A Paradox Approach to Societal Tensions during the Pandemic Crisis

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Introduction

Garima Sharma, Simone Carmine, Camile Pradies & Joshua Keller

> COVID-19 isn't going away soon [..] By now we know [. . .] that the novel Coronavirus will be with us for a rather long time. [. . .] In the interest of managing our expectations and governing ourselves accordingly, it might be helpful, for our pandemic state of mind, to envision this predicament—existentially, at least—as a soliton wave: a wave that just keeps rolling and rolling, carrying on under its own power for a great distance.
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> Siobhan Roberts, *New York Times*, May 8, 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic has consequences that we will continue to face as a society for years to come. The seemingly intractable nature of the pandemic yields many tensions at multiple and interconnected levels—planetary, societal, organizational, and individual (Hahn et al., 2015). Few organization theories are as versatile as paradox to capture such complex phenomena. Defined as a "persistent contradiction between interdependent elements" (Schad et al., 2016, p. 10), research seeks to explore tensions' sources, nature, management, and dynamics (Carmine & Smith, in press). Specifically, at the societal level, researchers have drawn on paradox theory to address important questions related to sustainability (Hahn et al., 2014; Hengst et al., in press; Sharma & Bansal, 2017), social impact (Smith & Besharov, 2019; Smith et al., 2013), and systems change (Hahn & Knight, 2019; Schad & Bansal, 2018).

The nine short essays in this article focus at the societal level and the various tensions brought forth by the current pandemic such as the tension related to health and economy (see Schad & Etter; Sheep; Li & Keller further); risk and the associated question of trust in science (see Fairhurst & Endres further); and the rigor of the scientific process (see Lê & Pradies further). These essays show us that COVID-19 is not an isolated phenomenon rather there are multiple and interrelated crises facing us.

One cannot understand the implications of COVID-19 without also considering its interrelationship with other crises such as the vicious cycle of distrust in pubic authority (see Rocheville & Bartunek further), women leadership and the tension of agency-communion (see Putnam & Buzzanell further), raising collective voice against injustice while staying safe in physical gatherings (see Pamphile further), and addressing issues such as climate change which are intertwined with the current crisis yet not as evident (see Hahn further).

These essays offer several provocative implications for paradox theory and future research. A few put forth new insights on key concepts in paradox theory such as the relationship between the poles of a tension. Schad and Etter challenge the assumption of ex ante fixed poles. They argue that tension between health and economy changes as the situation evolves. Paradox scholars have the opportunity to theorize such dynamics. Similar to Schad and Etter, Li and Keller ask us to rethink the notion of "balancing" between the two

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poles. By drawing from the Eastern view of paradox, they reconceptualize balancing in terms of changing relationships between the two poles over time and balance as a meta-cognitive concept whereby actors show flexibility in balancing.

Others have further added to the relationship between the poles of the tension. Sheep draws on the notion of knotted tensions to argue for dynamism in theorizing paradox. By bringing in the concepts of social identity, political identity, and threat to positive identity, he shows that identities and related tensions (opener/economic and restrictor/public health identities) are knotted with each other. Although not referring to knottedness, Rocheville and Bartunek, and Pamphile also draw upon the interconnectedness in tensions as they zoom out to the whole system and consider relationships between crises, for example, one related to racial injustice and the current pandemic. Rocheville and Bartunek also challenge us to consider the role of emotions such as anger, hatred, and fear in theorizing paradox, and Pamphile offers empathy with others as a mechanism for fostering paradoxical mindset through a collective mechanism. Along the same lines, Putnam and Buzzanell describe paradoxical mindset embraced by women leaders bringing to our attention gendered nature of the response to tensions of leadership in a crisis.

Further, science around vaccines and other solutions are important elements of societal level responses to the tensions fostered by the current pandemic with useful implications for paradox theory. Lê and Pradies shed light on the fact that science has largely favored speed at the expense of rigor in responding to the pandemic. This phenomenon, they argue, challenges a well-established insight in paradox theory that one must maximize both poles. Instead, they advance that when one pole (expediency) is dominant, then maximizing both poles may not be an option, instead the other pole must at least suffice.

Finally, Hahn offers important implications for paradox researchers interested in the phenomenon of sustainability. The current crisis brings to light the materiality in responding to paradox such as those related to climate change. He offers the concepts of collective rather than individual salience, as well as time-lagged salience such that, unlike COVID-19, we may need to respond to issues such as climate change before they become salient.

Together, these essays help us make better sense of the many interconnected layers of the COVID-19 pandemic across societies. They also offer several conceptual nuggets, with the potential to foster novel research on paradox, as we expand the scope of inquiry beyond the organization in addressing society's grand challenges (Schad & Smith, 2019; Van der Byl et al., 2020).

Public Health and Economic Activity

Jonathan Schad and Michael Etter

In 2020, a virus infected the world. Initially, political leaders outside the hotspots were hesitating to react. Yet when the effects started to materialize in their neighboring and home countries, political leaders were confronted with the urgency to respond to the dramatic images. Most governments tried to act decisively in a situation marked by high uncertainty and focused on protecting public health; with the aim of preventing the spread of COVID-19 and avoiding the number of associated deaths rising, many political leaders opted for a "lockdown." While this move slowed down the rise of cases, it also led to an unprecedented standstill of most economic activity. Emphasizing safety, a tension between health versus economy found quick resonance in the political and public discourse. Voices with a more nuanced understanding found it hard to get heard as polarization between economy and health built up in discourses (see Sheep further). Such polarization can be reinforced by complex information exchange processes such as participatory digital media. It seems that the initial narratives of regulators and governments led to a seemingly irreconcilable polarity, which makes it difficult to get back to "normal" (see *The Guardian*, 2020 as an example for the discourse in the UK).

Looking at the "public health–economic activity" polarity through a paradox lens, brings several characteristics into sharper focus. First, in responding to tensions, paradox scholars caution not to ignore one side at the expense of another, which causes vicious cycles of decline and reinforces the polarity (Sundaramurthy & Lewis, 2003). Thus, paradox theory tells us how good intentions may bring about unintended consequences. Although difficult for political leaders when confronted with the urgency of rising deaths linked to COVID-19, paradox theory also provides important insight into how leaders can use guardrails to emphasize one side while avoiding to disregard the other (Smith & Besharov, 2019), adapt rhetorical strategies that encompass both sides (Winkler et al., 2020), and seek support of outsiders to tackle a vicious cycle (Pradies et al., 2020).

Second, using different, yet complementary assumptions, paradox scholars accommodate both the social construction of tensions as well as their material underpinnings (Putnam et al., 2016; Schad et al., 2016). This allows us to disentangle the complex nature of tensions and explore both the perception of tensions (through e.g., political, public, and social media discourses) as well as their material side (e.g., infection rate, mortality, economic decline, bankruptcies). The systems perspective on tensions cautions researchers to go beyond the perceived (Schad & Bansal, 2018) as the realm of public health and the economic realm likely become salient at different points in time. The quantum view then points out that measuring the material has fundamental implications of how it is perceived (Hahn & Knight, 2019). Important implications arise such as how the constructed (as in social media discourse related to the pandemic) and the material (as in the infection rate) interact to form a health-economic activity as a polarity.

Third, the burgeoning topic of paradox's microfoundations helps us better understand how individual leaders

experience tensions and might adhere more to one side than another. Experienced anxiety (Vince & Broussine, 1996) and ambivalence (Ashforth et al., 2014) raise defensiveness and discomfort when confronted with competing demands (Lewis, 2000), such as when navigating the opposing poles of public health and economic activity. While a "paradox mindset" (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018) allows individuals to hold two opposing elements in mind (Hahn et al., 2014), recent research emphasizes how individuals can be constrained by their context (e.g., Berti & Simpson, 2019; Gaim et al., 2019). Trying to understand the current polarity better, researchers can look at their cognitive abilities (i.e., paradox mindset), while also looking at their respective situation which draws them rather to one side than the other (e.g., electorate, media reaction, personal circumstances).

While paradox theory helps us better understand the tension between public health and economic activity, this pandemic also serves as a centrifugal force for theory development. Paradox has traditionally focused on the organization—how organizations or individuals in organizations experience and cope with tensions. Yet COVID-19 is a qualitatively different phenomenon that can be seen as "wicked problem" or "grand challenge" (Ferraro et al., 2015; Reinecke & Ansari, 2016) since it involves high uncertainty, calls for urgency, spans levels of analysis, and evolves over time. Theorizing this crisis and the multifaceted sources of the health–economy tension, challenges some of our underlying assumptions and forces us to rethink two related aspects of paradox dynamics.

First, we think that theorizing the emergence of tensions provides a particularly fruitful area. As paradox researchers, we often take tensions as given as we explore paradoxical contexts (Child, 2020) or argue that tensions become salient when organizations are exposed to change, plurality, and scarcity (Smith & Lewis, 2011). In the context of COVID-19, the health–economy tension emerged under high uncertainty, a condition which so far has been undertheorized in current paradox theory. Prior to the pandemic, there was no (perceived) tension. This challenges the understanding of navigating between ex ante fixed poles. As knowledge and issues (e.g., lockdown, social distancing, masks) around the tension evolve, it can be argued that the poles themselves are in motion. In a context of high uncertainty about the poles (e.g., mortality of the virus; economic impact), the extremes can themselves become more polarized, which makes striking a balance much more difficult. We thus suggest that an interesting issue to look at is how poles react to one another in dynamic contexts and become more extreme, rather than looking at the navigation of ex ante fixed poles.

Second, the context of COVID-19 expands our understanding of escalation of tensions as a multilevel process of polarization. Current paradox research focuses on individual-level and group biases that accelerate polarization, such as groupthink or distrust (Sundaramurthy & Lewis, 2003). While this research largely focuses on dynamics on one level

of analysis, the pandemic requires us to expand analysis across levels. We need to bring in meso-level of government and regulatory actors, and to consider the micro-level to grasp individuals' tensions in their everyday life. It is only by taking these various levels into consideration that we can begin to see how health and safety came to be pitted against economic interests under conditions of urgency. This multilevel lens can add to existing paradox research showing how nested tensions are experienced across levels (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009) and how individuals' resources can facilitate aggregate organizational responses (Keller et al., 2020). Extending this line of inquiry can help us to better understand aggregation and diffusion mechanisms across levels that constitute or ease polarization in public discourses. It provides ample opportunities for future theorizing and methodological innovation (Bednarek et al., in press), such as looking at the discourse in the digital public sphere (Etter et al., 2019).

Belonging Tensions During a Pandemic Crisis

Mathew Sheep

In an interview reported in *The New York Times* (Senior, 2020), Dr Anthony Fauci, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases in the United States, observed:

> There's this feeling that there's opening the country on one end of the spectrum, and public health measures that suppress things and lock them down on the other. They should not be opposing forces. The guidelines that we put out a couple of months ago, those should be followed and appreciated as the *vehicle* to open the country, as opposed to the *obstacle* to opening the country.

In that framing, Dr Fauci articulated a paradox approach to two overarching priorities that have been in tension during the COVID-19 pandemic: *opening* for economic recovery versus *restricting* (e.g., locking down, social distancing) for public health and safety. Two individual/group identity categories are implicated that can be labeled as *opener/economic* versus *restrictor/health* identities. While many have framed these identities as opposing poles—some as a zero-sum game—Dr Fauci's approach would not pit them against one another as mutually constraining "obstacles" (either-or approach) but rather as mutually enabling "vehicles" (both-and approach).

Our operative question is: How can paradox theory and constitution of tensional identity categories contribute to our understanding of belonging tensions in times of pandemic? *Belonging tensions*, or paradoxes of identity, are made salient as complexity and plurality drive "tensions between the individual and the collective and between competing values, roles, and memberships." Further, competing identities create conflict and uncertainty (Smith & Lewis, 2011, p. 383).

As the category feature of "uncertainty" is frequently heard to describe the COVID-19 crisis, one might further ask: How is pandemic uncertainty constituted by making salient the belonging tension of "opener/economic" versus "restrictor/public health" identity categories? The communicative, constitutive practice of category work packs category labels with certain category *features* (Jayyusi, 1984)—often for political aims or legitimation of certain category positions. Category work is both "unrelievedly judgmental" in producing a moral order (a legitimated performance of the category; Jayyusi, 1984, p. 40) *and* unrelievedly paradoxical—even when such communication is ostensibly directed toward the reduction of paradoxicality and uncertainty in the system (as in a Luhmannian systems approach; Cooren & Seidl, 2020).

In pandemic discourse, especially as articulated in news media accounts, the restrictor/health versus opener/economic overarching categories are imbued with certain features that derive from related or knotted tensions of conflicting social identities, political identities, and positive identity threats.

Social identities are traditionally defined as "the individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups. . ." (Hogg & Terry, 2000, p. 122) or "a system of social categorizations that 'creates and defines an individual's own place in society'" (Tajfel, 1972, pp. 292–293). In the COVID-19 pandemic, social identities that become particularly salient for the restrictor/health identity category derive from demographic categories to which one belongs that are deemed more or less vulnerable to the virus, for example, age categories, race categories, residency, occupational identities, immunodeficiency conditions, and socioeconomic status. The opener/economic identity category also relies on *features* of these social identities to argue for the legitimacy of reopening schools (e.g., lower age categories are presumably less likely to be critically ill) or to reopen businesses and restaurants in regions with lower infection and mortality rates (residency categories). That the same social identities are invoked for both opener/economic and restrictor/health identities highlights tensions within the social identities themselves: older versus younger, wealthy versus poor, white versus people of color, essential versus nonessential workers, high-infection versus low-infection residency, and so on.

These categories can also become tensional when individuals "seek both homogeneity and distinction" within the same social identity (Kreiner et al., 2006; Smith & Lewis, 2011, p. 383). For example, someone might self-categorize as follows: "I am over 65 (age category) years and thus need to be careful in social/physical distancing (restrictor category), but I'm not immunodeficient (medical category), and I like to eat out in restaurants twice a week (opener category)." The belonging tensions these social identity categories make salient are intertwined and knotted. Not only does this one statement reveal a sense of belonging to both restrictor/health and opener/economic identity categories, but the tensional features of those

categories are also implicated (old vs. young, healthy vs. deficient immunity group).

Political identities and the belonging tensions they implicate have also emerged prominently in pandemic discourse. For example, wearing or refusing to wear a face mask has become a category behavior used by some in the United States to mark their political identity as progressive (liberal) versus conservative, the former having become more associated with a restrictor/health identity and the latter with an opener/economic identity. This tension may play out differently in other countries (see Li & Keller), where wearing face masks is supported across political lines or where it may involve community versus individual rights. Such policies may also be a feature of organizational identities (as in corporate policies on mask-wearing). In any case, these have become knotted with other belonging tensions, such as scientific versus political identity categories, health care workers versus conspiracy theorist group identities, and so on.

Positive identity threats from the pandemic abound. As Sheep (2020, p. 619) noted, pursuit of a positive identity "does not altogether negate the negative, nor is it a simple, linear path. It is often a complex process, riddled with contradiction and tension, with aspirational identities paradoxically unfolding in a persistent tension with their opposites that can be residuals from past history and/or emergent from *current crisis or perceived future threat*." Belonging tensions have involved positive professional or occupational identities that have suddenly been threatened by their negative counterparts. A "successful business owner" positive identity category is threatened by becoming a "bankruptcy victim" of the pandemic. The tension persists in that the former owner is not a business failure but a pandemic victim and can thus pursue restoration of the former positive identity.

While there are a multitude of other examples of identity categorizations in belonging tensions that have been made salient by COVID-19, these examples illustrate some main points: (a) A crisis makes salient an overarching belonging (identity) paradox that can be best understood and navigated in terms of its category labels and their features; (b) Such features often take the form of other belonging tensions that derive from social identities, political identities, and positive identity threats. There can be no doubt that COVID-19 will leave lasting imprint on the world. Nothing will remain unchanged in the wake of the pandemic, including new and more nuanced understandings of all of our theories such as those of belonging tensions and paradoxes of identity.

Paradox and the Discourse of Risk During the Pandemic

Gail Fairhurst and Carsyn Endres

> *Everybody knows what risk is, and nobody knows what risk is.*

To paraphrase an old expression about irony, we live in interesting times. While the pandemic makes us yearn for an

"uninteresting" return to normal, it is an opportunity to rethink paradox research. Our paradox approach is based in discourse, which helps us to understand how reality gets socially constructed. It does not deny the materialities of diseased bodies, quarantined spaces, medicines, or other health technologies, contra relativist critiques. It simply says that at the point at which one becomes a communicating actor (and this includes paradox researchers), discourse comes along for the ride. As Foucault said, there is nothing outside of discourse; we merely move from one discourse to another because we require systems of meaning to communicate.

In the case of the pandemic, it behooves us to understand the discourse of risk. As Hardy and Maguire (2020) argue, social actors use discourse to translate the risks in society in accordance with their vested interests. There will be struggle over who fixes the meaning of a risk object (in this case, the coronavirus), whose truths matter and in what ways, who has rights (e.g., to wear or not wear a mask?), and who has the obligation to act. Hardy and Maguire's discursive approach suggests that risk translations not only change the meaning of risk objects, but remake power relations between actors.

We have seen this with the pandemic in the United States. One such risk translation comes from the mainstream media (e.g., CNN, MSNBC, ABC, CBS, NBC, *The New York Times, The Washington Post*), which aligns with scientists and medical doctors who urge heed in the form of social distancing, frequent hand washing, and the wearing of masks. Their immediate response to eliminate the virus is to home quarantine, in effect, shuttering the economy however regrettable the consequences. Another prominent translation comes from conservative media (e.g., Fox News, Breitbart News, *The Washington Examiner*, conservative talk radio), proponents of which minimize the virus' effects. They question the statistics and credibility of prominent scientists; ignore the fact that the effects of prevention cannot be measured; ignore the strain on the health care system, while stressing low death rates for segments of the population; and contra unifying rhetoric, reinforce an "us" (conservatives) versus "them" (liberals) mentality in dealing with sociopolitical problems.

These translations show us that conditions are ripe for paradox when we come to the medical community for answers but excoriate them when they are not perfect and in unison. The conditions are ripe for paradox when business and government impose preexisting standards of competition and regulation on the helping professions who must improvise on the front lines to fight the pandemic's extreme novelty. Paradox is likely when the political arena is no longer a way to come together to solve problems, but a means of exclusion based on carefully drawn boundary lines reinforced by media choices. Finally, conditions are ripe for paradox when a U.S. president who is supposed to bolster the public's trust in government ironically erodes it by attacking or sidestepping the government's extant science and public health infrastructures.

If there is a silver lining to this state of affairs, it might be in shaping a paradox research agenda for global crises. A recent review of the risk literature by Hardy et al. (2020) shows that paradox researchers would be wise to study the organizing of risk. Although these authors do not write about paradox per se, they depict organizations as sites for the production, measurement, and handling of risks that they are increasingly unable to control, especially in global environments and crises.

For example, they point to a tension between seeing risk as objectively real versus socially constructed. In the everyday risk work of one organization dealing with a critical U.S. infrastructure, Jian and Fairhurst (2020) observed just such a paradox over the meaning of risk where one (objectively trained) engineer lamented, "Everybody knows what risk is, and nobody knows what risk is". This paradox in this environment demonstrated that meaning is decidedly not transparently real, nor is organizing based on fixed meaning the only basis for collective action. Such insight could help us understand the role of equifinal meanings in global crisis organizing.

Hardy et al. (2020) would also urge us to look at the aforementioned risk translations of U.S. mainstream and conservative media and to consider them as part of a global ecology of risks where risks translated by numerous actors on the world stage interact to shape the meaning of a risk object over time. They are sites for paradox and tension because translations can diverge but coalesce over time to shape debate *without* concerted action, another key insight for global crisis organizing.

We could go on—tensions between those who seek to apolitically normalize risk versus those who problematize it to source its politicization; risk translations that are verbal sleights-of-hand to shift accountability; pandemic narratives that simultaneously restore and destroy confidence during crises; pandemic narratives that turn disadvantaged populations into risk producers, reinforcing structures of inequality; or understanding the absent presence of success due to prevention efforts or when vaccines begin to take effect.

We conclude by noting that the complexities of this pandemic call into question the paradox template (Fairhurst & Putnam, in press), especially for risk-based topics. In its most basic form, the template singles out a paradoxical tension and corresponding response, often suspended in time or space, transparent in meaning, and joined with others later in a research report to model their interactivity. For global crises and the risks they pose, the days of single tension bipolarity are behind us. Individuals and organizations' lived experiences of pandemics, as just one example, require that we deal with the multi-polarity of tensions that entwine and knot over time (Sheep et al., 2017). A discourse perspective helps us understand the sociohistorical forces that create paradoxes and the interactive effect of paradoxes upon one another. It helps us understand power, that is, how these

forces both enable communicating actors with repertoires for speech and action, but also discipline them to conform. It helps us understand how paradoxes may be embedded in systems, but also how such systems learn and reframe the logics by which they operate (e.g., through risk translations). It even helps us understand how, during pandemics, the body may intervene to wreck one's narrative to stymie communication altogether.

Rigor Versus Expediency: The Paradox of Science in a Time of Pandemic

Patrick Lê and Camille Pradies

> There is always a tension between getting it fast and getting it right. I always favored getting it right. But in the current pandemic, that balance may have shifted too far toward getting it fast.
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> *New York Times* interview of Dr Marcia Angell, former editor-in-chief of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, relative to an article retraction (June, 2020)

The debate between rigor and expediency within science spans several centuries, with philosophical roots in the opposition between idealism and pragmatism (Glasgow, 2013). Yet as the introductory quote illustrates (Rabin, 2020), the COVID-19 pandemic has made the paradox more salient than ever. Urged to provide accurate and timely results to help weather the unprecedented worldwide health challenges that emerged in the wake of the virus, applied scientists and medical researchers are exposed to competing goals and temporalities. Rigor is at the heart of the scientific method, which implies a lengthy process comprising replication studies and meta-analysis in order to increase the level of evidence. Yet it becomes incompatible with the delivery of timely and practically relevant results such as required in the current pandemic, "to produce and maintain the ideal evidence-based clinical guideline," the "scientific community may be approaching unsustainable levels of scientific purity" (Browman, 2001, p. 1510).

More than surfacing a longstanding paradox (Glasgow, 2013), what the pandemic does is highlight the detrimental effects of overfocusing on expediency over rigor. Paradox theory warns us against the vicious dynamics provoked by overfocusing on one pole (Poole & Van de Ven, 1989; Schad et al., 2016; Smith & Lewis, 2011), especially the one associated with short-term objectives (Pradies et al., 2020; Slawinski & Bansal, 2015). The urgency of the pandemic has prompted an unprecedented effort in medical research within the first few months of 2020, with an average of 137 published papers a day. About 17, 000 articles underwent an "expedient publication process", with unusual high number of retractions (Yeo-Teh & Tang, 2020, p. 2). The cases of the retractions in two renowned medical journals, the *Lancet* and the *New England Journal of Medicine* (Piller & Travis, 2020)

are the most striking. While not all cases—fortunately—reflect scientific misconduct, some scholars have suggested that, overall, rigor was sacrificed at the expense of expediency. Speed and quantity took over quality to the extent that some label the phenomenon as a "paperdemic" fueled by "speed science" (Dinis-Oliveira, 2020, p. 174). Similar concerns have been expressed about the calls for the hasty deployment of a potential unvetted vaccine whose efficacy and safety would not be tested in line with the established procedures normally required. Medical researchers have warned that "balancing expediency and scientific rigor" in developing the vaccine would be essential (Graepel et al., 2020, p. 180). The consequences of favoring the former over the latter are serious and multiple. Expediency limits rigor, triangulation, and complexity in research at the cost of narrow and potentially flawed research that could harm trust in science (Singh & Ravinetto, 2020)—a concerning fact during a global sanitary crisis. Furthermore, it can lead to inappropriate health care policy responses based on misleading and, at times, incorrect information (Dinis-Oliveira, 2020).

Unpacking the rigor–expediency paradox broadens paradox scholars' view so that they move past the boundaries of organizations (Schad et al., 2019) and consider the societal and institutional contexts. At the societal level, the demand by the society for a clear and quick response bolsters the short-term pole expedient solution at the expense of scientific rigor. At the institutional level, the pressure for academic publishing and the symbolic capital in medical research by being the first researcher (or even country) to announce ground breaking results related to COVID-19, favors expediency over rigor (Dinis-Oliveira, 2020). Thus, the expediency–rigor paradox invites scholars to zoom out (Schad & Bansal, 2018) to the societal and institutional levels (Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2017; Smith & Tracey, 2016) and to the sociohistorical context (Putnam et al., 2016) to unpack inequality between poles (Cunha & Putnam, 2019; Huq et al., 2017). In doing so, it complexifies the question of paradox navigation to situations in which one pole is structurally dominant.

The COVID-19 pandemic and its implications in the rigor-expediency paradox also push paradox scholars to reflect on the constraints imposed on responses to paradoxical demand. Prior research has predominantly stressed the pursuit of the maximization of both poles. For instance, the "most positive effects on outcomes is the simultaneous maximization of complementary opposites" (Kearney et al., 2019, p. 23), managers facing strategic paradoxes are assumed to "maximize both strategies simultaneously" (Smith, 2014, p. 1592) and are invited to "maximize both upsides" (Johnson, 2014, p. 209). In contrast, the rigor–expediency paradox during the pandemic emphasizes the importance of maintaining a minimal level of engagement of the weaker pole (Huq et al., 2017). A handful of scholars have hinted at the idea of capitalizing on one pole while keeping the other above a certain level (e.g., Gümüsay et al., 2019). This resonates with what Li (2020a) called a "Minimax" approach to paradoxical tension

that denotes "prioritizing [i.e., maximizing] one pole subject to the constraint that a minimal level of attending to the other". Yet with the expediency pole being currently dominant during the pandemic, actors need to be particularly attentive to the "minimal threshold" that must be maintained at all times to prevent the sacrifice of one pole to the other (Ashforth & Reingen, 2014, p. 477). Indeed, a flurry of quickly available, but completely nonrigorous scientific studies would not make sense. To avoid veering too far toward one pole, paradox scholarship suggests that mechanisms such as guardrails (Smith & Besharov, 2019) or early warning systems (Johnson, 2014) can be implemented. These systems however tend to focus on the excesses of the dominant pole. The COVID-19 pandemic surfaces that research may want to examine complementary mechanisms that protect the weaker pole and ensure that its engagement remains above a minimal threshold at all times. With paradox salience being both socially constructed and the result of inherent features of a system (Hahn & Knight, 2019), the definition of those thresholds may need to balance both actors' perceptions, understanding, and objective constraints. Indeed, under some objective thresholds, vicious dynamics and exponential chain reactions are created such as, for instance, the physical constraints of the climate change system (Slawinski & Bansal, 2015), or in the COVID-19 pandemic, the spread of the virus. Namely, expedient science that would not be rigorous enough to provide real solutions would further fuel the crisis.

As the exploration of the expediency–rigor paradox during the COVID-19 crisis encourages scholars to reflect on the precise level of engagement of each pole, it prompts them to examine this question in practical rather than ideal terms. While the prescriptive ideal of simultaneous maximization of both poles may be attractive in abstract terms, it becomes harder to apply when facing reality. The pandemic invites us to consider acceptable thresholds or satisficing solutions (Simon, 1957) where finding a level of rigor that would be good enough without necessarily striving for "scientific purity" (Browman, 2001, p. 1510) would allow to meet expediency demands at a reasonable level. It also puts into question whether compromise and accommodating strategies, often presented as "mediocre solutions" (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009, p. 703) "that lose the vitality of extremes" (Lewis, 2000, p. 763), are intrinsically negative. It suggests that responses toward a middle way (Chen, 2002) may sometimes be more fructuous, depending on the context (Schad et al., 2016).

How Are Women Leaders Responding to the Pandemic Differently?

Linda Putnam and Patrice Buzzanell

Discussions about gender, paradox, and the COVID-19 center around gendered dynamics, especially paradoxes faced by women leaders. Questions that come to mind fit squarely with the competing demands that women leaders face,

namely, the tensions between agency and communion, individual versus collective, and empowerment versus control (Zheng et al., 2018a; Zheng et al., 2018b).

With the world turned upside down, the coronavirus pandemic has proven to be a complex problem with an indefinite time frame that has surfaced different strains on local and national health care systems, economies, and politics. As such, it is a contested and paradoxical site of leadership and organizing. In situations, like the COVID-19 pandemic, constituents might prefer charismatic leadership that could provide clear directives, yet the face of this crisis requires different leadership that treats the everchanging virus as a wicked problem (Grint, 2020). This essay focuses on two key questions: how are women leaders responding to the pandemic? What priorities and skillsets do they employ in leading during this pandemic?

To address these questions, we apply the work on paradoxical mindset to speculate how women leaders have responded to this crisis. A paradoxical mindset refers to embracing opposite demands through being open to solutions, accepting ambiguity, employing creativity, and using these demands to confront conflict and engage in continual learning (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018). Research shows that women leaders who adopt a paradoxical mindset are more innovative and effective than managers who treat competing demands as dichotomous choices (Zheng et al., 2018a). Although the research is sparse, we know that the COVID-19 pandemic has surfaced a number of competing demands, for example, tensions between stay-at-home versus return-to-work orders, mandating masks versus preserving individual freedom, and opening schools while reducing the spread of the virus. The intensity of play among these tensions exacerbates uncertainty and conflict.

What do we know about women leadership during this crisis? Research suggests that citizens prefer to be led by women during times of great uncertainty and constituents view women leaders as expressing confidence and empathy in their public briefings (Sergent & Stajkovic, 2020). In addition, fewer COVID-19 deaths have occurred in nations and states led by women than those by male leaders (Garikipati & Kambhampati, 2020; Sergent & Stajkovic, 2020). Specifically, in a study of first quarter responses to the pandemic across 194 countries, women leaders moved quickly to enact lockdowns, and thus they incurred fewer COVID-19 deaths (Garikipati & Kambhampati, 2020). These outcomes provide indirect evidence that women leaders find ways to act effectively, exhibit confidence, and embrace inevitable tensions in responding to the pandemic. Their actions appear risk averse in terms of losing lives; however, they take risks regarding the economic effects of the pandemic (Garikipati & Kambhampati, 2020). In effect, research suggests that women leaders are decisive, but open to other solutions; they sustain infrastructures while changing them; they express confidence, but not certainty; and they integrate emotional support with the decision-making process.

Their effectiveness in crisis situations may tie back to paradoxical mindsets, particularly, the ways that women leaders enacted agentic and communal action as a form of collective agency and ways that they guided their constituents to embrace competing demands and trust their governments. For example, New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern seized a short window of opportunity during the pandemic to mobilize collective efforts around minimizing harms and promoting livelihoods (Wilson, 2020). She conducted policy work through planning, skill development, and creating innovative responses that fostered communal outcomes of coping and shaped public sensemaking. In addition, she enacted collective agency through engaging her constituents in a long-term negotiation, one punctuated with building alliances, deferring to experts, yet acting with vigilance and reflexivity.

But Ardern is only one of a handful of women prime ministers and presidents who acted early and decisively in closing borders (Matte Frederiksen, Denmark), implementing nonessential travel restrictions and quarantine measures (Sanna Marin, Finland; Tsai-Ing, Taiwan), expanding testing programs and epidemic command centers (Angela Merkel, Germany; Erna Solberg, Norway), shutting down schools, banning public gatherings (Matte Frederiksen, Denmark), and combining direct, scientific-based information with personal messaging about the virus (Angela Merkel, Germany; Erna Solberg, Norway; Henley & Roy, 2020; Wittenberg-Cox, 2020).

Several of the women leaders embraced contradictions by conveying the severity of the situation in conjunction with having fun and expressing genuine kindness. For instance, Ardern (New Zealand) even designated the Easter Bunny and Tooth Fairy as essential workers (Wilson, 2020) while Solberg (Norway) talked directly with children about their fears during the pandemic (Henley & Roy, 2020). Interestingly, four of the Nordic countries' prime ministers (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, and Norway) were females who took strict actions that outperformed Sweden in fighting the virus. Overall, each of these women leaders provided firm action, conveyed clear instructions (such as "simply stop moving" Sint Maarten, Caribbean), and exhibited compassionate communication. Thus, these leaders embraced the paradox of collective agency by transcending the classic tensions in gendered leadership (i.e., agency vs. communion) through constraint and creativity as well as impossibility and potential (Putnam & Ashcraft, 2017). In these ways, these women may have transformed leadership itself by enabling people "to recognize and value risk averse, caring and thoughtful leaders" (Alice Evans, a sociologist at King's College London, in Taub, 2020).

Moreover, not all of the women were national leaders. Specifically, women legislators of 210 countries enhanced health care infrastructures (e.g., testing programs, equal employment opportunities, education, disease prevention) that had a direct effect on COVID-19 outcomes (Leung et al., 2020) and Jeong Eunkyeong, the female head of South Korea's Center for Disease Control, initiated a "test, trace, and contain" strategy that kept daily infections to single digits and made South Korea the world's role-model for responding to the coronavirus (Henley & Roy, 2020).

However, several caveats temper these conclusions. Clearly, there are too few women leaders to generalize from these findings. Moreover, women leaders may have a head start in responding to crises since they often come from political cultures typified by trust and support of their governments (Henley & Roy, 2020). Thus, to avoid valorizing women, we need to consider broader concerns about paradox and pandemics other than sex differences. Importantly, leadership is an issue of constructing contexts and labels that legitimate actions and persuade others to adopt these labels (Grint, 2005). Rather than attributing these findings to a feminist style, women leaders may have constructed the pandemic context in ways that necessitated asking the right questions, being reflexive, and engaging in authoritative, but collaborative processes. Perhaps it is less about the women than it is about constructing a cultural context with a paradoxical mindset that frames wicked problems in particular ways.

Eastern Versus Western Responses to the Pandemic: A Question of Balance

Xin Li and Josh Keller

While no society had escaped the impact of the pandemic, some societies had more success managing the pandemic than others. The relative success of East Asian societies had been especially notable because they had maintained a low death rate despite the earliest of outbreaks. By the end of August, 2020, Mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Vietnam, and Thailand all had COVID-19 mortality rates of less than 1 per 100,000 people living in the society, in contrast to the United States and the United Kingdom, which each had COVID-19 mortality rates above 50 per 100,000 people living in the society. This relative success occurred in societies with both democratic and authoritarian regimes and both left-wing and right-wing parties in control.

What explains this contrast? Some have attributed the East Asian response to the SARS epidemic in 2003, which had given East Asians a more salient memory of the seriousness of a public health crisis (Hopman et al., 2020). Others have pointed to the relative tightness of norms within East Asian societies, which make East Asians more likely to follow normative pressures, thereby reducing the risk of people ignoring public health advice (Gelfand et al., 2020). We propose an alternative explanation that centers on how societies respond to the tensions that have

permeated people's experience during the crisis. This includes governments' experience with tensions between protecting people's lives and maintaining economic activities (see Schad & Etter earlier), organizations' experience with tensions between protecting their employees and maintaining profitability (see Keegan et al. in Pradies et al., 2021), and individuals' experience with tensions between protecting their own family from the disease and maintaining their career (see Bednarek & Le in Pradies et al., 2021).

Prior research has found that East Asians are more likely to emphasize a balancing between opposing elements instead of choosing one element over the other (Leung et al., 2018). While all societies are shaped by a multitude of cultural factors (e.g., a sizable Christian minority in South Korea that suffered a COVID-19 outbreak), reasoning about opposing elements has a deep impact on East Asian culture. These differences follow contrasting philosophical approaches to tensions, as exemplified in Chinese management theories such as Zhong-yong balancing (Li, 2018), which emphasizes balance and harmony between two opposing elements and a preference for a "middle ground" solution over one of two polar viewpoints. This emphasis on balance and harmony would suggest that East Asians would more likely seek a middle ground solution to the tensions spurred by the pandemic. They would, for example, emphasize an equal balance between health and economic concerns, profitability and care concerns, and family and career concerns. The actual East Asian response to the pandemic, however, appears to be anything but balanced. For example, the Chinese government shut down the entire city of Wuhan for over two months and implemented strict quarantine and physical distancing policies nationwide. In contrast, the Swedish government, in advocating limited restrictions, emphasized the need to balance public health objectives with economic objectives. This would suggest, if anything, that Western societies are taking a more balanced approach.

In our view, this perceived contradiction can be resolved by delving deeper into how East Asian philosophy conceptualizes balance. First and foremost, we must consider differences in temporal depth (Slawinski & Bansal, 2017). East Asian philosophy emphasizes that relationships between opposing elements can change over time (Zhang & Han, 2019). Based on this viewpoint, emphasizing health over economic benefits in the short term helps address the balance between health and economics over the longer term. This includes, for example, a recognition that economic disruption is necessary at moments of time when even the slightest economic activity can be detrimental to public health. In addition, we must consider whether we refer to Zhong-Yong balancing as a concrete measure to address a specific tension or as a general principle that enables flexibility in interpretation. The emphasis of flexibility in the application of Zhong-Yong balancing dates to early Confucian scholars. For example, Mencius, a discipline of Confucius, pointed out

that "执中无权, 犹执一也 (holding the Zhong-Yong principle without flexibility is like holding one pole without balance)." The East Asian philosophical approach therefore treats Zhong-Yong balancing as a meta-cognitive principle (Keller & Chen, 2017; Keller & Sadler-Smith, 2019), where balance itself must be balanced with flexibility.

The emphasis on long-term balance and short-term flexibility is best illustrated within traditional Chinese medicine itself. Namely, while in normal situations a doctor should emphasize balance by aiming for a slow and gradual process of restoring health, in situations of acute illness the doctor may take drastic measures to create the necessary conditions that allows further balance in treatment. In the case of COVID-19, the pandemic itself represents an acute societal-wide illness that requires drastic measures to restore balance. Ironically, an ultimate both/and end may need, in the short run, an either/or and even a neither/nor means (Li, 2020b).

Paradoxes of Police Authority and Trust

Kimberly Rocheville and Jean Bartunek

The death of George Floyd at the hands of the Minneapolis police on May 25, 2020 ignited civil unrest across the United States and around the globe. At the heart of the protests was public distrust in and anger toward law enforcement, as Floyd's death was experienced as another case of police using excessive force against a person of color. His death was a violation of public trust in law enforcement's ability to exercise authority fairly, equitably, and judiciously. It also generated vicious spirals regarding the public's, especially people of color's, relationships with law enforcement. When Floyd was killed, much of the world was already overwhelmed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Protestors called for reform to address concerns with law enforcement amidst the contemporaneous need to protect public health, as detailed in Pamphile's essay further. In this essay, we explore the interplay of these two situations using paradox theory while also highlighting challenges to paradox theory with a focus on the crisis of trust in law enforcement.

The formal expectation is that police are trustworthy. The public can rely on them to keep peace, and in the case of a pandemic, help to contain its spread and maintain public order (Jennings & Perez, 2020). But trust literature (Sitkin & Roth, 1993) suggests that once trust is violated, as happened with Floyd's death and in other recent incidents, a vicious cycle is created, one that is not easily self-correcting. As was seen in the United States during the summer of 2020, the public's cooperation with the police broke down, which lead to some questionable exercises of force by police, perhaps because they trusted the public less. But the more force police officers use, the more likely the public is to question the trustworthiness of their authority (Goldsmith, 2005),

resist it (Reisig et al., 2004), and the more likely the relationship is to be severely damaged (Murnighan et al., 2004).

Thus, we are experiencing a vicious cycle of distrust in police authority in the United States. The less people have trusted police, the more likely the police have been to respond in kind. This vicious cycle is occurring at a time when the need for the public to trust in the authority of police is particularly great given the pandemic as countries that have fared comparatively well through the pandemic are those with high institutional trust in authority (Oksanen et al., 2020). The overlap of the two crises in the United States, however, has resulted in its opposite, which is particularly troubling for communities of color who have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic and by their treatment by police.

As the United States has grappled with the proper means of repairing trust between the public and police, recent events have galvanized widespread support for police reform through defunding law enforcement agencies (e.g., James & Ahlquist, 2020). However, this effort aimed at trust repair may actually feed the ongoing vicious cycle of public distrust in authority because it does not adequately acknowledge the paradoxical tensions at play.

Defunding will not result in entirely abolishing or dismantling police agencies, in most cases; rather, significant portions of law enforcement agency budgets, estimated at $100 billion annually (Urban Institute, 2017), will be reappropriated into nonpolice forms of public safety and community programs for social service, mental health, and education. Proponents of defunding police argue that "it's not just about taking away money from the police, it's about reinvesting those dollars into black communities. . ." (Cullors in Miller, 2020) in an effort to curb the so-called economy of punishment and create an economy of care (Miller, 2020). While suggested as a means of reform to address the current state of public distrust with police authority, it does not address police officers' occasional need to exercise force which is at the center of the crisis of trust. Therefore, while studies show that investing in communities in a broader sense is an effective way to reduce crime (Ramey & Shrider, 2014), taking that money away from police department budgets does not address the trust we place in our police to exercise force judiciously.

Police agencies argue that defunding departments may exacerbate the trust deficit as departments will have fewer resources for proper training in use of force and de-escalation tactics, hiring practices, and ongoing mental health support. Yet officers will still be called upon to respond to our most dire situations that may require some amount of force. Police will also have increased duties throughout the pandemic including explaining and enforcing public health measures (Jennings & Perez, 2020).

Furthermore, in light of the crisis of authority, police agencies across the country are facing low levels of morale

(Young et al., 2020), widespread departures combined with trailing interest in new officer recruitment (Matier, 2020; Police1, 2020; Police Executive Research Forum, 2019). In a 2020 poll of over 10,000 police officers, only 7% reported that they would currently recommend the profession to others given widespread belief that police are racist, ruthless, and repugnant (Calibre Press, 2020). The crisis of trust extends to police officers of color, many of whom joined the police force to create change from within, but who report being called race traitors by other persons of color (Zak & McCarthy, 2020).

These tensions challenge police agencies' ability to recruit trustworthy individuals and persons of color, those who are most likely to effect positive change in the image and performance of police agencies. Thus, the crisis of trust with police authority amidst the pandemic has created additional tensions and dilemmas within police departments that will take significant resources to overcome which will only be worsened by defunding law enforcement agencies.

For trust to have a chance of being restored, reform needs to recognize and appreciate the paradoxical tensions between the public's trust in police to exercise authority and the police's trust in the public in order to create more virtuous cycles (Lüscher & Lewis, 2008). This is, of course, no simple feat. It is made more complicated by the fact that in uncertain environments people are more likely to distrust than to trust (Ou & Sia, 2009) and the recognition that reinforcing cycles of distrust may well lead to decline (Sundaramurthy & Lewis, 2003). This is clearly a wicked problem (Head, 2008), as evidenced by the fact that there have been calls for police reform dating back to the Wickersham Commission in 1929 (National Archives and Records Administration, 1995), and cycling in and out of perceived importance ever since.

We propose that policymakers consider Smith and Lewis' (2011) dynamic equilibrium framework and explore solutions that make police more deserving of public trust while simultaneously making the public more deserving of police trust, as opposed to either defunding the police, which seeks only to defend against distrust in police authority, or claiming that police should have ultimate authority, which will exacerbate distrust on the part of the disempowered public. This will require positive experiences for the public and the police that challenge the deeply held negative attitudes that feed the vicious cycle (Goldsmith, 2005).

While these positive experiences are an important starting point, current research on paradox theory falls short in informing ways of addressing the tightly coupled emotions associated with paradoxical tensions (e.g., fear, anger, trust/distrust), and thus, we conclude that this may prove to be a fertile area for future research. Given the intractable nature of this wicked problem, this crisis of trust in police authority will take time to repair, but as President John F. Kennedy stated (1961), "all this will not be finished in the first one hundred days. Nor will it be finished in the first one thousand

days, not in the life of this Administration, nor even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet. But let us begin."

Public Voice and Health Paradox

Vontrese Pamphile

COVID-19 has heightened tensions for those interested in engaging in public collective action, political organizing, protest demonstrations, and other mass actions in the midst of the pandemic, namely, a tension between exercising voice and protecting health. Prior to COVID-19, the world was experiencing one of its largest waves of mass demonstrations. People gathered to demand change in places as varied as Bolivia, Sudan, Hong Kong, Iraq, the Philippines, and the United States, among many others. Then health concerns related to COVID-19 occasioned steep drops in public action, with good reason. The risks of spreading COVID-19 are clearly elevated during public demonstrations where people gather in large groups to use their body and voice, typically observing much less than six feet of physical distance. Yet public demonstrations are a vital tactic that can promote health by encouraging eradication of systemic injustices that threaten the health of marginalized people and society as a whole. While collective health is vitally important, so is using our public voice to further human rights. Moreover, while the pandemic seemingly constrains the ability to safely engage in public collective action, the way COVID-19 has disproportionally affected marginalized communities also stirs up desires to protest longstanding inequities recently magnified by the pandemic. Thus, public voice and health manifest as a paradox—as contradictory yet interrelated demands (Smith & Lewis, 2011).

How can paradox theory contribute to our understanding of public action during the pandemic? On one level, like other paradoxical tensions, the concerns for public voice and health may be viewed as incompatible. In this respect, any societal benefit from mass actions is weighed against the potential negative impact to public health. This reflects the now proverbial "either/or" response in paradoxical studies (Putnam et al., 2016)—when faced with tensions that seem antithetical, we can separate options and choose between them. Indeed, it is possible that demonstrators and would-be demonstrators reflected on voice and health as an either/or. Many, despite recognition of the health benefits of quarantining, felt an urgent need to protest police brutality, as evidenced by the recent global demonstrations in support of Black Lives Matter. From an either/or angle, protestors seemingly prioritized public voice—albeit in the name of Black lives— over health concerns. When viewed on another level, however, the dichotomy becomes a false choice. We need both our collective health and our collective voice to further human rights, the two are interrelated. For instance,

by risking health to protest police brutality, Black Lives Matter demonstrators continue to seek to eradicate serious injustices that harm the health of, and literally end the lives of, Black people.

Paradox theory, with its focus on embracing both demands rather than prioritizing one over another (Putnam et al., 2016; Schad et al., 2016), offers us a lens for understanding recent shifts in tactics around public voice. In some instances, it has been possible to take a "both/and" approach (Lewis & Smith, 2014; Putnam et al., 2016). That is, to see tension and still find ways of promoting health while exercising public voice. Examples include designing opportunities for public demonstrations that allow for physical distance, such as car caravans, or handing out masks and hand sanitizer during those that do not. Consider also the creative way in which people stood on their balconies and banged pots and pans to communicate collective dissent from the safety of their own homes. In other instances, people have responded by adopting a "more/than" approach—one that challenges normal boundaries and searches for novel and creative responses (Putnam et al., 2016). Across the world, people have developed innovative avenues for public voice in a way that moves outside voice-health tensions: new digital rallies, crowd-sourced aid funds, mass donations toward activism, social media information campaigns, and a myriad of other forms of novel online activism. Indeed, the voice-health tensions heightened by COVID-19 have opened possibilities for innovations in public action that will surely outlast the pandemic. Aligned with the idea that paradoxes can be generative (Jay, 2013; Raisch et al., 2018; Smith & Lewis, 2011), public voice can be seen as surviving, and even thriving, not despite of, but because of, the health concerns that have limited mass gatherings.

At the same time, the way that movements have responded to voice-health tensions offers opportunities for paradox scholars. The global scale of the innovations to public action is remarkable. We are witnessing collective response to paradoxical tensions across leaders, organizations, movements, and borders. The pandemic thus encourages us to see the voice-health paradox as embedded in a larger system (Schad & Bansal, 2018), where tensions and responses are interconnected on a global scale. Tactics that show up in one movement have materialized similarly across the world, with new avenues for voice taking off and movements learning from the successes and challenges of others facing similar tensions, evidencing a collective learning process (Raisch et al., 2018). Recognizing this kind of interconnectedness between not only tensions but also actors facing paradox can push paradox scholarship further. The present moment offers scholars an opportunity to "zoom out" further, taking a macro perspective to reveal different types of interconnections in our societal system and explore the shared experience of and response to paradox across a broad range of actors, interests, and settings (Schad & Bansal, 2018; Tracey et al., 2017).

Doing so can help us understand new collective options for managing paradox.

Moreover, as evidenced by the quick innovation in avenues for public voice, COVID-19 offers a particularly revelatory situation for scholars concerned with how moments of increased paradoxical tension can spur innovative change (Leung et al., 2018; Miron-Spektor et al., 2011). For instance, analyzing the flow of novel ideas among movements can help us learn how crisis situations and resource scarcity can occasion the adoption of paradox frames and paradoxical inquiries that lead to creative responses (Lüscher & Lewis, 2008; Miron-Spektor et al., 2011; Miron-Spektor & Erez, 2017). It could be that paradox mindsets (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018) are more likely to develop through challenging *collective* experiences, as processing with and relating to others experiencing similar paradoxes can make individuals more open to tensions (Pamphile, 2020). Indeed, it may be in part the heterogeneity of different types of actors facing the same paradox that spurs creative thinking (Keller et al., 2020). The pandemic encourages us to consider how fruitful moments of intense tensions can be in pushing people to new levels, particularly if tensions are faced collectively.

COVID-19 has awoken us to global interconnections like no other event. It has also laid bare societal inequities, presenting us with multiple, unparalleled challenges that require global collective action. While it is impossible to say what will happen to the creative approaches to public voice once the health concerns of the pandemic lessen, crisis situations can push us to create novel ideas and inspire us to imagine new solutions for the world's most pressing challenges. Indeed, after a period of limited mass action, we could very well witness a renewed sense of urgency and find that the pandemic motivates new waves of public voice for many years to come.

Responses to Collective Paradoxes Related to Systemic Sustainability Crises: Lessons from the COVID-19 Pandemic

Tobias Hahn

Situations of crisis oftentimes cast opposites into sharper relief and surface interdependencies that we take for granted under normal circumstances. Crises also frequently produce situations of scarcity and change that are argued to render paradoxes salient (Smith & Lewis, 2011). Salience captures actors' recognition and experience of a situation as paradoxical, that is, as comprising contradictory, yet interdependent elements (Putnam et al., 2016; Smith & Lewis, 2011). Not surprisingly, the current global health crisis has surfaced a myriad of paradoxes that actors at various levels are facing: Individual freedoms are restricted drastically for the collective benefit. People are urged to keep social and physical distance, while their emotional and empathic senses long for proximity. Compassion is expressed through distance. The public and economic life of the vast majority of the vital and productive population has been reduced or even stalled to protect the minority of the vulnerable and the infirm. Epidemiologically, we face the tension between swiftly reaching herd immunity to stop the spread of the virus and the need to slow down the spread of the virus to protect the vulnerable and to avoid the collapse of health care systems. Policymakers need to make sure that measures are strong enough to effectively control the spread of the virus while avoiding restrictions that are so strong, they undermine the economic, psychological, and social health of communities.

While the COVID-19 pandemic is first and foremost a human tragedy, it offers some valuable insights into the nature of, and responses to, paradoxes related to systemic crises. In the following, I will sketch out the implications for responding to paradoxes in the context of sustainability-related systemic crises. In particular, I will highlight the implications for the salience of and responses to collective paradoxes.

Sustainability has been conceptualized at the global level as an economic and social development path that respects, and operates within, the ecological carrying capacity and dynamics of natural systems. At the policy level, sustainability has been broken down into the so-called Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the United Nations. These goals reflect the need to change course in the light of the ongoing destruction of life-supporting social and ecological systems and the urgent need to improve the living conditions of large parts of the human population.

Many sustainability challenges are related to systemic challenges and crises. It is commonly accepted that human activity immediately threatens, or has even gone beyond, the carrying capacity of life-supporting ecosystems (Rockström et al., 2009; Steffen et al., 2015). Moreover, different sustainability challenges are not independent and sometimes even undermine each other (Nilsson et al., 2018). Their simultaneous pursuit entails the risk of unintended consequences as advances in one area may well have repercussions in others (Newton, 2002). Moreover, the underlying dynamics of sustainability are systemic, resulting in nonlinear and lagged effects across different levels and scales of social–ecological systems (Levin et al., 2013). Examples of systemic sustainability related crises include the climate crisis, biodiversity loss, malnutrition, racial and gender discrimination, and public health (as seen with the COVID-19 pandemic).

The resulting paradoxes have in common that they are collective paradoxes. As Uusitalo (1989) has pointed out, the achievement of welfare targets such as the SDGs depends on collective action and collaboration, while our economic system and incentives firmly build on the maximization of individual utility. The achievement of SDGs at the global

level thus represents a collective paradox in that actors at all levels need to collaborate and potentially curb their individual short-term preferences to achieve interrelated sustainability goals that in the long run will be collectively beneficial.

While sustainability has been conceptualized in terms of paradoxes in the organization and management literature (Hahn et al., 2015; Van der Byl & Slawinski, 2015), the paradox literature has mainly focused on individual and organizational responses to paradox (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009; Hengst et al., 2020; Miron-Spektor et al., 2018). Likewise, collective responses to paradox have been studied in clearly delineated settings of inter-organizational collaboration such as coopetition (Raza-Ullah et al., 2014).

What the current COVID-19 pandemic teaches us, especially in the context of sustainability, is the need to focus on collective paradoxes, that is, paradoxes that are not restricted to specific organizational settings but that affect, and are fueled by, collectives of actors across levels and organizations. Responding to such collective sustainability paradoxes has a strong temporal dimension (Slawinski & Bansal, 2015). Unlike the COVID-19 pandemic whose effects are immediate, many sustainability challenges are long term and have lagged effects. Consider the climate crisis where the cumulative emissions over decades have been leading to increasing temperatures and where we need to reduce carbon emissions to net zero within about 25 years to avoid devastating consequences in the upcoming decades (Rogelj et al., 2019).

The innate long-term and lagged effects of social–ecological systems are particularly challenging for responding to systemic collective sustainability paradoxes. They require that individuals, organizations, and governments act collectively even in the absence of the immediate threat such as a deadly infection or the collapse of health systems. Tackling climate change only when its consequences are immediate will be impossible and the toll will be much higher than with the current pandemic. Rather, we need to take bold action to curb carbon emissions today, even in the absence of an imminent threat.

Conceptually, this insight questions the role of salience for explaining responses to paradox. It is usually argued that salience, that is, the "experience of contradictory, yet interdependent elements by [. . .] actors (Hahn & Knight, 2019, p. 8) is a necessary precondition for actors to respond to paradox. Only recently, Schad and Bansal (2018) have advocated for a systems perspective to paradox. However, they do not problematize the notion of salience. The context of collective sustainability paradoxes brings up three additional aspects of salience that have not received sufficient attention so far.

First, salience of collective sustainability paradoxes is bound to the materiality of social–ecological systems. As pointed out by Schad and Bansal (2018), material characteristics of systems feature innately paradoxical dynamics, irrespective of actors' experience and awareness of these paradoxes in terms of salience. The material physical dynamics of climate change and their consequences for communities and economies unfold regardless of actors experiencing them as paradoxical or not.

Second, since responding to collective sustainability paradoxes requires collective action, the salience of these paradoxes also needs to be conceptualized in terms of collective salience. Thus far, the paradox literature as conceptualized salience as an individual-level construct. Such an individualistic perspective might be useful to explain the conditions under which some actors are more likely to experience salient paradoxes and others not. However, it does not capture the collective awareness and experience of sustainability paradoxes as salient. Collective salience in the sense of the salience of sustainability paradox among a critical number of actors is essential for unleashing collective action. Collective salience thus unearths an important political dimension of paradox (Berti & Simpson, 2019). This political aspect is even more relevant since the experience of ecological crises is unevenly distributed spatially with more vulnerable populations oftentimes not having the resources and agency to respond to sustainability paradoxes.

Third, due to their systemic nature, the salience of collective sustainability paradoxes is time lagged. By the time a critical number of actors actually experience sustainability paradoxes as salient, it is probably too late to respond to collective sustainability paradoxes. This detrimental time lag stems from systems dynamics as the effects of ecological damages are oftentimes only experienced when they are already irreversible. Moreover, it requires actors to make now-for-then sacrifices, the willingness for "sacrificing a nearer good for a later, greater good" (Brink, 2003, p.221), which further undermines the collective salience of sustainability paradoxes.

From a systems perspective, sustainability thus requires actors to respond to systemic paradoxes collectively before they become collectively salient. This insight has important implications for the notion of salience in the context of collective sustainability paradoxes. Descriptively, the focus on salience to explain actors' responses to paradox at the individual level may well be pertinent. In a sustainability context, however, such an approach is likely to describe the failure of adequate responses. Due to their systemic and collective nature, sustainability paradoxes call for responses at the stage of collective pre-salience. This focus on collective salience highlights an important tension between the collective salience as a precondition to trigger collective responses and the need for immediate collective responses due to the urgency of systemic sustainability challenges. Responding to collective sustainability paradoxes thus underscores the need for preparedness for potential paradoxes as well as the necessity to curate the experience of sustainability paradoxes for decision-makers before the effects of sustainability crises materialize (Knight & Hahn, 2020). The role and degree of

collective salience of sustainability paradoxes for triggering collective responses surfaces as an important element that has thus far not been in the focus. Collective crises such as the current pandemic invite us to rethink salience of paradox as a collective and political notion.

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