



Journal

Paradox Peers: A Relational Approach to Navigating a Business-Society Paradox

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5 **Paradox Peers: A Relational Approach to Navigating a**
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PARADOX PEERS: A RELATIONAL APPROACH TO NAVIGATING A BUSINESS-SOCIETY PARADOX

ABSTRACT

Despite advancements in our understanding of organizational paradox, we know little about how individuals navigate paradox when tensions are core to one's occupational role, but not a dominant concern for senior leaders. This study explores how grantmakers working in corporate philanthropy navigate a business-society paradox when their leaders prioritize business over social objectives at the organization level. Through analyzing interview data from grantmakers alongside observations of their group meetings, I induce a peer-based model of navigating paradox. The findings reveal the important supportive role of relationships with "paradox peers"—ongoing, cooperative connections to individuals external to one's organization but facing similar paradoxical challenges. I detail three relational mechanisms for engaging paradox that together facilitate the ability of individuals to navigate paradox in their home organizations: connecting with others to relieve tension, collectively protecting the paradox, and collaboratively brainstorming responses. My findings shift paradox scholarship towards a more relational understanding of navigating paradoxes, exploring how engaging tensions outside of one's organizational boundaries can support the navigation of paradox internally.

INTRODUCTION

This role can be a lonely one, particularly if you're a team of one or two. Inevitably, you rely on others to help you do your job. Yes, of course, it's critical to build internal support. But also look around; you need your peers.

– CSR consultant presenting to a group of grantmakers

Firms increasingly face paradoxical demands in their corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs, wherein social and economic objectives can be seen as both interdependent and in persistent tension (Hahn, Figge, Pinkse, & Preuss, 2018; Van der Byl & Slawinski, 2015). Despite the prevalence and recognition of the importance of these tensions, corporate leaders often fail to appreciate the paradoxical nature of business and societal goals (Hafenbrädl & Waeger, 2017; Hahn, Preuss, Pinkse, & Figge, 2014). Indeed, when firm leaders promote engagement with social issues, they often prioritize the economic benefits and "business as usual" (Kaplan, 2020; Wright & Nyberg, 2017). Accordingly, the work of navigating business-society tensions is often left to those in CSR occupations, such as ethics officers (Chandler, 2014), sustainability managers (Augustine, 2020), and diversity professionals (Dobbin, Kalev, & Kelly, 2007). Individuals working in these occupations can feel frustrated and torn as they pursue

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3 competing goals, particularly when leaders do not engage with tensions (Carollo & Guerci, 2018;
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5 Wickert & de Bakker, 2018; Wright & Nyberg, 2012). This raises the question: how do
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7 individuals navigate paradox that is core to their occupational role but not a dominant
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9 organizational concern for senior leaders? Unpacking this question is important because
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11 occupations with competing goals continue to proliferate (Sandholtz, Chung, & Waisberg, 2019)
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13 and scholarship highlights that those with less power may be ill-equipped to manage paradox
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15 (Berti & Simpson, 2019).
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19 Existing research on paradox provides some insight into this question. For example,
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21 scholars have made important advancements in understanding the value of individuals'
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23 paradoxical cognition (Keller & Chen, 2017; Miron-Spektor, Ingram, Keller, Smith, & Lewis,
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25 2018; Smith & Tushman, 2005), suggesting a paradox mindset is important for managing
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27 paradox at work. Yet, these studies offer less insight into how individuals develop and sustain a
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29 paradox mindset, including how one remains energized by tensions when they confront
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31 demotivating factors such as low organizational support. Other research has focused on the
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33 practices that individuals adopt to manage tensions, including sensemaking (Jay, 2013; Lüscher
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35 & Lewis, 2008), humor (Jarzabkowski & Lê, 2017), and debate (Huq, Reay, & Chreim, 2017;
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37 Wenzel, Koch, Cornelissen, Rothmann, & Senf, 2019). Because these practices often implicitly
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39 rely on interactions between internal organizational members, particularly supportive interactions
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41 with leaders (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009; Gotsi, Andriopoulos, Lewis, & Ingram, 2010; Huq,
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43 et al., 2017); when leaders dismiss the importance of paradox, individuals miss out on key
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45 resources and internal support. It thus remains unclear how individuals navigate paradox in their
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47 occupational role when it is not a dominant organizational concern.
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3 I explore this question through a qualitative study of corporate grantmakers, the
4 professionals who oversee corporate philanthropy. Grantmakers navigate the contradictions and
5 connections between business and social impact, a paradox their leaders typically do not engage
6 at the organization level. My inductive analysis of interviews with 40 grantmakers and
7 observations of their professional meetings surfaces the critical role of relationships with
8 *paradox peers*, or ongoing, cooperative relationships with peers at other organizations who are
9 navigating similar tensions, as suggested by the epigraph. I uncover three relational mechanisms
10 for engaging paradox: connecting with one another to relieve tension, collectively protecting the
11 paradox, and collaboratively brainstorming responses. Integrating my findings with existing
12 research, I propose a peer-based model of navigating paradox that shows how relationships with
13 paradox peers, through the relational mechanisms, facilitate the ability of individuals to work
14 through paradox at their home organizations. The model offers a more relational approach to
15 navigating paradoxes, encouraging scholars to consider how engaging paradox outside the
16 organization can facilitate the navigation of paradox within it. The findings also have
17 implications for research on occupations and managing business-society tensions.

37 **HOW INDIVIDUALS NAVIGATE PARADOX IN THEIR OCCUPATIONAL ROLES**

38 Paradoxical demands, or those that exhibit “persistent contradiction between
39 interdependent elements” (Schad, Lewis, Raisch, & Smith, 2016: 10), arise in a wide range of
40 occupations. For example, paradoxical demands are evident in the everyday work of correctional
41 officers (Wenzel et al., 2019), nurses (Huq et al., 2017), veterinarians (Pradies, 2021) and
42 scientists (Bednarek, Paroutis, & Sillence, 2017). To date, most studies have considered cases in
43 which individuals face a paradox in their role that is similar in nature to a paradox faced by their
44 organization. For instance, prison organizations and the correctional officers within must balance
45 rehabilitation and punishment (Wenzel et al., 2019), mental health clinics and nurses need to take
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3 into account competing medical and psycho-social needs (Huq et al., 2017), veterinarian clinics
4 and vets must consider the care of animals and earning profit (Pradies, 2021), and science centers
5 and scientists must pursue scientific and commercial goals (Bednarek et al., 2017).
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10 However, individuals may face paradoxes in their occupational roles that are not
11 dominant concerns for their organizations. We know leaders may choose not to engage paradox
12 or may value one dimension at the expense of the other (Cuganesan, 2017; Hahn et al., 2014;
13 Smith, 2014). Yet, even if leaders dismiss the importance of the paradox, an individual's
14 occupational role may still necessitate that they pursue competing demands. Consider
15 occupations that involve contradictory business and prosocial goals, such as diversity officers
16 (Buchter, 2020), sustainability professionals (Augustine, 2020; Carollo & Guerci, 2018), and the
17 corporate philanthropists studied in this paper. Individuals in these occupations must prioritize
18 both business and social impact, even if leaders view social objectives as peripheral to a profit-
19 focused strategy (Hahn, Pinkse, Pruess, & Figge, 2015; Hengst, Jarzabkowski, Hoegl, &
20 Muethel, 2020; Risi & Wickert, 2017). Indeed, maintaining a focus on competing goals can be
21 core to one's occupational mandate, i.e., the shared understanding of the purpose of an
22 occupational group (Hughes, 1958; Nelsen & Barley, 1997). For example, Sandholtz and
23 Burrows (2016) outlined the challenges HR professionals face with their opposing goals of
24 pursuing state-supported employment protections and supporting organizational profit. In effect,
25 tensions associated with navigating paradox are more likely to reside with individuals in their
26 work roles to the extent that senior leaders choose not to grapple with tensions or consider the
27 paradox as peripheral to the organization's dominant strategy.
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51 In exploring how individuals navigate paradox, studies have often focused on how
52 individuals draw on their inner ability to manage tensions. A growing body of work points to the
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3 importance of one's cognitive abilities (Keller & Chen, 2017; Miron-Spektor et al., 2018; Smith
4 & Tushman, 2005). For instance, studies highlight the value of a paradox mindset wherein
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6 & Tushman, 2005). For instance, studies highlight the value of a paradox mindset wherein
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8 individuals accept and are energized by tensions, seeing generative opportunities in the face of
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10 competing demands (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018; Zheng, Kark, & Meister, 2018). Accordingly,
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12 those with a paradox mindset exhibit increased creativity and job performance (Leung et al.,
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14 2018; Liu, Xu, & Zhang, 2020; Miron-Spektor, Gino, & Argote, 2011). This research stream
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16 provides important understanding of the cognitive capabilities that allow individuals to
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18 effectively confront paradox. However, because this work positions managing paradox as an
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20 individualized endeavor, it provides little insight into how contextual factors affect one's mindset
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22 (Keller & Chen, 2017). As a result, we lack understanding of how individuals sustain
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24 paradoxical cognition and maintain their ability to engage paradox in environments that are
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26 demotivating or disempowering (Berti & Simpson, 2019), such as when one's leaders have low
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28 engagement with paradox.
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33 Other research has identified the practices individuals adopt when navigating paradox.
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35 When looking closely, routine interactions appear to underly many of these efforts. For example,
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37 it is through interactions with organizational colleagues that people recognize and make sense of
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39 paradox (Jay, 2013; Sheep, Fairhurst, & Khazanchi, 2017), use humor to relieve tensions
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41 (Jarzabkowski & Lê, 2017), debate the merits of competing goals (Huq et al., 2017; Lüscher &
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43 Lewis, 2008; Wenzel et al., 2019), and engage in discourse and framing practices (Abdallah,
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45 Denis, & Langley, 2011; Schneider, Bullinger, & Brandl, 2020). Moreover, some research
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47 suggests that interactions with leaders encourage individuals to actively engage tensions
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49 (Besharov, 2014; Cuganesan, 2017; Huq et al., 2017; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008; Jarzabkowski, Lê,
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51 & Van de Ven, 2013). For instance, Huq et al. (2017) showed that when counselors and
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3 psychiatrists experienced negative tensions around paradox, debriefing with leaders helped them
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5 better embrace competing demands. Additionally, Andriopoulos and Lewis (2009) documented
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7 how creative professionals who struggled with tensions between discipline and passion were
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9 encouraged by leaders to adopt the paradoxical identity “practical artists.” Building on this work,
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11 Gotsi and colleagues (2010) found that when consultants struggled with the “practical artist”
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13 identity, leaders helped them temporally differentiate between their “artist” and “consultant”
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15 identities as needed. In short, studies have begun to hint at the idea that interactions with internal
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17 members, particularly with leaders, can support individuals as they navigate tensions in their
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19 work roles.
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24 Overall, existing research on how individuals navigate paradox has emphasized
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26 individuals’ inner abilities and the practices they adopt alongside other organizational members.
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28 It remains unclear how individuals avoid becoming “stuck” in tension-filled dynamics (Smith &
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30 Berg, 1987) when their occupational role necessitates that they confront paradox, but paradox is
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32 not a dominant organizational concern. Such individuals appear to lack both interactional
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34 partners inside the organization who fully appreciate their challenges as well as the engagement
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36 of resource-rich leaders. As such, their attempts to navigate tensions may be particularly
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38 isolating and difficult, eliciting feelings of defensiveness, discomfort, and paralysis (Lewis,
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40 2000; Schad et al., 2016; Smith & Lewis, 2011; Vince & Broussine, 1996), as well as greater
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42 demotivation and burnout (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001).
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44 Sustaining commitment to working through paradox in these situations is likely to be especially
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46 challenging, even when individuals have strong cognitive capabilities. This study of corporate
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48 grantmakers addresses the question of how individuals navigate paradox in their occupational
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50 role when paradox is not considered core to the organizational strategy.
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DATA AND EMPIRICAL APPROACH

Data Sources

Research setting. CSR offers a good context for exploring how individuals navigate paradox in their occupational role. Firms increasingly face potential paradoxes around social and economic objectives (Gao & Bansal, 2013; Hahn et al., 2018; Van der Byl & Slawinski, 2015). Despite the business and societal benefits that can accrue from viewing social and economic objectives as mutually reinforcing (Hahn et al., 2018; Jay, 2013; Sharma & Bansal, 2017), not all organizational actors view these issues through a paradoxical lens. Indeed, many corporate leaders primarily emphasize economic concerns, engaging with societal issues only to the extent that doing so benefits the business (Hahn et al., 2014; Kaplan, 2020; Wickert & de Bakker, 2018). In such cases, individuals whose occupations involve the simultaneous pursuit of both business and society goals may encounter paradoxes that leaders may not see or appreciate (Carollo & Guerci, 2018; Hahn & Aragón-Correa, 2015). Because for-profit firms typically prioritize economic objectives, CSR functions are often “bolted on,” rather than tightly coupled with core corporate strategy (Weaver, Treviño, & Cochran, 1999; Risi & Wickert, 2017). Studies have identified the resulting frustration and demotivation faced by those working in CSR occupations (Carollo & Guerci, 2018; Wright & Nyberg, 2012; Wright, Nyberg, & Grant, 2012).

In this study, I explore the experiences of corporate grantmakers who oversee philanthropy activities. Grantmakers’ occupational mandate is rooted in the joint pursuit of business and social objectives; both goals are central to their occupation’s purpose (Gautier & Pache, 2015; Himmelstein, 1997). As often happens in qualitative research, the research project shifted based on what I encountered in the field. I originally intended to explore how grantmakers evaluated the outcomes of the donations they made to individual nonprofits, with a focus on measurement practices and relationships with nonprofits in the community. However,

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3 early interviews suggested that navigating tensions between social impact and economic
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5 objectives was a more salient concern for grantmakers than post-grant measurement practices.
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7 Thus, I redirected my study towards how grantmakers experienced and managed tensions in their
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9 work. As interviews progressed, I began to see that grantmakers experienced the pursuit of
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11 business and social objectives as paradoxical, with demands that were contradictory, interrelated,
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13 and persistent (Smith & Lewis, 2011). Tensions increased in part because grantmakers perceived
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15 firm leaders to prioritize economic objectives. Moreover, unlike senior leaders (Pradies,
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17 Delanghe, & Lewis, 2020; Smith, 2014), grantmakers generally did not have access to the
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19 strategic and structural resources that could help them manage paradox. Thus, overall, the
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21 grantmaking context provided a strong setting in which to explore the research question.
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26 *Interview data.* My interview recruitment focused on grantmakers working in large
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28 companies in a major U.S. city. Large companies are considered the most influential actors
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30 within corporate philanthropy (Tilcsik & Marquis, 2013), thus I expected grantmakers from these
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32 companies to be abreast of current trends. Because I was initially interested in measurement of
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34 post-grant impact, I focused on one geographic area to “control” for large differences between
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36 cities in terms of the focus of grantmaking (Marquis, Glynn, & Davis, 2007). As the study
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38 progressed and shifted towards managing paradox, the potentially important role of peer
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40 relationships became a focus of my inquiry and analysis. Concentrating on one geographic area
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42 enabled me to understand the connections between grantmakers in the local community at a
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44 depth that would not have been possible otherwise.
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49 Using Fortune 500 companies as a starting point, I identified approximately 50 large
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51 companies in the metro area and invited every corporate grantmaker with publicly available
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53 contact information to participate in the study. Perhaps not surprisingly, obtaining contact
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3 information for grantmakers proved extraordinarily difficult, as grantmakers purposefully limit
4 their exposure to the “bombardment” of funding requests. Five grantmakers responded to my
5 initial email. After each interview, I asked informants to provide additional grantmaker contacts.
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7 As such, the sample primarily grew by referral chains, a useful sampling strategy for gaining
8 access to elite informants whose direct perspectives would be otherwise difficult to obtain
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10 (Babbie, 1995; Rivera, 2012). I continued to seek additional informants until I reached
11
12 “saturation,” wherein subsequent interviews revealed very few new ideas or themes (Small,
13
14 2009a; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Overall, I interviewed 40 informants from 32 different large
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16 firms. Note that some companies employed multiple grantmakers and on eight occasions, I
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18 interviewed two grantmakers from the same company.
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26 Informants ranged in terms of age and tenure with the company and included 33 (82.5%)
27 women and 7 (12.5%) men. Most respondents began their careers in other corporate functions (n
28 = 28; 70%), although some began their careers in the nonprofit sector (n = 12; 30%). Of those
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30 with a nonprofit background, many transitioned from positions in corporate fundraising (n = 7).
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32 Respondents reported that they developed skills “on-the-job” by interacting with peers and
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34 attending local professional group meetings. Some also attended national grantmaking
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36 conferences and philanthropy courses. All informants oversaw corporate donations, including
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38 both direct giving and giving through associated corporate foundations.
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44 During interviews, I asked grantmakers general questions about their day-to-day
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46 activities, funding practices, the purpose of the grantmaking function, how they thought about
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48 success, and their reporting practices. Interviews were conducted in-person at a location of the
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50 informant’s choosing, though two were conducted by phone. Most interviews occurred between
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52 late 2014 and the end of 2016. In addition, I conducted four follow-up phone interviews in 2020
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3 that also served as member checks to ensure the validity of the model with those in the field
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5 (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Interviews lasted between 45 and 120 minutes, averaging 75 minutes.
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8 **Observational data.** After conducting a handful of interviews, I realized that the
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10 grantmakers from different firms were meeting as a group roughly once a month to discuss
11
12 work-related issues. Although I had not initially intended to observe group meetings and
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14 meetings were typically only open to grantmakers, I was invited to join by an informant. Thus, as
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16 I shifted my analysis towards the role of peers, I began collecting observational data from the
17
18 group meetings. I observed 12 meetings from 2015 to 2016. When appropriate, I introduced
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20 myself as a researcher studying CSR and highlighted my joint training in both sociology and
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22 management. Events were organized by a committee of grantmakers and featured a rotating set
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24 of relevant topics. Typically, an outside expert shared remarks and answered questions about a
25
26 given subject (e.g., assessing nonprofit program quality); less frequently, grantmakers shared
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28 their own approaches to specific aspects of their work (e.g., engaging employees during times of
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30 change). The meetings were held at various organizational headquarters. Presentations lasted
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32 about 90 minutes, with an additional 15 minutes before and after for informal conversations and
33
34 light refreshments. Typically, about a dozen grantmakers attended. I carefully documented
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36 grantmakers' responses during the question-and-answer sessions as well as informal
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38 conversations before and after events. Although I observed the majority of interview informants
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40 at the group meetings, I did not interview every grantmaker in attendance. Overall, the
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42 observational portion of the study not only provided rich contextual data to complement the
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44 interviews, but also opportunities to witness how grantmakers relied on each other to manage
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46 competing demands.
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53 **Data Analysis**

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3 I adopted an inductive, grounded-theory approach to data analysis (Strauss & Corbin,
4 1998), which is especially relevant for understanding how informants comprehend and respond
5 to their work situations based on their lived experiences (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013). I
6 customized the analytical process (Fendt & Sachs, 2008; Gehman, Glaser, Eisenhardt, Gioia,
7 Langley, & Corley, 2018), adopting a central focus on navigating tensions, as in other studies on
8 paradox management (e.g., Jarzabkowski & Lê, 2017; Smith, 2014). As I organized and coded
9 the data using the ATLAS.ti software, I sought to understand how grantmakers perceived and
10 responded to contradictory demands and the emergent role of peers in the process. As the study
11 unfolded inductively, I turned to the paradox literature after spending time in the field, but I
12 frame the paper using paradox theory to ground the reader. My analytical process included
13 coding, categorizing, and abstracting to higher level concepts (Gioia et al., 2013; Locke, Golden-
14 Biddle, & Feldman, 2008). While the process was nonlinear and iterative (Strauss & Corbin,
15 1998), I present my analysis as a series of three steps for readability.

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33 ***Step 1: Identifying first-order codes.*** I began by reading interview transcripts and field
34 notes, engaging in a process of open coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).
35 When tensions between business and social objectives became apparent, I focused on
36 descriptions of experiences involving conflicting demands and how grantmakers grappled with
37 these demands (see e.g., Smith, 2014). During this stage, the role of peer relationships emerged
38 as an important aspect of informants' experience around competing demands. This coding
39 process resulted in first-order codes describing experience of tensions, such as "grantmakers
40 perceived that leaders prioritize business objectives and minimize social objectives," and codes
41 describing peer interactions, such as "relationships experienced as noncompetitive."
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3 *Step 2: Grouping codes into second-order themes.* Next, I searched for patterns,
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5 grouping first-order empirical codes into second-order conceptual themes (Gioia et al., 2013).
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7 Through a process of axial coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), I
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9 explored relationships among the groups of first-order codes, iterating back and forth between
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11 data analysis and the literature to better understand emerging themes. For instance, the theme
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13 “facing paradox in one’s occupation roles when leadership does not engage paradox” emerged
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15 around two codes: 1) grantmakers recognize both contradiction and interdependence between
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17 social and business objectives, and 1) leaders prioritize business objectives and minimize social
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19 objectives. That social and business objectives were seen as paradoxical by grantmakers but not
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21 by senior leaders stands in sharp contrast to studies of paradox in social enterprises, where a
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23 business-society paradox is faced by the entire organization (e.g., Smith, Gonin, & Besharov,
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25 2013, Smith & Besharov, 2019). Indeed, in this study, tensions between goals increased as
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27 grantmakers interacted with their leaders, whom they perceived to be predominantly focused on
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29 economic objectives.¹
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35 An insight derived from axial coding was that individuals had supportive peer
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37 relationships with grantmakers at other companies. Grantmakers described “connections to
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39 others who were situated inside the paradox, but also outside the focal organization,” which
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41 became the label I adopted for a second-order theme related to peer relationships. Additionally, I
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43 grouped empirical codes highlighting the noncompetitive nature of ties and how they became
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45 stronger over repeated interactions, which became the second-order theme “connections
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47 developed via ongoing cooperative interactions.” While I came across related ideas in existing
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53 ¹ Note that all grantmakers faced a similar business-society paradox but reported different levels of perceived leader
54 support. Three grantmakers described leaders deeply supportive of social impact as a firm goal, and thus they
55 appeared to be able to discuss competing demands as paradoxical more openly within their company. In this paper, I
56 describe the majority experience of grantmakers who perceived their leaders to prioritize economic objectives.
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3 studies, such as research on the social position of “outsider-insiders” (Nigram, Sackett, &
4 Golden, 2020), extant work did not precisely reflect how peers grantmaker peers relate to one
5 another around paradox, hence my decision to keep my emerging second order themes.
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10 This stage also involved analyzing emergent themes about the different ways that peers
11 were relating to one another around the tensions in their work. I continued to seek guidance from
12 existing literature as I made sense of emerging categories, in line with grounded theory (Strauss
13 & Corbin, 1998). For instance, I searched the paradox literature to compare the behavior of my
14 informants to other studies in which organizational actors managed paradoxical tensions. In the
15 setting under study, I identified three primary ways grantmakers related to each other around
16 paradox, which I labeled to reflect both the grouping of empirical themes as well as existing
17 research on paradox. First, to capture how grantmakers lightened the mental load of dealing with
18 tensions alone, I used the label “connecting with one another to relieve tensions.” While scholars
19 often highlight “accepting” tensions as a key way to address paradox (Hahn et al., 2015; Lewis,
20 2000; Smith & Lewis, 2011), my observations align more closely to depictions of relief
21 (Jarzabkowski & Lê, 2017). Second, grantmakers worked together to prioritize both competing
22 elements without allowing one to dominate, thereby “collectively protecting the paradox.” This
23 label aligns with the ideas of Huq et al. (2017), who argued that seeking to legitimize and equally
24 represent competing elements, especially when it may be easier to choose one side over the
25 other, “protects” paradox. Third, grantmakers worked together to explore new responses and
26 give feedback on their responses, thereby “collaboratively brainstorming responses to paradox.”
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28 While many of the responses grantmakers discussed are similar to those highlighted in extant
29 studies (for reviews of different responses, see Putnam, Fairhurst, & Banghart, 2016; Schad et
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3 al., 2016), my analysis surfaced the group brainstorming process that led to these responses
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5 (Sutton & Hargadon, 1996).
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8 Finally, I noticed that a set of codes related to how grantmakers relied on their peers
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10 while they worked in their organizations, physically away from one another. I used the label
11
12 “working through paradox by recalling peer interactions” to describe how, once back at their
13
14 home organizations, grantmakers drew from interactions with peers to remain motivated and
15
16 resilient in the face of internal setbacks. In other studies, “working through paradox” has been
17
18 used to reflect the continuous work necessary to reduce anxiety and move forward, rather than
19
20 attempting to resolve paradoxical tensions (Bednarek et al., 2017; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008;
21
22 Pradies, Tunarosa, Lewis, & Courtois, 2021; Smith & Berg, 1987). Because leaders in this
23
24 setting dismissed social objectives, part of working through paradox involved remaining
25
26 committed to the pursuit of both social and business objectives.
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31 ***Step 3: Synthesizing second-order themes into aggregate dimensions.*** In the final step, I
32
33 sought to understand connections between the themes (Whetten, 1989), theorizing their
34
35 interrelations by engaging the literature on paradox. I identified four aggregate theoretical
36
37 dimensions that form the basis for the conceptual model (Gioia et al., 2013). For example, I
38
39 combined all codes related to peer connections into a dimension labeled “paradox peer
40
41 relationships.” Additionally, after consulting extant literature on responses to paradox (Lewis,
42
43 2000; Smith & Lewis, 2011; Putnam et al., 2016), I created the abstract category “relational
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45 mechanisms of engaging paradox” to highlight how grantmakers engaged paradoxical tensions
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47 through interactions with peers. Figure 1 illustrates the data structure for this study.
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52 -----Insert Figure 1 about here-----
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3 Throughout data collection and analysis, I took several steps to ensure the accuracy and
4 validity of my interpretations and key findings. First, I used both observational and interview
5 data sources to triangulate my findings (Jick, 1979). Relatedly, I had the opportunity to shadow
6 one organization in greater depth which enabled me to better grasp the specifics of the “local
7 landscape” (Miles & Huberman, 1994). While I do not analyze data from the shadowing period
8 in this paper, the experience gave me an in-depth understanding of grantmakers’ day-to-day
9 reality that informed my interpretations. Second, to reduce single-coder bias when analyzing the
10 data, I had recurring meetings with external colleagues to discuss emerging constructs and ensure
11 alignment between the constructs and related codes, revising my analysis when necessary (Miles
12 & Huberman, 1994). Finally, I conducted member checks with informants to test my
13 interpretations against the lived experiences of people in the field (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles
14 & Huberman, 1994). All found the model to accurately represent their experience.
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30 FINDINGS

31 Here I detail four main findings, reflecting the aggregate theoretical dimensions that
32 emerged from the data analysis. First, I show how grantmakers experienced paradoxical tensions
33 in their occupation role inside their firms. Second, I provide evidence about grantmakers’
34 cooperative relationships with peers facing a similar paradox at other organizations, what I term
35 “paradox peer relationships.” Third, I show how peer relationships enabled three key relational
36 mechanisms of engaging paradox. Finally, I show that individual grantmakers drew on their
37 peers as they worked through paradox at their home organizations. Table 1 presents additional
38 evidence for each concept in the framework.
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52 **Experiencing Paradox in One’s Occupational Role**

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3 ***Facing paradox in occupational role when leadership does not engage paradox.***
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5 Grantmakers faced paradoxical demands in their occupation, as evidenced by how *grantmakers*
6 *recognized both contradiction and interdependence between social and business objectives.*
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10 Success for grantmakers involved positively impacting society and the business, two goals that
11 often raise inherent conflicts (Smith et al., 2013). Indeed, one grantmaker remarked that “you can
12 never really align business impact and social impact fully.” Still, grantmakers saw business and
13 social objectives as interrelated in their day-to-day work, and success required achieving results
14 in both areas. Without showing business results, they risked losing the funding and autonomy to
15 support societal welfare. Similarly, dismissing prosocial priorities risked appearing disingenuous
16 or dishonest, with potentially negative reputational repercussions. Likewise, fulfilling business
17 goals could support social objectives, and vice versa. Jennifer,² a grantmaker at a large insurance
18 company, described this as “always a push and a pull.” She explained:
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31 Here’s what we’re doing to bring up the business value and how we’re doing it is through
32 our social impact. The social impact work should be top-notch, well done, well delivered,
33 with measurable results. If you do social impact well, that will help with the business
34 value. It’s actually the fabric of the social impact first. Here’s what we’re trying to
35 deliver in communities and, if we do those things right, here’s how it should impact the
36 business. It isn’t an either/or. It is because of these things we can get this, and if we are
37 able to improve that reputation, why not?
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39
40 Jennifer described how “top-notch” social impact work would produce strong results in
41 communities, which would yield benefits for the business, especially regarding its reputation.
42 This would, in turn, enable the firm to make additional social investments in communities. She
43 explicitly contrasted her work with “either/or” situations where either social or business priorities
44 dominate; rather, grantmakers pursue both simultaneously and synergistically.
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² To protect informant confidentiality, all names are pseudonyms and some industries have been changed.
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3 The challenge grantmakers faced in navigating paradox was heightened by perceptions
4 that *leaders prioritized economic goals and minimized social impact goals*. Gretta, who led a
5 team of corporate philanthropists at a bank, described how the executives primarily cared about
6 business priorities: “All they care about is making money. Shareholders, compliance, bonuses,
7 drive, drive, drive.” These were the words used in leadership meetings, including when the team
8 discussed the bank’s philanthropy. Gretta felt executives did not engage with and often
9 minimized the importance of social impact because it did not match their definition of corporate
10 success. Given the firm’s profit orientation, Gretta felt she needed to be “prepared to defend” the
11 business value of her social impact work. While grantmakers like Gretta recognized that they
12 faced paradox, it was demotivating to have leaders minimize what she considered a primary goal.
13 Gretta said that people often joked that they wanted her job because they perceived it to be “fun.”
14 She emphasized that others did not see the challenges: “Businesses make it complicated
15 generally. It’s hard to do mission-driven work in a non-mission-driven organization.”
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33 Grantmakers realized that their social impact goals were considered secondary by
34 corporate leaders in various ways. Olivia, a grantmaker at a manufacturing company, had spent
35 months thinking about how to maximize social impact. Education was a major focus for her firm,
36 and she developed an approach that considered a child’s educational experience. Her plan
37 included initiatives that directly supported students, their schools, teachers, parents, and so on.
38 She organized grantees into an impact matrix, which she excitedly presented to senior leaders at
39 the firm. Olivia recalled, “They basically looked at it, told us that it was not necessary, and that
40 we didn’t need to waste time with it.” After a pause, she continued: “That hurt. But you know,
41 I’m going to keep doing it anyway. To make a difference we need to make sure that we have a
42 handle on our grantees and their impact.” In fact, despite being disheartened by that
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3 conversation, Olivia shared that she and her team had been using the impact matrix for several
4 months. She described it as a tool that helps her “maximize success,” even though “they clearly
5 don’t require me to do this.” For her, maximizing success meant a focus on social impact, even
6 though organizational leaders did not see it as relevant to her functional success.
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12 In summary, grantmakers confronted paradox because their daily work emphasized both
13 business and social objectives, which were contradictory yet interrelated, and persisted over their
14 careers (Smith & Lewis, 2011). Importantly, grantmakers perceived that their leaders viewed the
15 social impact of philanthropy as secondary to its business impact (Hahn et al., 2014; Kaplan,
16 2020). Grantmakers thus felt they had guidance from leaders on pursuing competing demands,
17 particularly regarding how to realize social impact. This situation was challenging for
18 grantmakers, as evidenced by the way they sometimes described their work as “hard,” “a pain in
19 the ass,” “generally complicated,” and “hurtful.” Indeed, Michelle commented, “It’s just really
20 hard to educate people about your job, to understand the importance. You’re using a lot of
21 influence skills to get stuff done. If you’re the only one, it’s just hard.”
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35 **Paradox Peer Relationships**

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37 Grantmakers had important relationships with their “paradox peers,” or ongoing,
38 cooperative connections to individuals facing similar paradoxes outside the organization.
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41 ***Connections to peers situated inside the paradox and outside the focal organization.***

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43 Grantmakers described being *connected to others who were engaged in meeting the competing*
44 *demands of business and social goals.* Helen, a grantmaker at a manufacturing company,
45 explained that she and her peers “share the same challenge. They’re doing healthcare. They’re
46 doing equipment. But at the end, we’re all funding nonprofits in the community. So just because
47 their funding issue is different, we all have the issue on ROI [return on investment].” Indeed, the
48 group appeared highly cognizant that all grantmakers shared the challenges of fulfilling both
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3 economic and social objectives. For instance, before speaking to the group about employee
4 engagement, a grantmaker emphasized that they all were “tasked to be both stewards of the
5 company and the community” and that this could lead to “difficult work” (fieldnotes 05/2015).
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10 Discussing ways to address this difficult work was a core purpose of their group meetings.
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12 At the same time, *peer connections existed outside grantmakers’ focal organizations.*
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14 Every peer meeting that I observed was attended by a dozen or more grantmakers from different
15 companies. The very nature of these meetings revealed that grantmakers often felt isolated and
16 sought to interact with peers in other organizations. Grantmakers broadly recognized the external
17 nature of these connections. Katie, who worked for a medical company, said that although her
18 internal colleagues “understand the politics better” than her external peers, internal colleagues
19 “get stuck in systems and processes that have existed for a while.” Her peers at other
20 organizations, by contrast, approached their work in different ways based on their own
21 organizational contexts. In sum, a defining aspect of the peer relationships was that peers were
22 insiders to the paradox but outsiders to the organization.
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35 *Connections developed via ongoing cooperative interactions.* An important aspect of
36 peer ties was that they *were built and strengthened over repeated interactions.* Grantmakers
37 reported that peer relationships grew stronger through repeated interactions in settings such as
38 local peer meetings, lunches, and happy hours. Because people entered the career and the peer
39 network at different times, some peer relationships were new and developing, while others were
40 well developed. For instance, when just starting out in the field, Michelle went to every event
41 offered by grantmaking associations and intentionally sought to connect with local peers. At the
42 time, she simply “needed to learn” about her job. As Michelle progressed in the field and
43 interacted more with her counterparts, her peer relationships deepened.
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3 I think it takes time. It takes years, I mean, to build up these relationships. People aren't
4 just gonna tell you stuff, just 'cause we work in the same space. And it's going to meet
5 people; it's that in-person kinda stuff where you get to know people and get to know
6 them better. And you talk, and then you may not see each other until the next conference
7 or the next thing, but you grow closer.
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10 Michelle also highlighted that the field was relatively small and well-connected. "We know a lot
11 of the same folks ... you already have that halo effect, of being friends with someone, and then
12 you can trust them."
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16 Ongoing interactions with peers enabled grantmakers to develop deeper relationships, the
17 kind where "you can go and talk to them and just kind of be free." Gretta noted that because
18 peers had different skills and experience levels, it was important "to form relationships that are
19 strong or trusting between each other." She elaborated:
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26 When I attend peer events or whatever, they're great. I learn something or I meet new
27 people. But the biggest value, for me, is more on that inner level or more deeper level.
28 We find our people. We find our connections and go from there.
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31 While grantmakers appreciated their peer ties overall, they acknowledged the significance of the
32 more intimate connections that they had built over time.
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35 Another important aspect of peer ties was that *grantmakers experienced external*
36 *relationships as noncompetitive*. They felt at ease with their counterparts at other organizations.
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40 Pattie, the sole grantmaker for a technology company, explained:
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42 One thing I really, really enjoy about my job, and I'm sure you probably have heard, is
43 that there's really no competing spaces. It really – there really isn't. Like even if the
44 companies might compete on a different level, we're not sharing competitive intelligence.
45 We're not. I mean, the whole opportunity in community relations is to elevate your
46 community and to make your community a better place to live and work. And so, a way
47 that you do that is by working together.
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50 As Pattie described, by "working together" with peers, they could bring an added benefit and
51 further uplift the communities they served.
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3 Grantmakers often appreciated peers from similar organizations that might otherwise be
4 market competitors. Miranda mentioned that she struggled with wanting her employer to stand
5 out from competitors, but that it was an “interesting dynamic” due to grantmakers’ “tight-knit
6 community” and “trust.” Miranda described the pull towards collaboration over competition:
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12 Your vision is to further social impact, both for the ROI for your company and for the
13 community. So that’s one of your core skills. And one of the core things you do in life is
14 collaboration. And I think if you’re a good philanthropist, you’re looking at ... collective
15 impacts that will make a difference in the long term, regardless of what might
16 differentiate your company right now, because everyone gains when we work together.
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19 In effect, grantmakers signaled they had more to gain by collaborating with their peers to
20 advance the profession and help communities than any potential loss of a competitive edge due
21 to sharing the inner workings of their initiatives.
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26 Indeed, grantmakers frequently remarked on the collaborative and comfortable nature of
27 peer relationships. Allison contrasted the sense of ease and trustworthiness of their grantmaking
28 peer space with that of other professionals such as attorneys, saying “I think we’re less
29 competitive in our spaces, and ... more collaborative, and I think that helps a lot.” Similarly,
30 Katie said, “It’s interesting. I don’t see any negativity. I’m not seeing like, weird competition,
31 competitiveness, or secrecy or anything like that. Just positivity.” Grantmakers reflected on how
32 this comfortableness emerged, even when working across organizational lines. Roxanne for
33 instance, thought it might be because “Nine out of 10 of us just really have hearts.” Others
34 attributed it to the fact that grantmakers are corporate “do-gooders,” and that “helping
35 professions” center on “building stakeholder relationships.” Because peer relationships were
36 cooperative, grantmakers stood out if they were “posturing” instead of being “real” or if they
37 “annoyingly” seemed to be looking out for themselves. Katie said with a laugh, “This sounds
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3 really bad. There's a few people no one likes. We all don't like the same people, kind of mutual
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5 dislike of that one or two people."
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8 In sum, grantmakers built paradox peer relationships with other grantmakers in different
9
10 organizations. The fact that peer relationships were ongoing, cooperative, and situated inside the
11
12 paradox but outside the focal organization setting is critical, because it provided the foundation
13
14 for peers to interact on a deep level around paradox. Importantly, the external nature of peer ties
15
16 provided access to social connections and resources that were lacking in their home
17
18 organizations. Moreover, their regular engagement and cooperation shaped how peers related to
19
20 one another around the paradoxical tensions in their work, as discussed in the next section.
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23 24 **Relational Mechanisms of Engaging Paradox**

25 Peers collectively engaged paradox through three key relational mechanisms: 1)
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27 connecting with one another to relieve tensions, 2) collectively protecting the paradox, and 3)
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29 collaboratively brainstorming responses to paradox.
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31

32 *Connecting with one another to relieve tensions.* Relationships with paradox peers
33
34 supported grantmakers by relieving tensions they otherwise experienced in isolation. Catherine, a
35
36 grantmaker at a retail company, provides an example of how peers relieved tensions by *fostering*
37
38 *feelings of connection and understanding*. Catherine faced challenges in her role, sharing, "It's
39
40 such a unique role, and so few people understand how it works and the pressures behind it. There
41
42 is something really important about having those friendships and relationships to go to." When
43
44 asked to elaborate on what she thought was important, Catherine continued by saying, "It makes
45
46 me feel better." With a lighthearted laugh, she added, "I mean, it's like – it's [grantmaker]
47
48 therapy. People understand how hard this is." Because internal colleagues did not understand
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50 grantmakers' competing demands, external relationships offered opportunities for deep
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52 connections that made them feel understood.
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3 Lisa's experience also highlights how peers helped her feel connected and understood.
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5 Lisa's company was facing a management crisis which meant potential cuts to the philanthropic
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7 program. She appreciated that some of her peers had faced similar challenges and understood
8
9 what she was going through. She said, "It's just been reassuring going through a crisis to hear
10
11 how other people have dealt with it, the good and the bad." Lisa expanded:
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15 It's human experience, right? You're not alone. You're not doing this badly or well. This
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17 is the circumstance that we're in, and reassuring myself that I'm doing a good job, too,
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19 and other people understand me and my perspective, and appreciate and value the work,
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21 because not everyone does. I think philanthropy is often one of the first things to be cut,
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23 and so to know that other people have a deep understanding for what you do and how
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25 important it is, it's very helpful.

26
27 Lisa could talk with peers about the difficulties she was facing and be met with an understanding
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29 ear. Doing so allowed her to feel that she was "not alone."
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33 Peer relationship also provided relief by *offering opportunities to commiserate about*
34
35 *shared tensions*. For Jeff, peers provided an outlet to express difficulties that would be less
36
37 appropriate to voice elsewhere. With his peers, Jeff could admit that he did not always know
38
39 what to do and candidly discuss his roadblocks. He said, "When we're together, we can bitch
40
41 about all the other executives," meaning they could vent about the general challenges of
42
43 executive pressure and the idiosyncrasies of their specific leaders, thereby collectively relieving
44
45 some of the stress of balancing competing demands. Sharing difficulties helped to build a
46
47 community where challenges could be discussed freely and be met with compassion.

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49 Similarly, Debra said that she specifically sought commiseration from her peers.

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51 Every meeting, I'm like, "Who else is in a company that's really hard and you can't get
52
53 anything through?" ... I want to hear the good stuff, too. I'm really proud of all of my
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55 friends that are doing amazing work, but I want that commiseration of who else feels like
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57 they're just stuck right now, and they want to do great work and they can't?
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3 Debra found it comforting not only to be understood, but also to know that others felt stuck too.
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5 The commiseration aspect of the peer group allowed grantmakers to vocalize their challenges in
6
7 a relatively empathetic group of people. Additionally, some grantmakers remarked that
8
9 longstanding relationships felt especially safe for venting about tough work challenges, the kind
10
11 “that you want kept in a locked box.” One grantmaker described how she felt “safer” venting
12
13 with peers than with internal colleagues.
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17 ***Collectively protecting the paradox.*** Peers collectively worked to “protect the paradox,”
18
19 or to value competing business-society demands without letting one dominate (Huq et al., 2017).
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21 Grantmakers helped maintain this dual focus by *alternating the focus of their meetings between*
22
23 *social impact and business impact*. Consider the difference between two meeting presentations
24
25 about measuring impact. In one meeting, grantmakers learned about social impact measurement
26
27 from a professor who researched nonprofit program evaluation (01/2016). The speaker outlined a
28
29 variety of best practices that could help grantmakers maximize social impact by shifting their
30
31 focus from outputs (i.e., nonprofit activities) to outcomes for beneficiaries (i.e., the effects of the
32
33 outputs), and implementing theories of change and logic models to anticipate and measure
34
35 impact. In contrast, the second meeting was led by a CSR consultant focused on a very different
36
37 set of measures that grantmakers might consider adopting. He presented business-oriented
38
39 metrics (e.g., consumer awareness, purchase intentions and behavior, employee recruitment and
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41 retention) to better align grantmaking with business demands and cultivate relationships with
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43 different leaders from finance, marketing, government relations, and the like (03/2016).
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49 The meetings profiled above evidence how grantmakers independently engaged
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51 competing demands, valuing the unique skills associated with each goal. Importantly, exposure
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53 to a variety of topics over time offered grantmakers the ability to appreciate and develop
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3 expertise in both areas, strengthening the foundation for their dual commitment in their home
4 organizations. Because grantmakers lacked internal guidance on social impact, meetings focused
5 on social impact were especially important for ensuring both demands remained valued.
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10 Protecting the paradox also involved *encouraging each other to use business language to*
11 *provide room to pursue social impact goals*. For example, at a meeting on measuring and
12 communicating impact, Jeff described how difficult it was for him to achieve social impact in the
13 face of constant changes in leadership and business strategy.
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19 My leadership changes their mind on what they want too much for me to get any long-
20 term data. The problem is you don't have continuous focus long enough to figure out if I
21 am even making an impact. If I'm changing business strategies let's say every... at least
22 three years, sometimes even less than that, how can I measure it? I'm going to have to
23 keep changing programs to align with the strategy... I mean we all get it, it's frustrating!
24
25

26 Jeff then asked the group, "How do you ingrain our work into the company so that a change in
27 executives doesn't mean a change in social impact?" Anne responded, "As much as you can, try
28 to get the community engagement data in business terms." Rebecca added, "Try to build an
29 appetite for what you're doing with the execs using their language so that you don't have to
30 constantly justify your existence." Jeff's peers suggested that emphasizing the parts of his work
31 that resonated best with executives would provide the stability necessary to pursue social impact
32 over longer time horizons. This interaction provides one example of how peers worked within
33 the constraints of their leaders' economic priorities to build in room to pursue social impact.
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45 ***Collaboratively brainstorming responses to paradox.*** When grantmakers got together,
46 they engaged in group brainstorming to generate new ideas and solve problems associated with
47 their responses. One way that peers brainstormed was by *exploring new ways to pursue business*
48 *and social impact*. For example, at a meeting about how to use CSR to engage employees
49 (02/2015), a grantmaker and her colleague, the director of diversity and inclusion, presented an
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3 innovative partnership they established at their manufacturing company. Together, they sought to
4 engage various employee-led groups in community work. The grantmaker provided funding and
5 trained group members how to identify potential beneficiary organizations that fit both the
6 passion of each group and the company's business strategy. From the grantmaker's perspective,
7 the partnership had helped her "make a difference in the community" by identifying important
8 nonprofits that previously had not been on her radar. At the same time, it strengthened employee-
9 company ties, a form of business impact. Through the recounting of this innovative partnership,
10 the grantmakers in the meeting learned about a novel way to simultaneously pursue business and
11 social impact. Because the field of corporate philanthropy was still developing, learning about
12 potential initiatives together was noted as particularly helpful.
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26 Grantmakers also worked together to develop novel initiatives. For example, Rebecca, an
27 experienced grantmaker at an insurance firm, reached out to a peer at a bank to explore the idea
28 of a new charitable flex fund for employees.
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33 I need next level, I need strategy, I need people to help challenge my way of thinking. So,
34 I talked to [an external peer]. "Hey, is anyone talking about charitable flex funds?" And
35 he's like, "No, but our corporate group has a session we planned for March on innovation
36 ... Will you collaborate and see what people think about them?" I'm like, "Absolutely."
37
38

39 Rebecca said she was looking forward to the upcoming event and grateful for the opportunity to
40 develop and test this potential strategy. As expressed by Rebecca, engaging with peers was
41 especially important to "challenge" grantmakers to think in new ways. Even grantmakers with
42 internal teammates valued the diverse perspectives and creative ideas that emerged from
43 discussions with external peers about new initiatives. This was the case for Gretta, who worked
44 on a small team of grantmakers. Gretta explained: "You never want to be too insular ... the
45 external benefit is, you get that diversity of thought, right?"
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3 Grantmakers also described *seeking advice from peers on responding to business-society*
4 *tensions*. For example, Debra shared that she reached out to peers when she was uncertain about
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6 how to structure proposals and end-of-grant evaluations in a way that would allow her to best
7
8 capture both social and business impact. She wanted to know more about reporting metrics and
9
10 “reached out to people and said, ‘I know you have this. I know it’s successful. How does that
11
12 work with you guys?’” She wanted feedback on the metrics she had implemented and was
13
14 curious about “other innovative questions” she could add. By talking with peers, grantmakers
15
16 like Debra could gain a sense of whether their own programs and initiatives were in line with
17
18 best practices. This allowed them to “calibrate,” as one grantmaker put it—to understand what
19
20 might be possible and update their practices accordingly.
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26 Similarly, Jessica described a regular breakfast meeting she attended with a few peers in
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28 the health industry as one of the most helpful venues for obtaining feedback on her programming
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30 and related challenges. She recalled seeking advice on potential disaster relief efforts in the wake
31
32 of a hurricane, explaining that her desire to provide broader support was diluting her focus. Her
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34 peers provided “several helpful ideas” (e.g., to focus on providing water to the local community,
35
36 given the company’s expertise in water-related issues). This feedback helped Jessica balance
37
38 social and business objectives. Realizing that she could help victims in a meaningful way while
39
40 reinforcing the company’s expertise renewed her motivation. She left the meeting saying: “I can
41
42 do this better.” Feedback thus not only provided tactical advice to improve responses, but also a
43
44 sense of energy and purpose.
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49 **Navigating Paradox in One’s Occupational Role**

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51 *Working through paradox by recalling peer interactions.* Working through paradox
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53 involves remaining committed to and sustaining seemingly competing goals, rather than
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55 resolving tensions between them (Bednarek et al., 2017; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008). One way
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3 individual grantmakers worked through paradox was by *recalling peer meetings to remain*
4 *energized and motivated*. Jessica discussed how learning about her peers' accomplishments
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6 "reenergized" her by highlighting the potential impact she could have, thereby motivating her
7
8 continue to pursue competing demands at work. Jessica described a recent meeting at which she
9
10 learned more about the approach of a peer grantmaker. She found it "incredibly motivating."
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15 Their giving was way bigger than [our company's] giving in terms of actual dollars but
16 [what stood out is that] they were incredibly strategic. That just reenergizes you ... we all
17 do amazing work, and we can do even more. Like, oh my god, we could do so much
18 more! The sky's the limit.
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20 Although Jessica's philanthropic budget was considerably smaller than her peer's budget, she did
21
22 not feel disheartened by financial limitations. Instead, she felt inspired to be more strategic. Her
23
24 takeaway was: "You have to realign or, I guess, reframe your thinking in terms of your
25
26 company's size." Following this meeting, Jessica reexamined her own grantee portfolio to better
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28 align her impact goals with grants, board placements, and volunteer opportunities.
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31
32 Roxanne similarly shared how she felt motivated to advance her work and make a greater
33
34 impact after attending peer gatherings. At conferences, Roxanne would chat with others about
35
36 their major initiatives and listen to presentations about innovations in corporate social impact.
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38

39 There are times when the conferences and the things you go to, it makes you feel good to
40 be in this space. 'Cause sometimes you don't get that validation at work, right? People
41 just think, "Oh, well, that's a nice thing to do, whatever." But then you go, and you
42 realize, "Gee, collectively, we're making this huge impact."
43

44 Being reminded of the larger impact they were making in the sector made Roxanne feel good
45
46 about her work. Although the social impact of her work was not always recognized directly at
47
48 her home organization, she felt "a little boost" from being reminded about the successes of the
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50 collective, which she drew upon to motivate her own work.
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54 Individuals also worked through paradox by *recalling peer interactions to remain*
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56 *committed to social impact inside one's company*. Returning to an earlier example, although
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3 leaders had dismissed Olivia's social impact matrix as "not necessary," she and her team
4
5 remained committed to using it, in part because she knew her peers were also dedicated to
6
7 figuring out how to effectively advance social impact. She described how the field of corporate
8
9 philanthropy had become more "sophisticated" and how measuring social impact was a "next
10
11 level" goal. In fact, talking with a peer about their measurement efforts had inspired Olivia to
12
13 design an impact matrix in the first place, and she wanted to continue to advance the work.
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16
17 Peer interactions also helped Michelle remain commitment to social impact. Michelle's
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19 social impact measurement was extensive. She had spent three years working with an external
20
21 evaluation researcher to determine appropriate metrics and implementing the impact
22
23 measurement tools with their grantees. The initiative was successful, and nonprofits had begun to
24
25 collaborate more with each other. Michelle could now look across her grantmaking portfolio and
26
27 assess impact at a more macro level. Although Michelle knew it was a unique and important
28
29 effort, her internal colleagues and leaders sometimes did not recognize the achievement or
30
31 belittled her efforts. Their dismissiveness wore Michelle down, and occasionally she questioned
32
33 why she was working so hard on the measurements. At these times, she reminded herself of her
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35 peers' favorable responses to her work and their recognition of the initiative's complexity.
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40 You're working hard, and no one at work thinks it's all that great. But then you go, and
41
42 you find out that you are the only one doing this kind of tracking, of the metrics and stuff.
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44 We're the only ones that have that. And so, it's like, "Yeah!" And then I can go back and
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46 tell my boss, "We're the only one doing that. I should get more credit." [Laughter.] ... I
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48 think that validates the hard work that you're doing. ... Internally it's like, "Eh, okay.
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50 Whatever." But it's a big deal.

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52 Michelle knew that what her team was attempting to do with metrics was difficult to achieve.
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54 Although she was proud of her work, her peers' reactions reminded her of the value of
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56 measurements. They left her feeling "validated" and enabled her to renew her commitment to
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58 work on tough initiatives, despite tepid responses from organizational insiders.
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3 Interestingly, I also spoke to one informant who lacked a robust peer network. Gerry, a
4 grantmaker at a manufacturing firm, had responded to a “cold” email rather than from a referral
5 chain. Gerry worked largely alone. He was satisfied with his approach, which he felt aligned
6 with the business strategy. Donations went only to communities that were home to their
7 manufacturing plants, with a focus on organizations that supported local decision makers, such
8 as police softball leagues and firefighter associations. He sought to build positive reputational
9 capital with town decision makers, which he and the firm’s leaders believed would be useful if
10 problems occurred at a plant. Unlike the other grantmakers I spoke with, Gerry did not have
11 strong peer relationships, nor did he work with peers to engage or work through business-society
12 tensions. While Gerry may have prioritized business over social goals regardless, he lacked
13 connection to peers who could have encouraged or even challenged him to adopt a more
14 balanced focus. Although grantmakers with peer relationships also exhibited some instrumental
15 reasoning in their grantmaking, often to ensure positive business impact, they also sought to
16 maximize social impact. The counterexample of Gerry thus highlights the value of peer
17 relationships for motivating one another to work through competing business-social demands.
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37 **A PEER-BASED MODEL OF NAVIGATING PARADOX**

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39 My objective in this study was to develop theory to explain how individuals navigate
40 paradox in their occupational role when it is not a dominant organizational concern for senior
41 leaders. In this section, I integrate relevant literature with my inductive findings to introduce a
42 peer-based model of navigating paradox. The model highlights the importance of external
43 relationships with paradox peers, the relational mechanisms of paradox engagement, and the
44 enhanced individual commitment to working through paradox facilitated by these mechanisms.
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53 Figure 2 depicts both an organizational realm (white elements) as well as a peer realm (gray
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3 elements) to emphasize how individuals draw on external peer relationships to better navigate
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5 paradox in their home organizations.
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8 -----Insert Figure 2 about here-----
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10 Some organizations embed competing objectives at their very core, such that both leaders
11 and individuals across levels must find ways to navigate paradox (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Smith
12 & Besharov, 2019). Other times, leaders may not integrate paradoxical goals into the
13 organization's strategy (Hahn et al., 2014; Smith, 2014), even as some functional or occupational
14 roles demand that individuals oversee competing goals on behalf of the organization.
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16

17 Grantmakers in this study represent individuals who *face paradox in their occupational role*
18 *when leadership does not engage paradox*. Because navigating paradox is difficult (Lewis, 2000;
19 Vince & Broussine, 1996), particularly under resource constraints (Smith & Lewis, 2011),
20 individuals can experience anxiety, employ defense mechanisms such as avoidance, or even
21 experience long periods of stagnation (Lewis, 2000; Smith & Berg, 1987; Poole & Van de Ven,
22 1989; Vince & Broussine, 1996). To avoid burnout, individuals must find ways to work through
23 paradox (Lüscher & Lewis, 2008; Pradies et al., 2021; Smith & Berg, 1987).
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37 Individuals who experience tension in their occupational role but do not receive robust
38 support from other organizational members may seek support from like-minded colleagues in
39 other organizations (Augustine, 2020; Bucher, 1988; Fayard, Stigliani, & Bechky, 2017). At the
40 heart of my model lies the idea that in seeking support, individuals build relationships with
41 paradox peers. These relationships are *situated inside the paradox and outside an individual's*
42 *focal organization* and develop over time via *ongoing cooperative interactions*. Critically, the
43 positioning of peers as both paradox insiders and organizational outsiders enables individuals to
44 develop authentic relationships based in shared experience of the paradox and the ability to
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3 harness differences between their approaches. This reflects the value of interactions with
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5 “outsider-insiders” (Nigam et al., 2020) and contrasts with extant work on paradox that
6
7 highlights collaboration with colleagues inside the organization as a navigation strategy (Huq et
8
9 al., 2017; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008). The characteristics of peer relationships in this study
10
11 highlight how grantmakers formed an occupational community (Van Maanen & Barley, 1984)
12
13 around paradox in that they were not just members of the same occupation, but also fostered a
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15 sense of solidarity and held communal rather than competitive relationships.
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19 Paradox peer relationships provide important relational resources (Blatt, 2009) that drive
20
21 three primary mechanisms for engaging paradox. In Figure 2, the mechanisms are presented in a
22
23 circular manner to indicate that they overlap in real time and are mutually reinforcing. First,
24
25 paradox peers engage paradox by *connecting with one another to relieve tensions*. Rather than
26
27 struggling with tensions in isolation (Rothman & Wiesenfeld, 2007), grantmakers found a sense
28
29 of connection with external peers with whom they could commiserate. Relieving tension is an
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31 important part of managing paradox (Smith, Binns, & Tushman, 2010), as it helps reduce anxiety
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33 and encourage comfort with repeatedly engaging competing demands (Huq et al., 2017;
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35 Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Jarzabkowski & Lê, 2017). Whereas paradox studies have pointed to
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37 short-term relief offered by humor (Jarzabkowski & Lê, 2017) or irony (Gylfe, Franck, & Vaara,
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39 2019), my findings emphasize how peer relationships provide ongoing relief. The social
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41 elements of my findings reflect that “colleagueship” develops when people face similar work
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43 challenges across organizations (Bucher, 1988; Fayard et al., 2017; Van Maanen & Barley,
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45 1984), and contrast with the idea that relief from tensions primarily stems from the cognitive
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47 acceptance of paradox (Hahn et al., 2015; Smith & Lewis, 2011). Moreover, connection and
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3 relief are key to working through paradox, as they are primary sources of individuals' resilience
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5 at work (Stephens, Heaphy, Carmeli, Spreitzer, & Dutton, 2013).
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8 Second, paradox peers engage paradoxical tensions by *collectively protecting the*
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10 *paradox*, which involves actively working to value each objective and ensure that one does not
11
12 overpower the other (Huq et al., 2017). Through working together to give independent attention
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14 to business and social impact, grantmakers valued each element in its own right without
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16 attempting to eliminate tensions by merging the two goals or prioritizing one over the other
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18 (Beech, Burns, de Caestecker, MacIntosh, & MacLean, 2004; Clegg, da Cunha, & e Cunha,
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20 2002; Putnam et al., 2016). Practically speaking, collective effort and energy is useful when
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22 engaging opposing elements, as it can be difficult to do so alone (Abdallah et al., 2011; Bednarek
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24 et al., 2017; Seo, Putnam, & Bartunek, 2004). Professionals suffer when they are unable to
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26 balance their prosocial goals with the economic realities of their work (Schabram & Maitlis,
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28 2016), and benefit from being pushed to consider a more balanced approach (Andriopolous &
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30 Lewis, 2009; Gotsi et al., 2010). In contrast to the idea that strategies for protecting paradox
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32 come from leaders or those with higher status in organizations (Gümüşay, Smets, & Morris,
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34 2020, Huq et al., 2017; Knight & Paroutis, 2017), my findings show that peers help to value and
35
36 keep the paradox open even when more powerful internal actors favor one of the competing
37
38 objectives. This echoes findings that peer pressure can be especially important for countering
39
40 complacency and sustaining commitment to both social and economic objectives in one's
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42 occupational role (Howard-Grenville, Nelson, Earle, Haack, & Young, 2017).
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49 Third, paradox peers engage paradoxical tensions by *collaboratively brainstorming*
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51 *responses to paradox*. Paradox peers work together to develop new ideas for initiatives to meet
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53 their dual goals, experimenting with different practices without prematurely investing resources
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3 in them (Smith & Besharov, 2019). This emphasis on interactions contrasts with existing work
4 that views the ability to generate new ideas and solve problems in the face of paradox as a
5 cognitive skill (e.g., Miron-Spektor et al., 2018; Sleesman, 2019). Discussing new ideas with
6 external peers is particularly important because organizational insiders can become entrenched in
7 existing responses to paradoxes (Lewis, 2000; Smith & Lewis, 2011; Sundaramurthy & Lewis,
8 2003) and fall prey to path dependency (Sydow, Schreyögg, & Koch, 2009). Even when internal
9 pockets of support are helpful to professionals (Soderstrom & Weber, 2020), relationships that
10 span organizations provide access to unique information and diverse perspectives (Cross &
11 Cummings, 2004) that that can help cast organizational tensions in a new light (Jay, 2013).
12 Through brainstorming, peers harness contextual differences and heterogeneity in their
13 approaches (Howard-Grenville et al., 2017) to solve problems and push each other to approach
14 paradox in new ways inside their home organizations.

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16
17 In the face of persistent competing demands, actors must exhibit similarly persistent
18 responses (Cunha & Clegg, 2018). My model depicts how relational mechanisms facilitate the
19 ability of individuals to work through paradox at their home organizations. “Working through”
20 paradox refers to the continuous steps actors take to reduce anxiety and move forward amidst
21 tensions (Bednarek et al., 2017; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008; Pradies et al., 2021), rather than
22 counterproductively avoiding tensions (Golden-Biddle & Rao, 1997). My findings emphasize
23 that without robust engagement of paradox inside their organizations, individuals can find
24 alternate ways of remaining committed. Grantmakers *worked through paradox by recalling peer*
25 *interactions* to re-energize themselves and maintain their focus on both social and business
26 objectives. This was particularly important for social impact goals, which were not otherwise
27 engaged at a deep level inside their firms. Indeed, without peers to support and push each other
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3 on this aspect, grantmakers may have focused primarily on business objectives, as Gerry did, or
4 burnt out. Working through paradox has been described as an interactional process of engaging
5 and re-engaging tensions within organizations (Lüscher & Lewis, 2008; Pradies et al., 2021). In
6 this study, grantmakers instead engaged tensions outside their firms and drew on those insights
7 to motivate their internal responses. Reflecting the idea that individuals develop resilient aspects
8 of their identities and better understandings of organizational life through occupational
9 affiliations (Anteby, Chan, & DiBenigno, 2016; Bechky, 2011), my findings demonstrate the
10 importance of affiliation with paradox peers for navigating tensions and living with paradox.
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21 With the arrow in Figure 2 connecting working through back to peer relationships, my
22 model shows how relying on peers to engage paradox can ultimately reinforce relationships and
23 the relational engagement of paradox in the peer realm. The way paradox peer relationships
24 enable overlapping mechanisms evidences positive dynamics typically seen within well-
25 functioning work groups (Lee, Mazmanian, & Perlow, 2020). Individuals who build strong
26 work-related relationships are able to openly discuss and address challenges, thereby enhancing
27 their capabilities at work and further strengthening their relationships (Carmeli, Dutton, &
28 Hardin, 2015; Carmeli & Gittell, 2009; Lee et al., 2020). Put another way, paradox peer
29 relationships, like strong work relationships, fuel positive cycles of engagement in building
30 relationships and navigating paradox. Of note, as individuals iterated through these cycles, they
31 developed stronger and more trusting relationships, including with peers from competing firms.
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47 To summarize, my model explains how relationships with paradox peers help individuals
48 engage paradox in their occupations through three mechanisms, in turn facilitating the ability of
49 individuals to draw on peers to continually work through paradox in their home organizations.
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54 Overall, those who thrive when navigating paradox do so by remaining energized and motivated
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3 (Keller & Chen, 2017; Miron-Spektor et al., 2018). My model shows how this process can be
4
5 based in supportive peer relationships.
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7 8 **THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

9 The model developed in this paper contributes a more relational approach to paradox
10 studies, offering insight into the interactions and relationships between people that underpin how
11 individuals navigate paradox. Research in paradox has begun to recognize that paradoxes emerge
12 in social contexts, pointing to a form of relationality in how paradoxes are “talked into being”
13 (Sheep et al., 2017), recognized as salient through interactions (Knight and Paroutis, 2017) and
14 enacted through the everyday interactions of individuals (Lê and Bednarek, 2017). Yet research
15 explicating the ways that individuals navigate paradox has emphasized the practices in which
16 individuals engage rather than the way in which those practices implicitly rely on interactions
17 between organizational members (e.g., Abdallah et al., 2011; Bednarek et al., 2017; Lüscher &
18 Lewis, 2008; Schneider et al., 2020). The core contribution of this study is to unpack how and
19 why interactions with others, in particular with peers, enable individuals to more effectively
20 navigate paradox. In doing so, I surface the interactional threads that have been hinted at in
21 extant studies of navigating paradox (Jarzabkowski & Lê, 2017; Keller, Wong, & Liu, 2020;
22 Sheep et al., 2017) and move beyond existing work by providing a rich understanding of the
23 relational mechanisms that allow individuals to engage paradox: connecting with one another to
24 relieve tensions, collectively protecting the paradox, and collaboratively brainstorming responses
25 to paradox. Thus, my research challenges paradox scholars to consider the centrality of social
26 contexts in how paradoxes come to light and in how individuals grapple with and respond to
27 paradoxical tensions.
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30 Four theoretical implications follow from this relational perspective. First, my findings
31 challenge individualistic assumptions about how actors navigate paradox. Much research has
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3 focused on the cognitive and behavioral capabilities of individuals as they respond to paradox
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5 (Schad et al., 2016). Advancements in research on paradoxical thinking place responses squarely
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7 in the cognitive realm (Keller & Chen, 2017; Miron-Spektor et al., 2018), thereby highlighting
8
9 individualized skill sets. For example, Miron-Spektor et al. (2018) depict some individuals as
10
11 holding more of a trade-off mentality between competing demands and other individuals as
12
13 comfortable and energized by persistent tensions. From this perspective, responses to paradox
14
15 appear to originate with the individual and are influenced by one's inner abilities to engage
16
17 tensions. Indeed, in many studies, responses appear to be developed based on the thoughts,
18
19 interpretations, and practices of individuals (Hahn et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2020; Smith, 2014;
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21 Zhang, Waldman, & Han, 2015).

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26 In contrast, my findings place relationality front and center in the process of navigating
27
28 paradoxical tensions. My model offers a deeper understanding of how relationships allow for
29
30 collective engagement with paradox, which in turn helps individuals navigate paradox. As
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32 Emirbayer (1997: 287) argued, the social world is composed of interconnected relations that
33
34 provide meaning and significance, such that "individual persons ... are inseparable from the
35
36 transactional [relational] contexts within which they are embedded." Extending these insights,
37
38 my model emphasizes how relationality is dominant in the ways that individuals navigate
39
40 paradox, even when they appear to lack internal relational partners. My findings show that
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42 relationships with multiple actors, sometimes unexpectedly outside of one's home organization,
43
44 support individuals as they work through paradox. Managing paradox may even be thought of as
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46 fundamentally relational, as it is through interacting with others that people debate the merits of
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48 competing goals (Huq et al., 2017; Wenzel et al., 2109), comfortably joke about tensions
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50 (Jarzabkowski & Lê, 2017), and respond to paradox (Putnam et al., 2016). My model thus
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3 resonates with research on relational sociology (Emirbayer, 1997; Mische, 2011) and
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5 psychological inquiries that place social relationships at the heart of work processes (Heaphy,
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7 Byron, Ballinger, Gittell, Leana, & Sluss, 2018; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Overall, my research
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9 challenges paradox scholars to expand their focus beyond the individual to a broader relational
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11 framework that enables a better understanding of how social exchanges cultivate and sustain
12
13 engagement with paradox.
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17 A second implication of my work is to challenge the implicit idea that individuals stay
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19 within the boundaries of their own organizations as they navigate paradox in their everyday
20
21 work. Many studies focus on leaders who drive organizational responses to paradox (Pradies et
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23 al., 2020; Smith, 2014) and individuals who engage in practices from within their organizations
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25 (Huq et al., 2017; Jarzabkowski and Lê, 2017; Jarzabkowski et al., 2013). The emphasis on intra-
26
27 organizational dynamics has been reinforced in part by a continued focus on paradoxes that are
28
29 core organizational concerns (Bednarek et al., 2017; Gotsi et al., 2010; Wenzel et al., 2019). My
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31 study invites scholars to recognize that paradox is not always championed by leaders and that
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33 individuals often navigate paradoxes from a more peripheral position without high levels of
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35 internal support (Berti & Simpson, 2019).
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40 In contrast with existing work, my model highlights the value of building relationships
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42 with external peers to address paradoxical demands internally. My findings suggest actors who
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44 struggle with paradox, particularly when they lack organizational support or are in a peripheral
45
46 position, benefit from actively engaging with external peers who allow them to step outside their
47
48 own organizational experiences. This builds on the idea that external actors provide new ways of
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50 seeing tensions (Jay, 2013) and the idea that external actors draw attention to both demands
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52 (Smith & Besharov, 2019) by showing the generativity that comes from relationships with
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3 external peers facing a similar paradox. In doing so, my findings on paradox peers help explain
4 the value of cooperative occupational communities (Van Maanen & Barley, 1984) for navigating
5 paradox. Echoing the idea that occupational-based heterogeneity can be an enabling force
6 (Howard-Grenville et al., 2017), my findings suggest that outsiders can be sources of creativity
7 and motivation. Indeed, connections to outsiders can prevent insiders from becoming stuck in
8 unproductive responses to paradox (Smith & Lewis, 2011; Sundaramurthy & Lewis, 2003).
9
10 Moreover, while we might not expect to find open and vulnerable engagement between peers in
11 competing organizations, it is the openness of paradox peer relationships that supports mutual
12 success, both within organizations and across the professional field (see also Sonenshein, Nault,
13 & Obodary, 2017). The findings thus reflect an irony that individuals may need to be vulnerable
14 with outsiders to advance responses to paradox internally. More broadly, my work encourages
15 scholars to extend beyond the analytical boundaries of the organization to more accurately
16 interpret the dynamics that shape paradox management.
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33 A third important implication of this study is to extend the concept of a paradox
34 mindset—the extent to which one accepts and is energized by tensions (Miron-Spektor et al.,
35 2018)—to include a relational dimension. Research on paradox mindsets has focused on
36 identifying individual differences in cognition, and thus has not offered much insight into how
37 such mindsets are developed or sustained (Keller & Chen, 2017; Miron-Spektor et al., 2018). My
38 findings suggest paradox mindsets have an important collective element. Interacting with
39 paradox peers enabled grantmakers to reduce anxiety, value both goals, and generate new
40 responses, thereby helping them remain inspired to pursue competing goals. These interactions
41 were especially helpful because grantmakers were relatively isolated internally, suggesting that
42 relational partners are important for sustaining paradox mindsets amidst demotivating forces,
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3 such as disempowerment (Berti & Simpson, 2019). I thus build on emerging findings about how
4 cultural backgrounds shape paradox mindsets (Keller, Loewenstein, & Yan, 2017) by offering
5 additional insights into the role of local interactions. Complementing calls for a deeper
6 understanding of the factors influencing paradoxical cognition (Keller & Chen, 2017; Miron-
7 Spektor et al., 2018; Schad et al., 2016), my work highlights the need to further consider how
8 relationships enable individuals to develop and sustain paradox mindsets.
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11 Fourth, my model offers new insights regarding the role of lower-power relational
12 partners in shaping how individuals navigate paradox. Typically, paradox scholars have
13 prioritized understanding how high-power actors like senior leaders shape the navigation of
14 competing demands (Berti & Simpson, 2019; Pradies et al., 2020). In studies documenting how
15 non-leaders manage paradox, researchers have similarly emphasized how higher-power actors
16 (i.e., leaders) provide lower-power individuals with resources, such as ways to frame one's
17 identity (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009; Besharov, 2014; Gotsi et al., 2010), space to work
18 through tensions (Gümüşay et al., 2020; Knight & Paroutis, 2017), and the support necessary to
19 prioritize competing goals (Huq et al., 2017; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008; Jarzabkowski et al., 2013).
20 When studies have looked at interactions between non-leaders, scholars have often emphasized
21 conflicts between groups who are attached to one of the competing goals (Huq et al., 2017;
22 Wenzel et al., 2019). My findings highlight that individuals do not always receive support from
23 leaders (Berti & Simpson, 2019) and instead may obtain support from lower-power relational
24 partners. Although grantmaking peers at other organizations lacked internal power, they offered
25 key relational resources that ultimately empowered individual grantmakers to work through a
26 business-society paradox, even when they felt misunderstood by their own profit-minded leaders.
27 Indeed, whereas high-power leaders have the authority to essentially require individuals to
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3 pursue paradoxical demands, my findings show that a community of relatively lower-power
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5 individuals who collectively struggle over tensions can inspire a strong sense of internal
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7 motivation that empowers individuals to work through paradox. This reflects the finding that
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9 subordinate group members can build a sense of collective efficacy through interactions without
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11 the presence of higher-power individuals (Kellogg, 2009; Polletta, 1999). My work joins other
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13 scholars in calling for greater attention to the power relations at play in navigating tensions (Berti
14
15 & Simpson, 2019; Cunha & Putnam, 2019; Wenzel et al., 2019), while also laying the foundation
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17 for future research on understanding dynamics of empowerment around paradox.
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22 Finally, my findings have implications for research on work and occupations and the
23
24 ways for-profit firms engage business-society tensions. Both classic and recent research on
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26 occupations has focused conflicts between different groups (e.g., Abbott, 1988; DiBenigno,
27
28 2018). By contrast, I consider paradoxical tensions as core and persistent dynamics within a
29
30 single occupational group. As people become more attached to and reliant on their occupations
31
32 as a source of meaning (Anteby et al., 2016; Bechky, 2011), I encourage scholars to explore how
33
34 persistent contradictions in occupational roles influence how people experience work. Rather
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36 than attempting to narrow jurisdictional expertise through specific tasks and accreditation
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38 (Augustine, 2020; Sandholtz et al., 2019), members of occupations who face paradoxes may
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40 benefit by remaining open to seeing their work in dynamic and even inconsistent ways (Smith,
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42 2014). My model suggests that the extent to which occupational members collectively engage
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44 tensions may be critical in explaining whether occupational groups become stuck in tension-
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46 filled dynamics (e.g., Anteby & Chan, 2018) or display the ability to embrace tensions and
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48 change (e.g., Howard-Grenville et al., 2017; Kellogg, 2009). In this way, my model reflects more
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50 interactionalist approaches to understanding occupational groups (Anteby et al., 2016; Bechky,
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3 2003; Huising, 2015; Kellogg, 2009). At the same time, interactional studies of occupational
4 groups tend to highlight relationships between an occupational group and other stakeholders,
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6 whereas my findings highlight the relational practices within an occupational community. Thus,
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8 while my model offers a more relational approach to paradox theory by pushing paradox scholars
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10 beyond organizational boundaries, the findings also suggest that occupational scholars can
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12 benefit from adopting a more inward-looking approach to examining how relationships develop
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14 and provide resources within the boundaries of an occupation (Van Maanen & Barley, 1984).
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19 My findings also draw attention to the fact that in order to answer calls to understand how
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21 for-profit firms engage with societal objectives given their dominant economic goals (Sharma &
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23 Good, 2013; Van der Byl & Slawinski, 2015), researchers must examine the work of those who
24
25 navigate these tensions on behalf of firms. By hiring grantmakers, ethics officers, sustainability
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27 professionals, and individuals in similar roles, firms benefit from the pursuit of prosocial
28
29 initiatives while retaining the option to decouple or buffer their core functions from engaging
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31 with contradictions (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Weaver et al., 1999). My findings imply that
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33 although firms may attempt to resolve paradox by creating these positions and segmenting
34
35 tensions there, they may simply be shifting the paradox from the organizational level to the
36
37 occupational level, thereby creating persistent challenges for individuals. Relegating business-
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39 society paradoxes to the purview of individuals in such occupations without engaging these
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41 issues at the organizational level may stall or even reverse social impact (Dobbin, 2009;
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43 Kanashiro & Rivera, 2017). My findings suggest that occupational peers can and do encourage
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45 one another to sustain their commitments to social impact. In future research, scholars could
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47 investigatge how occupational groups work to move social issues from the periphery to the core
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49 of the firm. Professional associations have typically been recognized for the roles they play in
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3 promoting standards and providing training (Abbott, 1988; Greenwood, Suddaby, & Hinings,
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5 2002). Scholars have only begun to see cross-organizational convening as pivotal to furthering
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7 social initiatives inside companies. My work suggests that cross-organizational relationships may
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9 fundamentally shape how individuals in CSR-related roles manage their work, and calls for
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11 greater attention to these positions and relationships.
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14 **Limitations, Generalizability, and Future Research**

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16 Although the grantmakers in this study successfully tapped into their external peer
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18 network to access positive relational resources, the model developed here may not apply in the
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20 same way to all individuals who face paradox in their occupations. I was not able to capture
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22 several potentially important areas of variation in this study. My data collection strategies, which
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24 relied largely on referral chains in one geographic location where I observed the existence of an
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26 active peer group, likely directed my attention to grantmakers who were connected to one
27
28 another rather than those who remained isolated within their firms. The case of the more isolated
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30 Gerry suggests that individuals without peer connections may struggle to engage competing
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32 demands compared to those who are connected. In future studies, researchers could more
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34 explicitly consider variation in the extent to which individuals connect with paradox peers. The
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36 grantmakers in this study all resided in large, Fortune 500 organizations. It is possible that the
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38 model may not apply in the same way to those who fill the philanthropic role at smaller
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40 organizations where philanthropic resources are scarce and the grantmaker may wear multiple
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42 hats. Without the time and space to recognize and process paradoxical tensions in relation to
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44 one's mandate, individuals may struggle to develop deep peer dynamics around paradox and thus
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46 have less robust paradox engagement.
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53 Moreover, additional research is needed to investigate whether some paradox peer
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55 connections matter more than others in shaping how individuals address tensions. In my setting,
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3 some peer relationships were closer than others, in part because some had just started their
4 careers whereas others had been in the community for over a decade. I observed similar
5 relational mechanisms in both mature and developing peer relationships, reflecting the finding
6 that core networks comprise both long-standing and recent ties (Small, Pamphile, & McMahan,
7 2015). This may not always be the case. Other inquiries into paradox peer dynamics may
8 uncover that new relationships bring “fresh eyes” and energy to paradox (Howard-Grenville et
9 al., 2017) whereas more established networks may enable people to take purposeful actions to
10 change entrenched responses (Reay, Golden-Biddle, & Germann, 2006). Additionally, I
11 identified positive ways of interacting around paradox, but peers also could relate to each other
12 in negative ways, potentially resulting in viscous cycles (Lewis, 2000) or an escalation of
13 commitment to ineffective approaches (Sleesman, 2019). In future studies, researchers could
14 further unpack the factors that prevent destructive cycles and enable positive relational dynamics
15 (Lee et al., 2020) in cross-organizational peer settings.

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33 It is also important to consider the extent to which the model depicted here generalizes to
34 settings beyond corporate philanthropy. The insights may apply to other occupations or work
35 roles with competing demands that are not seen as congruent with the dominant strategy of
36 leaders (e.g., HR, CSR, legal, etc.), but additional research is needed to explore the boundaries.
37 For instance, in more competitive contexts, it may be more difficult to establish trusting
38 relationships and empathic peer dynamics. Moreover, it is possible that the relational
39 mechanisms differ in occupational groups that are more established. While the still-
40 professionalizing grantmakers were open to creative brainstorming and integrating expertise
41 from opposing viewpoints, individuals in more mature occupations can become entrenched
42 (Sandholtz et al., 2019) and thus may be less open to engaging tensions as paradoxical.

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3 In the future, researchers could also explore the role of paradox peers for those whose
4 work roles do not explicitly fall within specific occupational groups. In theory, a variety of
5 individuals from the most senior leaders (Smith & Tushman, 2005) to frontline employees
6 (Schneider et al., 2020) could rely on paradox peers from other organizations to engage paradox
7 in similar ways to the grantmakers in this study. Yet, it is likely that the occupational nature of
8 the paradox peer ties in this setting significantly enhanced their ability to form peer relationships.
9 Occupational communities are linked by expertise which allows for quick understanding
10 between members (Bechky, 2003; Van Maanen & Barley, 1984) and professional associations
11 enable members to meet with regular cadence, supporting the building and maintenance of ties
12 (Small, 2009b). Without an organizing function such as group membership or a forum for
13 exchange, paradox peer ties may be less likely to develop and peers may not engage frequently
14 enough to deal with challenges as they arise.

30 **CONCLUSION**

31
32 As current societal challenges exacerbate the complexities and intricacies of our lives
33 (Ferraro, Etzion, & Gehman, 2015; Sharma et al., 2021), understanding how individuals embrace
34 and navigate paradoxical tensions at the workplace is increasingly important. This is true not
35 only for top executives and strategists, but also for individuals whose occupational roles require
36 them to navigate paradox, particularly when paradox is not a dominant organizational concern
37 for senior leaders. Developing knowledge about factors that support individuals as they work
38 through tensions in the face of these challenges is a crucial step toward further integrating
39 corporate responsibility, ethics, diversity, and sustainability occupations into firms. I hope that
40 the peer-based model of navigating paradox presented here inspires further exploration of the
41 relational dynamics that help individuals collectively thrive while embracing tensions at work.
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FIGURE 1: DATA STRUCTURE

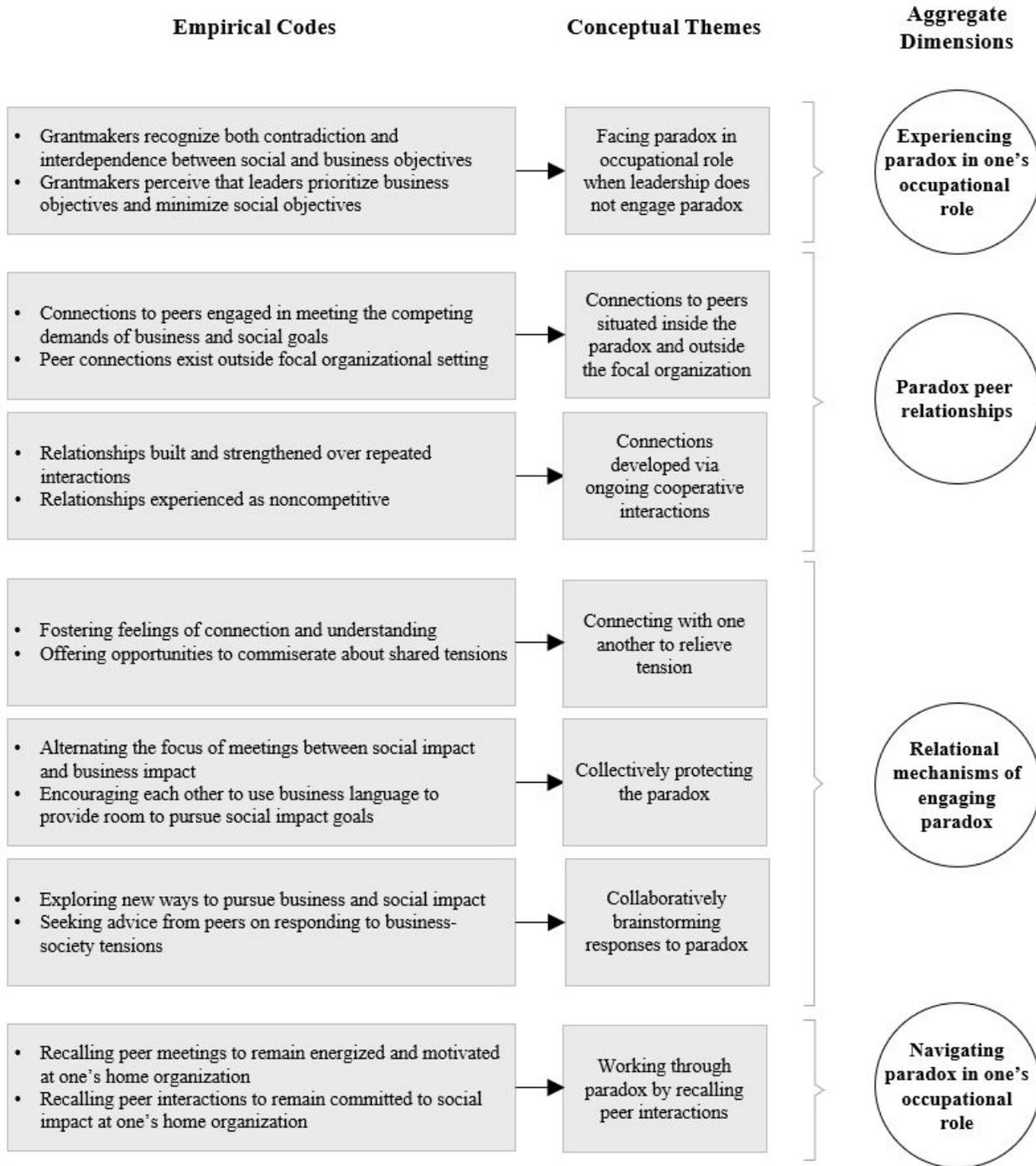


FIGURE 2: PEER-BASED MODEL OF NAVIGATING PARADOX

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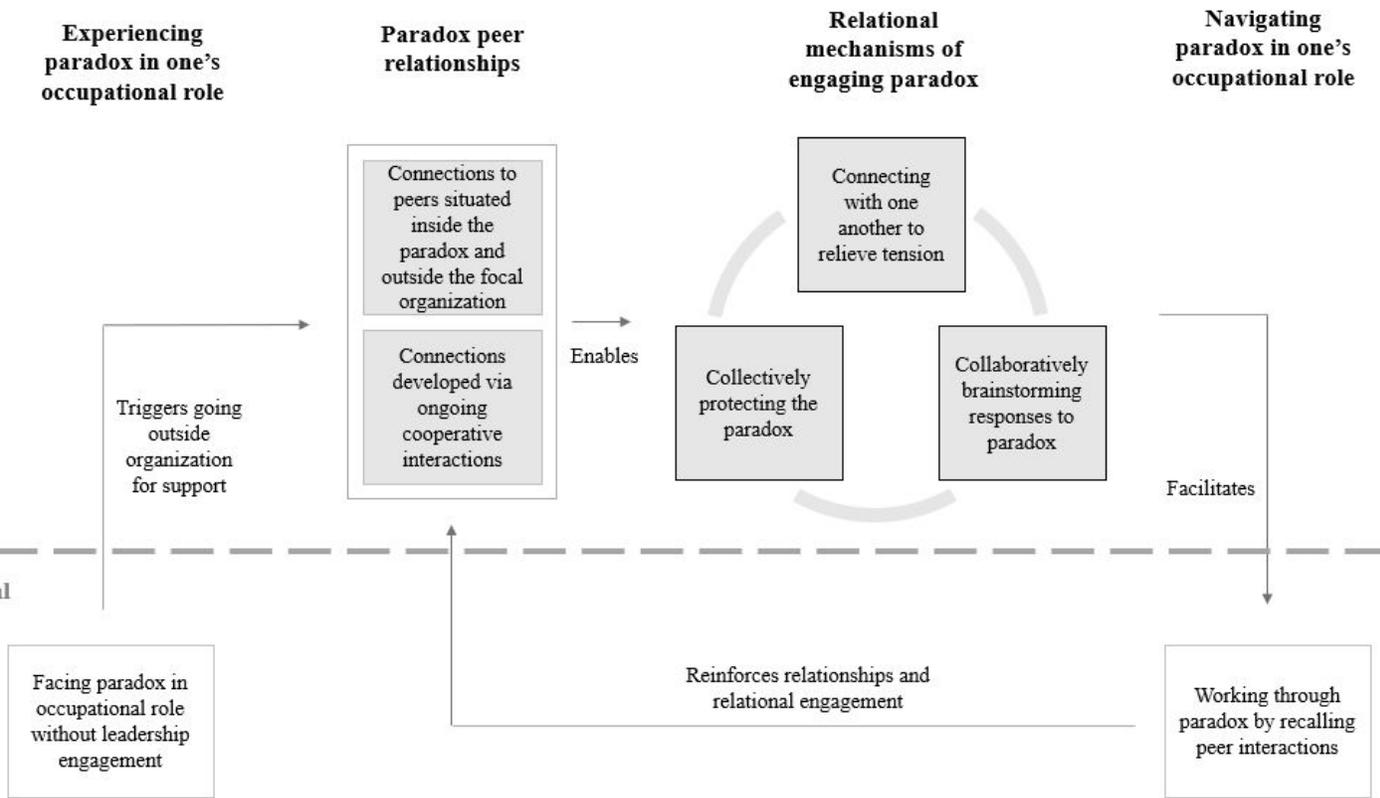


TABLE 1: REPRESENTATIVE DATA

Aggregate dimension	Conceptual category	Empirical codes	Representative data
Experiencing paradox in one's occupation	Facing paradox in occupational role when leadership does not engage paradox	Grantmakers recognize both contradiction and interdependence between social and business objectives	<p data-bbox="831 350 1881 586">“[It can feel like I am] talking out of both sides of my head at the same time ... But I love being able to do both. It's great to—obviously to be able to give back to the community and have some resources to do that. If there's an agency that's doing like awesome, awesome work, great leadership, huge impact, I can advocate to fund them, and I can fight for them and usually we can get them some money. ... On the business side, it's really good to know that like okay, I am part of a corporation, I am making an impact on the bottom line and like actually, here's how we align with the strategic goals, like we belong here, we're not just like the charity, fluffy fun side.” – Allison</p> <p data-bbox="831 626 1881 805">“It's a lot of hard work. you're working with all internal and external forces to get things done. I mean every area [business and social goals] is important, but they don't align. And so, there is a lot of pressure around that. [At the same time], to me, it is the obligation, to help support, to help support the people who contribute to your growth and your welfare. It's the ability to, to give, as well as receive. It gives us an opportunity to help support the communities that are helping us grow and thrive.” – Sharon</p>
		Grantmakers perceive that leaders prioritize business objectives and minimize social objectives	<p data-bbox="831 829 1881 976">“If your leadership in the company is not believing in it and it's not built upon that kind of structure of social good, it can be a pain in the ass to do this type of work because then it's all about 'How does this build the business?' ... The job of this company is to make money, period. That's it. That's what they do. I'm going to try struggle to get ... I'm going to do some good, darn it.” – JoAnn</p> <p data-bbox="831 1016 1881 1187">“You have to understand the fundamental incentive of the institution. We're supposed to make money for shareholders and that's going to be our primary thing. There's not going to be an incentive to do that [social impact] necessarily ... [Leaders] all fundamentally have hearts and they're all individually altruistic, but that's not what this organization is measured by. At the end of the year, it's about making their numbers, making their margins, selling more stuff.” – Roxanne</p>
Paradox peer relationships	Connections to peers situated inside the paradox and outside the focal	Connections to others engaged in meeting the competing demands of business and social goals	<p data-bbox="831 1219 1881 1357">“You know, we just have similar experiences, professionally. Small teams. We know what it's like to be under pressure or to like fight above your weight to try and get something across. ... you're always fighting for your life, in a sense, or budget or reason to be because you're not a money generating department in a company—and money generation is everything, right?” – Michelle</p>

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organization		“We get together and try to figure out, ‘Hey, what issues are you dealing with? What issues are we dealing with? How can we make an impact in these areas?’ That sort of thing.” – Jeff
Peer connections exist outside the focal organizational setting		“Talking to outside people, it’s nice because then you can hear different things that they’re doing [outside of what we’re doing at my organization].” – Elizabeth “[My peers] don’t have to navigate the structure and the pressures of my company and the way it works. Every company is so different in the way they approach corporate philanthropy... The diversity of perspectives [in the meetings] is really valuable.” – Debra
Connections developed via cooperative ongoing interactions	Relationships built and strengthened over repeated interactions	“And then you start seeing the same people over and over again, and then that helped, too [in building my network of peers]. Yeah. But you have to make an effort.” – Nancy “I think you have more rich conversations in a smaller setting, and I guess then if it’s recurrent, you—unlike a conference with 100 people all where you’re sitting for an hour, you can build connections better, so you can build the informal ties that you wouldn’t necessarily get from a huge conference. ... otherwise, we wouldn’t see each other in between those things.” – Elizabeth
	Relationships experienced as noncompetitive	“I think the really important thing is it’s not competitive whatsoever, even though the space itself is trying to differentiate your company from others. I would say it’s an extremely collaborative space, extremely positive space ... complete collaboration and openness and willingness to share and help however you can among the community, no matter who I talk to.” – Jessica “But it’s nice because you are in a relaxed environment, and you can just kind of network and talk, and there is no, like I said, no agenda.” – Ashley
Relational mechanisms of engaging paradox	Connecting with one another to relieve tensions	Fostering feelings of connection and understanding “[Olivia] actually mentored me when I started in the field. ... I just love her to death ... she is just such a sweetheart. When I first came into the space in CSR, she really showed me the ropes ... I literally grew this department at [my company] from the ground up. When I started I was alone. It was great to have someone like her there.” – Pattie “Somebody that 100 percent understands what you are going through. So, your peer group will 100 percent understand what you're going through because the rules and things that apply to a us don't necessarily don't always apply to other functions.” – Hannah
	Offering opportunities to commiserate about shared tensions	“I would also say that there’s the commiseration piece. And it’s just more the emotional support. ... I think it’s just understanding the challenges of wanting to fund more than you’re able to. The challenges of people in your company not understanding what you’re doing and the value you bring and why this really isn’t about just giving away money and having a party. It’s

about stakeholder engagement. It's about license to operate. It's about a larger sustainability program for the company, regardless of how they frame it. I think the commiseration is also around relationships with NGOs, and that sort of strange dynamic that you can develop." – Cassie

"You feel somehow better in discussing these challenges 'cause people get it." – Sharon

Collectively protecting the paradox	Alternating the focus of meetings between social impact and business impact	<p>Meeting on how to assess the social impact of portfolios overtime; presentation given by consultant who works with nonprofits. (High-level overview of a meeting on social impact, from field notes)</p> <p>Meeting on communicating business results to executives using different reporting systems; presentation given by a CSR consultant. (High-level overview of a meeting on business impact, from field notes)</p>
	Encouraging each other to use business language to provide room to pursue social impact goals	<p>In remarks after a group meeting, a grantmaker mentioned a useful resource provided by the Association for Corporate Contributions Professionals (ACCP), a group to which many grantmakers belonged. On its website, ACCP provides a template letter that offers appropriate business-framed language to frame their conference attendance to leaders as beneficial, even though the conference addresses both business and social impact. (from field notes 10/2015).</p> <p>At a meeting about the future of the profession, a panel of grantmakers discussed how their ability to adapt was an asset that would support their status within firms and their longevity in a growing profession. One panelist shared: "You have to know how to think like your CEO. You have to know how to make your work relevant. We need to adapt. The good thing is that we can have a lot of different types of visibility within the corporate organization, within the structure." The panel discussed how, because they could have many positive influences on the business even from different departmental homes, they would be able to continue to pursue social impact and grow the profession. (from field notes 06/2016)</p>
Collaboratively brainstorming responses to paradox	Exploring new ways to pursue business and social impact	<p>At an event focused on volunteerism and engaging employees, a grantmaker panelist described a strategy that involved cultivating and engaging employees so that they could serve as "champions" for CSR. As he described his program and how it grew from 30, to 300, to 1,200, to 7,000 engaged champions in four years, a few grantmakers in the audience remarked that he had done a great job with the program. He received several questions from the audience. One asked how he managed to set it up, another asked about partners he worked with, a third asked how it might work in a company with a less-developed program where management was not as warm to the idea, and a fourth grantmaker asked about the tactics for growing at that speed. The panelist answered all questions, including details about the one-pagers he made for senior leaders, the steps he took to recruit and engage employees, the partners he worked with, and more. (from field notes 02/2015).</p>

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		<p>A grantmaker in the audience asked the grantmaker panelists about engaging employees via matching gift programs, where companies match a donation made from an employee to a nonprofit group. A few grantmakers shared their approaches including the level of match their company provided (e.g., 1:1 matching up to 1:3 matching) as well as how they define and monitor the types of organizations that can receive funding. The benefit of this program is that this increases employee engagement and donations simultaneously. (from field notes 02/2016).</p>
	<p>Seeking advice from peers on responding to business-society tensions</p>	<p>“Part of it is because we’re so unique in our company ... so we do benchmark, and we talk to people. That helps us a lot. Then I was able to call on my colleagues, say, ‘Well, how would you guys give it?’ ... There’s a lot of benefits to having peers and that network that you talk to and getting information quickly ... we’re all chiming in on different things that we keep hearing, and then we all work together to figure it out.” – Elizabeth</p> <p>“[Peer grantmakers] can help you see what isn’t working too. To me that’s very valuable, ‘cause that way you get some kind of sense of what else is possible, and then provide resources to help someone solve whatever the problem is. You know, helping to push people forward.” – Miranda</p>
<p>Navigating paradox in one’s occupational role</p>	<p>Working through paradox by recalling peer interactions</p>	<p>“It’s such a difficult role, because on the one hand, I think internal people often see me as either an environmentalist that’s trying to push things too far, or they see me as doing fun things. And that’s not the point. ... [Peer meetings are] a break from your normal routine of implementation, and it’s energizing in the sense that you get re-inspired, re-committed, that other people are in the trenches with you.” – Debra</p> <p>“I feel like every time I would attend a [peer meeting], ... I would come back so pumped like, ‘We can do so many things.’” – Anne</p>
	<p>Recalling peer interactions to remain committed to social impact at one’s company</p>	<p>“It’s a lot of work to do that—to put the [social] measurements in place, and track all that, year after year. And no one likes it, but then when you have the results, people like it. But you have to lay the foundation—all of the stuff that no one sees until that result comes out. And that gets hard. So, [my peers help me] stop and celebrate those things.” – Emily</p> <p>“We’re in this field because we wanna make a difference, we wanna help the nonprofits, help communities, and things like that. All the crappy stuff [like the big emphasis on ROI] ... you just be resilient and get through it, because at the end of the day, your job is so much better and broader, and as we do it collectively.” – John</p>

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