code of the dynamics involved in managing organisational creativity, the paper hopes to stimulate new thinking and research in this area. The key challenge for organisational researchers will be to discover further opposing conditions or processes, which nourish creative contribution in project-based environments.

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