# On paradox : rationality, management and desire

# On Paradox: Rationality, management and desire

James Joseph Ellison Priestley

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy to the Department of Organisational Psychology, School of Business, Economics and Informatics, Birkbeck, University of London.

*Thesis submitted in December 2022; viva took place in February 2023; minor corrections approved by the examiners in April 2024.*

# Abstract


Aims and objectives

This thesis attends to the unconscious experience of the manager because it has been neglected by organisation and management scholarship. Its particular aim is to build on current research into organisational paradoxes. It focuses on three foundational paradox types from the literature to ask this question: How does the senior manager respond in the unconscious to the paradoxes of belonging, performing and learning?

Method

Seventy senior managers participated in eleven focus groups. The data were collected for a research project on behalf of the case organisation - at its offices. It was going through a change programme at the time. An initial analysis was carried out to understand how discourses were being socially constructed. A subsequent analysis used a Lacanian psychoanalytic lens to probe the unconscious operations of the senior manager so as to explain the (conscious) talk observed during the data collection.

Results

There is a rich substrate to the senior manager's conscious struggles with paradox. Their unconscious responses to paradox reveal a fantasy which places senior actor and employer in an interdependent pact. The thesis shows that the organisation's performance management system depends much more on unconscious fantasy than goal setting theory.

Implications

This research provides insights on the case organisation's people and systems which have eluded both the organisation itself and much scholarship. A rationalist fantasy benefits the organisation - and organisation/management studies. The consequences for the manager are bittersweet, however. The thesis explores the manager's encounter with a fantasy which is robust, enduring… and impossible. It draws on Lacan's discourse of the university to suggest how the manager may resist, and why the paradox scholar should too.

# Contents

# Acknowledgements

My grateful thanks…

To my supervisor Andreas Liefooghe who made the idea of a PhD exciting, introduced me to Lacan and became a friend.

To my second supervisors for generous guidance: Kate Mackenzie Davey who stayed as long as she could but had to retire, and then Alexandra Beauregard.

To the Department of Organisational Psychology at Birkbeck, University of London, for supporting this research with a Studentship and financing my presentations to several conferences, all of which advanced my ideas and made me feel I was among friends.

To my examiners who were tough and fair: Professor Dany Nobus of Brunel University London, and Dr Casper Hoedemaekers at the University of Essex.

To Louis, Max, Madeleine, Tatiana; my still, quiet centre. They inspired the effort without knowing it: I told them about this thesis a month before submission.

To M.O.P. and D.E.P. for unswerving support always. To Clare, Christophe, Tom for providing sanity. To friends all around for love and patience.

To everyone at Birkbeck, especially Rebecca Whiting, Director of the PhD programme and tireless supplier of practical and moral support. To the remarkable postgraduate friends I made there including Christine Brown, Helen Cooper, Sam Evans, Paula Fitzgerald, Kirsty Lauder, Merry Scott Jones, Jane Setten and particularly my fellow travellers in the psychoanalytic domain, Susan Kahn, Marianna Sidiropoulou and Mark Stringer.

To colleagues who became friends and vice versa. Especially Morna Flood-Consedine for all that wisdom about competing worldviews.

To the Lacanians who lit up a very curvy path: Gilles Arnaud, Bénédicte Vidaillet, Richard Boothby, Bruce Fink, Stijn Vanheule and many more.

To the paradox community, particularly Marianne Lewis, Wendy Smith and others who led the way. To those who insist that paradox scholarship needs the linguistic turn, notably Linda Putnam, Gail Fairhurst, Stan Deetz, Dennis Mumby, Stewart Clegg. And to Russ Vince for flying the psychoanalytic flag solo.

# Chapter 1: Introduction and research question

Why study paradox?

All organising produces paradoxes because it entails choices between competing imperatives (Sjoberg 1967 in Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983). The thriving literature on paradox has built on the formulations developed by Lewis (2000), who integrated decades of previous research and was the catalyst for the influential work on paradox that followed, for example Smith & Lewis (2011, 2016, 2022). A paradox is defined as contradictory but interrelated elements which exist simultaneously and persist over time (Smith & Lewis, 2011: 382). It is both inherent to organisations and constructed: people are unaware of it until circumstances shift it from hidden or latent to perceptible or salient, at the point where they are constructed as a tension. There are many paradoxes at all levels of analysis and between, for example innovation vs risk and growth vs sustainability tensions for the organisation, or the paradox of independence vs belonging for the individual. On its own each element of a paradox is logical, but when considered as a whole it seems inconsistent and even absurd. This causes difficulties in organisations because it disrupts the order and predictability that they prize. Order - or rather the appearance of order - is restored through “deparadoxification” (Luhmann 1991 in Fiol, 2002) by focusing on one side of the paradox and overlooking the other.

How organisations treat paradoxes influences how they conduct business. Paradox scholars encourage practitioners to accommodate perspectives that contradict each other, for example when developing a corporate social responsibility initiative so that it is framed both as an act of good in the community and through a business case frame to

ensure costs are controlled, etc. But often the latter perspective prevails: the initiative is understood only insofar as it conforms to business case thinking, but benefits that fall outside this frame are overlooked (Hahn et al., 2014), as if these aspects of the CSR initiative are invisible to the organisation.

Embracing the paradox as a whole can generate new ways of thinking. Beethoven, Mozart, Schubert, Monteverdi worked with contradiction and ambiguity to imbue their music with emotion (Rothenberg, 1979). Einstein's theory of relativity began with a contradiction which forced him to look for fresh explanations: he imagined a man in freefall taking an object out of his pocket and releasing it. Both objects hurtle towards the ground and yet are also stationary relative to each other (Rothenberg, 1979: 112). In commerce actors can turn apparently impossible dilemmas, which seem to demand an either/or choice (Putnam et al., 2016: 73), into creative breakthroughs. But they must first see that the elements are interrelated and able to complement each other (Lüscher & Lewis, 2008).

Organisations, individuals and societies ignore paradoxes at their peril (Lewis, 2000; Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2016). The Great Recession of 2008 was caused by financial institutions pursuing growth without enough thought about the increasing risks they were taking. Complex financial instruments like the credit default swap hid the paradox from view, generating what appeared to be risk-free growth based on the subprime mortgage market. The dangers were trivialised or even ignored because the instruments repackaged uncertainty as probabilistic risk (Brown & Hao, 2012), and that changed it from dangerous into manageable. Once they considered the danger had been tamed, financial institutions treated a very unlikely event - widespread defaults and bankruptcies - as if it was impossible (Lanchester, 2010: 41). In fact the paradox was there all the time, but only a few people gave it any thought (Lewis, 2010). BP's 2010 oil disaster and the VW emissions scandal of 2015 show a failure to give equal priority to both sides of the growth vs sustainability paradox (Gaim et al., 2021). And one way to understand Brexit is that it persuaded 52% of UK voters it would make them more British, delivering them from a paradoxical mix of British and European identities. The vote to Take Back Control was a classic either/or proposition offering coherence and consistency. Irrespective of how people feel about life outside the European Union, the national identity paradox remains because all trade deals require trade-offs with national sovereignty (Ringeisen-Biardeaud, 2017).

The paradox literature

Interest in paradox dates back to antiquity. Paradox became mainstream in academia after the Academy of Management first published an article about it 22 years ago (Lewis, 2000). It is now perhaps the dominant way to frame complexity in organisational studies (Fairhurst G.T. et al., 2016: 174). A paradox lens has been applied to many tensions across numerous subject areas including leadership (Waldman & Bowen, 2016), professional identities (Gotsi et al., 2010), creativity (Miron-Spektor et al., 2011), social responsibility (Hahn et al., 2014), and innovation (Smith, 2014).

The audience of the paradox literature is organisation and management scholars. Members of the paradox community also write with senior practitioners in mind: much of their work is about tensions faced by leadership and the management of paradox. One of the most settled opinions in the literature is that senior actors should see paradoxical elements as equally important and embrace them both (Smith & Lewis, 2022), or all elements if the paradox consists of more than two. There are exceptions to this consensus (eg Putnam, 2015) but they are rare. A primary reason offered for the “both/and” approach is that embracing both/all poles of a paradox is the most effective response to the growing complexity of the environment in which organisations operate, owing to factors including globalisation, technology and workplace diversity that make it unrealistic, even dangerous, to concentrate on one imperative and ignore the rest.

Paradoxes frustrate organisations and the rationalist worldview which draws from the Enlightenment to champion order and stability. The organisation pursues “bureaucratic rationality” to codify the world and make it known and predictable. This codification is intended to mirror reality so that the organisation may adapt to it. In practice, however, the organisation may produce a version of reality which overlooks the mess and the contradiction. Rather than adapt to a paradoxical reality, the organisation instead reconstructs it until it fits an organisational view (O'Neill, 2010) that obeys formal logic and chooses not to treat opposites as equally valid (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983). This ploy allows the organisation to restore the appearance of order and stability, but it intensifies the underlying paradox and stores up trouble for later (Lewis, 2000: 763). Although this response does not serve the rational organisation well in the long term, it becomes increasingly likely the more it faces uncertainty. Rationality reassures and yet, as the organisation’s environment becomes more complex and contradictory, its ambition to guard against the “disarray” of the informal (Townley, 2008: 33) becomes ever harder to sustain.  According to paradox scholarship the antidote is *paradoxical thinking* whereby

managers accept tensions and accommodate conflicting imperatives rather than eliminate them (Smith & Lewis, 2011). Scholars argue that this is the only fitting response to growing complexity. They also point to the ability of paradoxical thinking to move the practitioner (and the academic) in new theoretical directions. For example, scholars cite the experience of Einstein in which an apparent impossibility leads to the theory of relativity (Rothenberg, 1979). Even dilemmas (challenges that seem to demand either/or choices) can be turned into paradoxes when managers are given enough time to grapple with them (Lüscher & Lewis, 2008). The community has developed a set of practical tools to help organisations accommodate paradox rather than transform it into discrete rational parcels which present non-contradictory problems to solve (eg Smith & Lewis, 2022). An example of paradoxical thinking is Smith's 2014 paper on "dynamic decision-making". She observes managers repeatedly separating the paradoxical elements of a problem - so as to deal with each one. They then re-integrate them so that neither paradoxical pole is neglected for long. The intention is to attend to the whole paradox and thereby achieve long-term sustainability (Smith, 2014).

## Limitations of the paradox literature

The paradox lens has proved an effective way to draw attention to complexity in organisations. In spite of the progress of paradox scholarship since Marianne Lewis' seminal paper, it has contested the normal rules of rationality, and yet there are reasons to question whether it will continue to disrupt such thinking in the long term.

Most attention in paradox research to date has focused on organisational paradoxes, such as growth vs sustainability (Waldman et al., 2019). Research on the individual response to paradox includes a study of humour as a management tool: how joking can help individuals to think paradoxically (Jarzabkowski & Lê, 2017). And the "paradox mindset" measurement scale (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018) assesses individuals for cognitive complexity, comfort with ambiguity and a readiness to treat paradoxes as opportunities. It aims to "leverage tensions to achieve beneficial outcomes" (p29) and may come to inform leadership selection and corporate training. But Waldman et al argue that more work is needed to investigate individual responses because they influence paradoxes at the level of the organisation. In the next chapter I look at the paradox literature's relative neglect of individual responses and argue that it has restricted the literature's understanding of the people who must deal with paradox.

Secondly, sensemaking has become an established lens with which to study both defences against paradox and their opposite, paradoxical thinking (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014: 93). The sensemaking literature has persuaded organisation and management scholars to pay much closer attention to the individual actor's take on organisational life (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2014: S6). Specifically it helps them to understand how actors deal with the ambiguity and surprises produced by complex environments, and can lead to new ways of organising and understanding (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014: 92-93). But the reliance of paradox scholarship on the sensemaking literature brings cons as well as pros. Scholars have largely ignored the political processes that influence sensemaking (Mikkelsen & Wåhlin, 2019) and determine how actors see the organisational world (Deetz, 2003). In addition, sensemaking broadly accepts that what research subjects tell the researcher is a faithful, unproblematic account of what happened during sensemaking (Putnam et al., 2016: 77). This gives it "a desirable instrumentality" which marginalises experiences that may be crucial to paradoxical thinking but are too nebulous to fit into familiar, instrumentalised, cognitive patterns (Holt & Cornelissen, 2013: 530).

Thirdly, paradox scholars show a growing interest in the cognitive sciences (Keller & Wen Chen, 2017), evidence of their attraction to normal science (Kuhn, [1962] 2012). The literature does acknowledge its debt to Freud (eg Lewis, 2000; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008), and has incorporated unconscious defence mechanisms into its work (Jarrett & Vince, 2017; Petriglieri & Stein, 2012; Vince & Broussine, 1996: 5), but it makes only limited use of Freud's thinking, drawing mostly on ego psychology, a widely popularised version of Freudian thinking which puts the conscious mind in charge and makes the unconscious accessible. This thesis argues for a much more radical understanding of the unconscious, the one Freud developed after the First World War and Jacques Lacan subsequently championed and psychologists overlooked (Kahneman, 2014).

Why Lacan?

Lacan advocates a return to Freud's most radical thinking - what he articulates from "*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*" (1920) onwards. Lacan argues tirelessly that ego psychology, with its abiding interest in causal, objective relationships, misses what is most important about Freud. Ego psychology became institutionalised through the International Psychoanalytical Association (I.P.A.) but Lacan argues for a post 1920 Freudian conception of the unconscious which emphatically moves away from two assumptions: first, that the unconscious is part of a biological system that adapts to the outside world and, secondly, that it is ultimately governed by a conscious ego. His work offers an antidote to the growing optimism of mainstream organisation and management scholarship that it can "resolve" complexity (eg Keller & Sadler-Smith, 2019: 178). I will argue that Lacan's negative ontology of the unconscious subverts a rationalist fantasy to make all organisational life knowable to practitioners and academics alike. For Lacan, the conscious struggles of senior managers in the case organisation reveal a life-long project *in the unconscious* to solve a puzzle which has no solution. This quest governs all that the senior manager does. In other words, the position of Lacan and later Freud is diametrically opposed to that of ego psychology: it is the unconscious that rules, not the conscious ego or rationality.

Lacan sheds light on an intersubjective (unconscious) pact between the senior actor and the case organisation. Its performance management system seems to operate on strictly rational lines. But the data also reveal the central role of the death drive and unconscious fantasy, and this thesis will argue that a Lacanian lens can offer a more complete picture than is possible if one relies only on rational explanations.

I also offer a Lacanian commentary on organisation and management research. In particular I investigate paradox scholarship whose research has multiplied in organisational and management journals (Schad et al., 2016). It urges organisations to wean themselves off their attraction to stability and order and become "consistently inconsistent" (Smith et al., 2016). And it presents paradox as a catalyst for fresh, anti-reductionist thinking which can subvert rationality. Nonetheless, I will argue that paradox scholarship is showing an incipient managerialism, and that subversive ideas do not stay subversive for long when adopted by management. But the word paradox is the opposite of orthodoxy in Greek, and subversiveness needs to be the raison d'être of paradox scholarship if it is to be useful in the long term.  The threat to it is real. Managerialism is a fate already visited on many disruptive movements - including microfinance, Fairtrade

and climate science - which have lost much of their reforming potential (Edward & Olsen, 2006; Edward & Tallontire, 2009; Levy et al., 2016; Wright & Nyberg, 2017). All too often innovative ideas become managerialised, and I will argue that Lacanian theory is a powerful antidote to paradox scholarship's shift towards institutional status which some have already observed (eg Cunha & Putnam, 2019). Lacan proposes no grand alternative to the literature's current orthodoxies. Instead he invites all scholars to reflect on their assumptions and how their own unconscious desire shapes their research. I will argue that organisation/management studies, including paradox scholarship, should be viewed through Lacan's discourse of the university which applies a psychoanalytic lens to the scholar's role as an agent of knowledge. It offers a compelling insight into an unconscious alliance between organisation/management scholarship and business, even if it can be plausibly denied in the conscious mind.

Research Question

The involvement of senior managers in the case organisation was fortuitous but useful for this research. Insofar as paradox scholarship has scrutinised individual responses to paradox, it has focused on leaders. This is based on the well founded view that they determine the extent to which the rest of the organisation embraces paradox (Knight & Cuganesan, 2019; Pradies et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2010). And, from the outset I wanted to explore the reaction of the individual to paradox - so as to correct the literature's neglect of this subject to date. (See Chapter 2).

Psychoanalytic approaches offer a timely opportunity for novelty in paradox scholarship, and management and organisation studies more generally. I argue that its work is being limited by its chosen conception of the unconscious, and that it should instead investigate the actor's unconscious operations through a more radical (and less reductionist) theoretical framework. Although unsettling, the Lacanian lens offers new insights which are rich and, I will argue, compatible with the subversive, destabilising nature of paradox which

My choice of paradoxes to study was dictated by two influential theorising papers on paradox. They are: belonging, organising and learning (Lewis, 2000: 765; Smith & Lewis, 2011), and they are confirmed and further explored in the subsequent, influential 2011 theory paper by Smith and Lewis (see Chapter 2). The paradox of performing is a major example within the category "paradoxes of organising", and relevant to the case

organisation where much of the talk by participants revolved around its performance management system, through which its senior managers respond to two paradoxical objectives: to grow revenue and collaborate with each other.

Weighing up all these factors, I developed my research question as follows:

**How does the senior manager respond in the unconscious to the paradoxes of belonging, performing and learning?**

# Chapter 2: Paradox

1. Introduction

Handy's comment on paradox seems as relevant today as it was 30 years ago:

> "The more turbulent the times, the more complex the world, the more paradoxes there are. We can, and should, reduce the starkness of some of the contradictions, minimise the inconsistencies, understand the puzzles in paradoxes ... we have to learn to use the paradoxes – the balance, the contradictions, and inconsistencies – as an invitation to find better ways" (Handy, 1994: 13).

The literature continues to argue that complexity outside organisations is increasing, and this is making an ever larger number of paradoxes salient. There has been a significant output on organisational paradox since 2000 including via popular management journals, like the Harvard Business Review, and books (Smith & Lewis, 2022; Smith et al., 2016). In organisational studies paradox is now a popular lens through which to understand complexity (Fairhurst et al., 2016: 174), and the both/and approach to paradox is becoming a mantra (Smith & Lewis, 2022). Contradictions have long been an object of interest in organisational theory (Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2017) but in 2000 a paper which is now seminal introduced paradox to the mainstream of management and organisational studies (Lewis, 2000), founded, obviously, on historical research. A follow-up article has been even more influential based on citations generated. "Toward a theory of paradox: a dynamic equilibrium model of organizing" (Smith & Lewis, 2011) won the Decade Award in Managerial Practice research at the Academy of Management in 2021. Paradox research since Lewis 2000 emphasises commercial environments that are fluid, complex and unpredictable (including Schad et al., 2016; Smith & Lewis, 2011; Waldman et al., 2019). And paradoxes have now been studied in numerous subject areas that include leadership (Waldman & Bowen, 2016), professional identities (Gotsi et al., 2010), creativity

(Miron-Spektor et al., 2011), social responsibility (Hahn et al., 2014), and innovation (Smith, 2014).

A paradox is a proposition or statement that consists of contradictory but interdependent elements which exist simultaneously and persist over time (Smith & Lewis, 2011: 382). The collective word, “tension”, is defined in terms of an individual reaction: tensions cause anxiety or discomfort when actors make choices and move forward in organisational situations (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2014). The word ‘tension’ is a generic term which covers several kinds of contradiction now differentiated in the paradox literature. These include dualisms (the existence of binary relationships where the poles can be separated), dualities (interdependent opposites which are not mutually exclusive), contradictions (bipolar opposites that define and negate each other), dialectics (opposites where the thesis and antithesis interact to form a synthesis - which removes the underlying tension but is immediately destabilised by another antithesis), dilemmas (either-or choices in which one alternative must be selected), and paradoxes, whose elements (i) compete with each other, (ii) are interdependent and (iii) last over time (Putnam et al., 2016). Paradoxes cannot be solved (Fairhurst et al., 2016: 174). They produce surprising choices which seem absurd, irrational and impossible - such as equity programmes that legitimise discrimination, democratic systems that restrict participation, objectives that require “empowering” managers to control events and simultaneously to surrender control.

The focus of this thesis is the individual’s response to paradox, though other levels of analysis are relevant because the organisation’s norms shape how individuals respond and whether paradoxes are recognised as such in the first place. Paradox scholars discuss individual responses at length but this is still a small part of the overall literature. A recent review of 133 organisational paradox articles found that only 40 (30% of the total) were interested in how individuals experience paradox. The review identified three categories of inquiry: the nature of paradox, approaches to paradox and, thirdly, its impact. Within the second category, individual approaches have been studied much less than collective ones (Schad et al., 2016: 29). On the assumption this review generalises to the whole literature, the relative lack of interest in the individual’s response to paradox is surprising. Scholars plainly write for practitioners as well as fellow academics, and place great emphasis on the role that must be played by leadership if organisations are to shift from a more rationalist, linear, reductive approach to one that, they argue, is better suited

to complexity. In the next pages I summarise the literature on responses to paradox. I then summarise the main debates which are still in progress.

## 2. The study of paradox

### 2.1 Background

Reactions among practitioners divide broadly between those who split the paradox into its component parts so as to concentrate on each in turn, and those who embrace it by focusing on both sides at once (or all of them if more than two). I refer to these as the "either/or" and the "both/and" approaches - the most common terminology used in the literature when distinguishing between the two.

An ambivalence about paradox is traceable back to antiquity. On the one hand paradoxes tease, provoke, entertain, confound - and make us think of creative, new possibilities. On the other hand we are drawn to order, an orientation I explore in the next chapter (Chapter 4) and a major theme of this thesis. We desire order so as to make the world more biddable, more predictable, and to feel we are in control of events. Paradox undermines all this. The word owes its existence to Plato who was interested in ideas that are contrary (para) to popular opinion or common sense (doxa). Aristotle developed a law of non contradiction, claiming that contradictory premises cannot both be true (Priest 1995 in Schad, 2017: 29). His argument remains influential: today organisation and management scholars learn to develop theories which are internally consistent, because the presence of contradiction or contradictory assumptions is "often viewed as an indicator of poor theory building" (Poole & Van de Ven, 1989: 562). The Taoist symbol for yin/yang points to a wholeness consisting of contradictions. Each part contains elements of its opposite: intuition vs rationality, dark vs light (Lewis, 2000: 762). In the 18th century Kant discussed "antinomies" in his Critique of Pure Reason. He showed the limits of reason by discussing how two sets of arguments can each be sound and yet produce contradictory conclusions such that it is not possible to choose between them (Kant, 1998).

### 2.2 The nature of organisational paradox: inherent or constructed?

Current scholars theorise that paradoxes are both inherent to organisations and constructed. Inherent because all organising presents choices between competing imperatives (Sjoberg, 1967). And organisational life involves the interplay between

“complex, dynamic and ambiguous systems” whether these are industries, firms, teams or individuals. Each subsystem operates independently and their differing goals cause them to compete, but the overall system means that they also depend on each other (Lewis & Smith, 2014: 132). Paradoxes shift from being inherent, or latent, to salient through social construction. Circumstances determine the likelihood that a paradox will become salient and the scholars argue there are three main contextual factors: plurality, change and scarcity (Smith & Lewis, 2011: 390). Plurality is about competing points of view - such as multiple stakeholders with contradictory needs, or when departments clash because their goals compete with one another despite their interdependent nature. Change produces new demands for sensemaking as actors try both to control events and let go (Lüscher & Lewis, 2008). And scarcity refers to occasions when organisations make choices between contradictions when resources are scarce, ie they lack time or funds or human resources. The number of salient paradoxes in organisational life is determined by any one of these conditions - plurality, change, scarcity - or a combination of them.

## 2.3 Sensemaking

The literature draws heavily on the notion of cognitive framing to explain how individuals make sense of the world around them. A practice known as bracketing creates categories that help to reduce the complexity perceived by the individual. Within a given category all items are like each other. Items that fall outside do so because they differ from those that are inside. A category is therefore made clear and distinctive because of *what it is not* as well as what it is, and in this way both sides (A and Not A) acquire meaning (Vince & Broussine, 1996). The binary structure of these pairings emphasises the difference between the two poles, making them hard to process cognitively because everyone struggles to consider opposites to be equally valid (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983: 376). A paradox forms when these categories depend on each other and persist over time (Lewis, 2000). These pairings complement one another and also compete. The effect can be baffling because each part of a paradox is logical and consistent in isolation, but irrational and even absurd when juxtaposed (Lewis, 2000).

The sensemaking literature developed originally by Karl Weick exerts a strong influence over paradox scholarship. Sensemaking is more than interpretation because actors actively construct what they interpret (Sutcliffe, 2013). Sensemaking is the process through which individuals work to make sense of novel, unexpected or confusing events

(Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). They make sense of ambiguity or uncertainty by choosing explanations that confirm their existing ways of framing the world (Lewis, 2000: 763). This process reinforces the "core rigidities" of an organisation (Leonard-Barton, 1992) because individuals develop an account of what is happening that they find familiar and "plausible", and because they subsequently describe how they have made sense of things (Weick, 1979).

## 3. The senior manager's response to paradox

Senior managers embody the goals of the organisation. Where it cherishes either/or thinking, senior managers enact and sustain it. The senior manager is expected to collect the evidence, model a set of algorithms, and choose the right course of action (Parker, 2002: 97) based on a calculation about what will best serve organisational goals. The management literature strongly criticises leaders who are slow to decide and then waver after the decision is made. They argue that decision-making must quickly instrumentalise the right course of action and the leader is expected to apply her/his decision-making consistently (eg Charan, 2006). For this worldview, consistency is an ideological antidote to complexity and disruption (Edwards, 2017) on the basis that it brings stability. The status of consistency is enhanced in part because it is compared favourably with its opposite, inconsistency. An alternative perspective is that complex environments demand *inconsistent* responses that vary according to changing circumstances. The phrase "consistently inconsistent" seems to have been first applied to the economist Keynes in Life Magazine (Busch, 1949). Keynes was notable because he was happy to switch investment strategies when circumstances changed. Paradox scholars also praise consistent inconsistency, arguing that the organisational response to paradox should be flexible enough for it to embrace both (or all) sides of paradoxes whose elements are permanently shifting relative to each other (Smith & Lewis, 2011, 2012; Waldman & Bowen, 2016). But it is hard to imagine a leadership communiqué that reads: "I know this contradicts what I said last week but I've changed my mind again". In a report on 150 CEOs and their relationship with paradox (Saïd Business School, 2015), participants talked openly about their struggles with complexity and paradox but on condition of anonymity. The anxiety they expressed about the task of negotiating paradoxes was not compatible with the ideal of the confident, decisive senior manager who can solve every problem. In summary, senior managers are well placed to note when paradoxes become

salient (Knight & Paroutis, 2017) and ensure that the organisation negotiates the whole paradox, not just one aspect of it. Paradox scholars argue that it is cognitively easier to choose one element of a paradox so as to concentrate on it, but that managers should resist this temptation and instead think “paradoxically”. I outline these contrasting responses now.

### 3.1 The either/or response to paradox

Paradox scholars argue that the dominant response in organisations is to focus on one or other of the paradoxical elements: just maximising corporate growth rather than juggling both it and sustainability; just planning for the long term rather than also generating enough short-term revenue to ensure the organisation has a long term future. The ideal, however, is to consider the whole paradox so that both/all sides receive equal attention. I focus first on the either/or approach which is more normal in the rational organisation because paradoxes are an affront to rationality and “smile ironically at our nicely constructed theories with their clear-cut distinctions” (Ybema, 1996: 40).

### 3.2 The both/and response - in contrast to either/or

Embracing the competing priorities of a paradox is the only way, scholars argue, to respond to growing complexity and ensure the organisation is competitive in the long term (Lewis, 2000; Smith & Besharov, 2017; Smith & Lewis, 2022; Smith et al., 2016). Scholars recognise the merits of focus - for example the need to set aside long term planning so as to deal with a short term crisis - but argue that the separation of paradoxical elements needs a countermeasure: their systematic re-integration so that actors consider the whole paradox as often as they focus on its constituent parts (eg Smith, 2014). Even intractable dilemmas (challenges that seem to demand either/or choices) can be turned into paradoxes when managers are given enough time to grapple with them (Lüscher and Lewis 2008).

#### 3.2.1 Paradoxical thinking

The solution advocated by paradox scholarship is that organisations and their leaders should develop *paradoxical thinking.* This requires managers to accept that they cannot choose, except strictly temporarily, between competing tensions because any choice simply intensifies the demand from its opposite. Instead they systematically consider both options (Smith & Lewis, 2011: 391), an approach that requires “cognitive complexity” and “emotional equanimity”. Emotional equanimity minimises fear and emotional defences.

Cognitive complexity is the ability to recognise the interrelated nature of paradoxical elements and then build cognitive frames that include contradiction. In paradoxical thinking they flow in both directions. Anxiety can provoke emotional defences which repress the contradiction of a paradox and prevent it from becoming salient in the first place (Jarrett & Vince, 2017: 58). Paradoxes cause anxiety, but this can be tempered by emotional equanimity such that individual defensiveness is minimised and the actor is able to identify the paradox cognitively and then process it in its entirety, as opposed to the either/or focus on just one element. This leads to virtuous circles of paradoxical thinking (Smith & Lewis, 2011; Sundaramurthy & Lewis, 2003). Cognitive complexity and its twin, behavioural complexity, then allow the individual to feel "emotionally comfortable" when trying to reconcile tensions (Waldman & Bowen, 2016: 322), ie cognition controls emotion.

### 3.2.2 The "paradox mindset"

In promoting both/and thinking, paradox scholars emphasise the role of leaders and the skills they must develop (Smith & Lewis, 2012; Waldman & Bowen, 2016). The argument is that it is they who must promote this approach around the whole organisation. With this aim in mind a "paradox mindset" scale was developed recently. It is a self-report survey which measures individuals according to their awareness of paradoxes and their aptitude for paradoxical thinking (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018). Its ambition is to help organisations both to recognise "and engage" tensions. The task is "not just a mental exercise but depends on managing emotions as well" (ibid: 40). While some of the scale items indicate innate neurological characteristics, the authors propose that much of the mindset comprises attitudes and skills that can be encouraged and taught.

## 3.3 Corporate culture and the senior manager

The paradox scholarship view of paradoxical thinking is managerialist. It holds that the organisation, and therefore its senior managers, must cultivate both/and or paradoxical thinking. Scholars have written extensively about the "dynamic capabilities" of the organisation - the organisational processes, routines and skills which make individual paradoxical thinking a reality (Smith & Lewis, 2011: 392). Organisational norms reinforce the cognitive frames actors the apply in ambiguous situations and therefore how they respond to paradoxes. A preference for rationality and evidence-based management (eg Morrell, 2008) makes the either/or approach more likely. Rationality explicitly combats mess and ambiguity; it also favours one paradoxical element over other(s) if that element

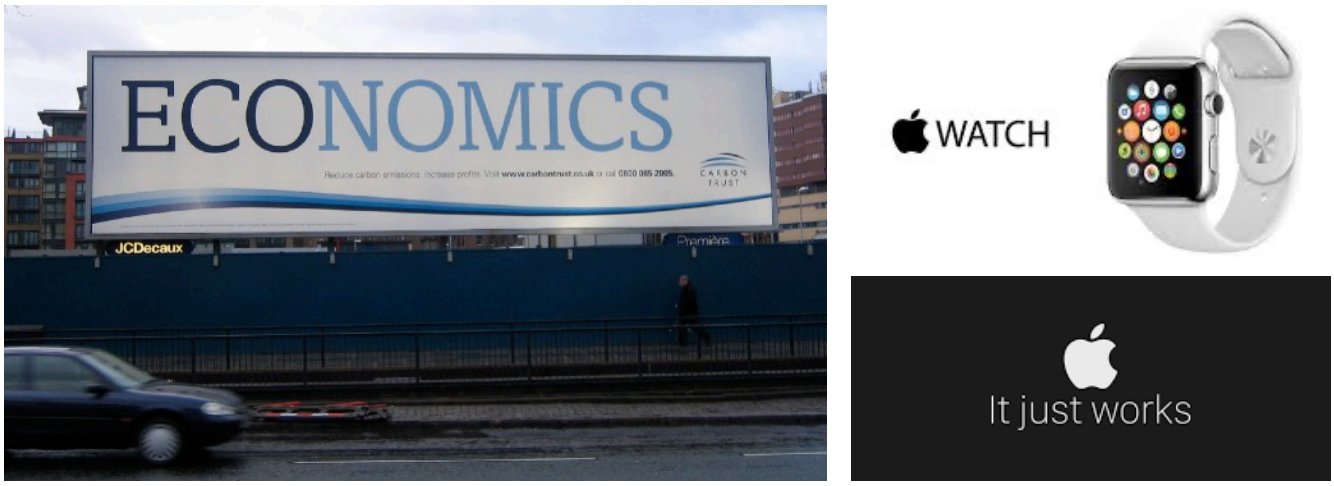
is more conducive to the evidence-based approach. For example, in the paradox of short term vs long term goals, the utility of short term actions is easily assessed against imminent quarterly targets or the measurable benefits of winning a pitch. Long term priorities are harder to codify and may even disappear as circumstances change. Another common practice in organisations is to pursue an alignment logic because of a deep commitment to a unitary truth and consistency (Hahn et al., 2014; Smith & Tushman, 2005). This shapes how they respond to paradoxes such as the ones that become salient in corporate social responsibility initiatives, for example negotiating the paradox between return on investment and sustainability. The alignment logic causes them to consider the aspects of sustainability that conform to business case thinking, like costs and targets, but not the factors that lie outside (Hahn et al., 2014), such as community relations if these do not obviously serve ends that seem valid when viewed through a business case lens. The either/or approach thereby recognises the familiar and ignores what is strange as if it were invisible. It therefore gives close attention to half of the problem, and ignores the other half. This is problematic when the non-business-case-frame factors are crucial for the long term success of the initiative, such as the involvement of local community leaders. The alignment logic overlooks the interdependence of the elements which naturally fit the business case with those that do not. While order is achieved in the short term, this approach risks storing up trouble for later and causing the project to fail.

Two other factors seem to be important. The first is the trend to apply the principles of consumer branding in organisations. Brands aim to differentiate products from their rivals. Branding is increasingly directed at employees to communicate the benefits of the organisation and persuade them to align their identity with that of the organisation (Mumby, 2016). It is one of the main mechanisms through which identity and sensemaking processes are mediated and constructed: it helps to unite the ambitions of the individual actor and financial value as defined by the organisation. A central feature of branding is that it reduces complexity in the interest of clear, unambiguous, easily digested messages to employees (Mumby, 2016: 887). For example, the ethos of customer service may dominate to the extent that the complexities it causes become overlooked, such as the needs of those who deliver the service (Francis & D'Annunzio-Green, 2005).

The tendency to simplify combines with “a widespread social addiction to positivity” that afflicts leadership and reinforces managerialist identity and influence (Collinson, 2012: 89) - one that favours a one-sided, either/or construction of paradox. The bias to positivity

means that the organisation and its managers report solutions more than problems and propagate consensus rather than constructive dissent. Leadership studies reinforce the tendency to communicate that all is well because they perpetuate the assumption that organisational success is caused by leaders (ibid: 98).

Below are examples designed to show the difference between a brand message containing a paradox and one that does not. Communicating a paradox is uncommon because it is a complicated story to tell. The first image, a roadside poster, does convey




Some branding communicates a paradox (left) where complementary but also competing elements are explicit. Most branding simplifies paradoxes so as to present a solution, implying the paradox has been successfully managed

the paradox of growth vs sustainability does not require a choice and organisations can successfully pursue both. The other two images, from technology firm Apple, are more common because they convey a solution only, and do not refer to the trade-offs such as difficult negotiations between innovation and risk, cost etc that made the new solution possible. There is a natural alliance between branding, a discursive tool used to influence how actors see themselves and the organisation (Mumby, 2016: 887), and the Peters and Waterman proposition that “all that stuff you have been dismissing for so long as the intractable…organisation can be managed” (Peters & Waterman, 1982). Inside and outside organisations, simplicity is persuasive. Both of these examples make light of complexity. When an organisation brands paradoxes as manageable in its communications to staff, it often reaffirms the primacy of rationalism and the linear, decisive, instrumentalising either/or approach as a modus operandi. It is able to do this by looking in the rear-view mirror. The organisation’s retrospective account does not mention the false trails or the mess. Instead it describes the coherent strategy that predicted and produced the successful result. Meanwhile paradox is inherently fluid and

dynamic and therefore hard or impossible to predict. In the context of management, paradox is wild and subverts the management ambitions of stability and predictability.

## 4. Debates

For 25 years and more the paradox community has been crafting a lens though which to view all organisational life (Fairhurst et al., 2016). There is ample evidence that some of its thinking is becoming settled (Cunha & Putnam, 2019), but disputes remain. The competing perspectives are resolved here into five debates which I will now discuss. My aim in discussing these debates is to summarise the questions paradox scholars have not yet fully answered.

### 4.1 The managerialism in paradox scholarship

Paradox scholars address their work to managers as well as fellow scholars. The dominant talk is of managing paradoxes (eg Lewis, 2000: 763), the management of paradoxical tensions (Smith et al., 2017: 304; Smith & Lewis, 2011: 381), the role of managerial cognition (Keller & Sadler-Smith, 2019: 168). The research community also seeks to "address tensions" (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018: 40) or achieve their "resolution" (Keller & Sadler-Smith, 2019: 178). It is interested in the skills leaders need to "manage" paradoxes (Smith & Lewis, 2012). The over-arching ambition is to help managers not just survive but also "thrive in the midst of the tensions that are persistent and prevalent in the volatile, ambiguous and complex and uncertain environments" (ibid: 179). The paradox community focuses at the level of the organisation and management and, as previously discussed, most of its attention is devoted to the former (Schad et al., 2016: 29). This has consequences for our understanding of paradox and the longer term contribution of paradox scholarship, and I now discuss two weaknesses in the literature. The first is its failure until recently to consider the effect of power on responses to paradox. The second is what might be called naivety about the power effects on the paradox community itself.

Power is integral to "the functioning and manifestations of paradox in all organisations" but the literature often overlooks it (Fairhurst et al., 2016: 177). For Mumby, Fairhurst and others, power effects are integral to the way paradoxical dynamics play out. For example, actors have been found to amalgamate multiple tensions within discursive knots, showing their awareness of the power effects that make a given paradoxical pole either stronger or weaker (Sheep et al., 2017). Another recent paper about the "dark side" of paradoxes argues that actors do not negotiate them in a vacuum. Instead power is embedded in the

structures and knowledge of the organisation - influencing its rules, institutional norms and social relations and therefore the courses of action that are available to the actor and those that are barred (Berti & Simpson, 2021). A Critical perspective informs how we understand the construction of paradox in four ways, according to Putnam et al. First, discursive struggles for meaning in organisations are political. Secondly, attention to power sets paradoxes in their historical context, for example the binary tension that exists between the rational and the irrational. Thirdly, a power perspective sheds light on multiple layers of analysis at once, for example the effect of the organisation on the individual response of its actors to paradox. And fourthly, actors come to recognise a paradox and the power relations that underpin it (Cunha & Putnam, 2019: 110). Such insights counter the paradox literature's tendency to reify paradox, ie treat it as a stable relationship between two poles, even if the context around the paradox is in permanent flux (Cunha & Putnam, 2019: 101). Putnam and others argue that academics must be more vigilant against a dualistic view of paradox, because it cannon adequately represent the continuous movement within and around paradox.

A dialectical view of paradox should be mentioned here because it reflects a reaction to the reification of paradox. For those who advocate it, paradox is misrepresented if its dynamism, the continuous movement between poles, is not emphasised. The notion "negative dialectics" resists the temptation to stabilise the movement between polls through a synthesis or conclusion (Adorno, 1973). Scholars should instead choose the "more difficult path of keeping tensions and contradictions in constant play" (Mumby, 2005: 23). The dialectical view sees poles not as discrete phenomena forming tensions, but as fluid, interconnected forces. Thesis and antithesis amalgamate, but the resulting synthesis has barely formed when a new antithesis emerges to contest it. The dialectical view thereby de-reifies "established social patterns and structures" so as to explore new possibilities (Benson, 1977: 6). And it draws from poststructuralism to argue that the apparent unity of an object depends linguistically on its opposite. This is Derrida's concept of undecidability in which opposing terms are different because they inhabit each other (Cooper, 1989), an idea I discuss further in the object vs subject debate below. Scholars who subscribe to the dialectical view see tensions merging, evolving, dissolving through social interaction (Putnam et al., 2016: 75). Hegelian dialectics and Marx & Engels' dialectical materialism have been highly influential, but more recent interpretations have tended to be less dogmatic, more open-ended (Fairhurst & Collinson, 2023). For example, Bakhtin departs from Marx and Hegel to focus on *ongoing* sensemaking and

communicating (Bakhtin, 1981) so that the dialectical view becomes one of continual oscillation between opposing poles. This interpretation of dialectics is powerful because it explores tensions not in order to resolve them but rather to see how they can be a springboard for fresh ideas (Spicer et al., 2016: 237). The dialectical perspective is further discussed below under the object vs subject debate.

Furthermore, the paradox community is influenced by its relationship with management. For reasons already stated, its primary target audience outside academia is organisational leadership. It chooses case studies and insights that are relevant to managers, and its language reflects this focus. The word “manage” is the obvious collective verb for what managers do and its intended meaning may be neutral, but it is loaded with organisational significance and connects effortlessly with well established discourses of influence and control. “Manage” with these connotations undermines the position that managers should accept paradoxes as they are, and not treat them as a form of management problem. The use of this word by paradox scholarship is perhaps knowingly ambiguous. Is it neutral or does it denote managerial control?

The danger is that paradox articles look increasingly like “How to” guides for practitioners - dangerous because making paradox scholarship practical has caused paradoxes to be cast as problems (Cunha & Putnam, 2019: 101). Managerialism has already curbed several movements whose origins were radical and reforming, including Fairtrade and microfinance (Edward & Olsen, 2006). An encounter with business presents a young movement with the opportunity to grow. In return for funding and visibility it learns to be pragmatic, and an inexorable process of standardisation may begin (Edward & Tallontire, 2009). Its activity is increasingly rationalised through a set of limited goals and metrics that support an instrumentalist discourse, which in turn binds it to discourses of markets and profit. While there is much talk about radical innovation, the movement is increasingly understood through a business case lens (Hahn et al., 2014). When the movement joins the mainstream it must re-learn how to be political, dissenting, contrary if it is to be radical again. By then, however, radical action has become unlikely, all but impossible (Edward & Tallontire, 2009: 830-1). Of course there are differences. What is similar is the possibility that paradoxical thinking becomes so familiar to managerialism that we can no longer tell them apart.

## 4.2 The ontological debate

For some time the ontological status of paradoxical tensions has been debated. One perspective is that they are inherent (or material), meaning that they are embedded in complex systems like organisations. The other is that actors construct them within a particular space or time through processes of cognitive framing (Smith & Lewis, 2011: 385). Smith and Lewis respond by arguing that paradoxes are both (ibid: 388), ie latent within organisations until they are noticed, and salient once apprehended, at which point the tension should be negotiated and not ignored.

Since then the literature has complicated its theorising in two ways. First by investigating the relationship between different levels of analysis - how the individual's thinking about paradox is influenced by team/organisation/society-level responses to it, and vice versa. For instance national culture combines with particular contexts to shape how actors apply paradoxical frames (Keller et al., 2017). The second complication develops the idea of nested paradoxes, where one paradox contains several more that 'cluster' around it (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009). Sheep et al show that it is the individual's construction that complicates paradox. They use a discursive lens to argue that actors do more than make sense of one paradoxical pairing at a time: their sensemaking causes tensions to multiply and coalesce until an intractable "Gordian knot" of paradoxes is formed (Sheep et al., 2017: 472). This account emphasises continual movement and casts doubt on the expectation that paradoxes can be extrapolated so as to make them easier to observe, or stabilised long enough to be isolated, defined and managed. This is because managing is itself constitutive: talk produces sensemaking (ibid: 465). They also argue that the paradox literature still has much to gain from a discursive perspective (ibid: 465). The practical solution may be greater "discursive penetration" (Giddens, 1984: 374), which involves the actor developing the ability to reflect on the way particular forms of talk bind multiple paradoxes together into knots.

To make sense of this complexity, a recent paper adds to it. Hahn and Knight (2019) argue against the separation of latent and salient paradoxes into two ontologies, one objective and the other constructed. They claim to improve on the insights of Sheep et al (2017), outlined above, by shifting the origin of knotted paradoxes upstream. Their proposal is to replace the current view of the relationship between latency and saliency with a "quantum-based onto-epistemology" (Hahn & Knight, 2019: 381) which amalgamates representationalism, ie inherent paradoxes, and constructionism, ie salient ones that then

become knotted (ibid: 368). With their paradox “metatheory” (ibid: 381) they aim to solve the dispute over whether paradoxes are “out there” or subjective. In truth, they are both (Lewis, 2000), but Hahn & Knight argue that they should be integrated, and the discussion about the precise nature of their relationship has been an unhelpful distraction (ibid: 363). Their argument is that the transformation of paradox from latent to salient depends on “potentialities” within organisational phenomena. An important building block of their argument is that the constitutive, ie socially constructed, perspective on paradox (eg Putnam et al., 2016) is limited and limiting. In the process, they diminish the linguistic turn (eg Rorty, 1992), reducing it to an interest in discursive constructs rather than cognitive ones (Hahn & Knight, 2019: 381).

### 4.3 The part of the paradox scholar

Hahn & Knight deal with the Linguistic Turn in a sentence and on the basis of one paper (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000). By according it the status of a straw man they overlook its potential to “unpack the dynamics of the discourse/material relationship in all its complexities and contradictions” (Mumby, 2011: 1155), ie exactly what they hope to achieve with their quantum approach.

The linguistic turn offers insights into the relationship between actors and their world - and between the researcher and her/his research. It is a response to the “crisis of representation” (Jameson, 1986: viii), postmodernism’s label for the failure of research approaches to take account of the part that actors and academics play in constructing the world in which they operate. It would applaud Hahn & Knight’s desire to complicate the view that organisational phenomena are either discursive or material, but reject their claim that the linguistic turn is just another ontological standpoint. In fact the linguistic seeks to unpick a misleading dualism between subject and object, and overturn “an autonomous, coherent, fully-formed consciousness from its perch at the top of the tree of knowledge” (Mumby, 2011: 1148). It does so by investigating the linguistic character of all experience (Deetz, 2003: 423), insisting that we do not pass on a faithful, photographic imprint of reality; instead we are intermediaries who add our own construction of it. At the origin of experience, then, is a tension between ways of looking and what is being looked at (Heidegger, 1934). Between subject and object is a dialectical relationship which is continually destabilised (Mumby, 2011: 1149). It looks at all the social phenomena through which meaning is produced and builds a picture of the “ensemble” which constitutes society (Clegg, 1989: 178). The constitutive approach studies structured collections of

text which form the object of which they speak (Foucault, 1979: 49) and thereby give meaning to the material world. It. This world *is* separate from our experience of it, but the latter is inevitably ambiguous and contested because the world is mediated through discourse. Multiple ways of talking about the same object are therefore possible (Hardy & Phillips, 1999) and actors must negotiate meaning for themselves and others through the production, dissemination and consumption of texts. Discourses can be understood only in light of their context (Grant & Hardy, 2003: 7), such as the socio-historic context where a particular meaning has come to dominate. Over time, however, truth claims become "black-boxed" and decontextualised (Iedema et al., 2004: 13) such that their meaning is no longer contested and therefore appears to be stable, true, generalisable.

But meaning is always inherently contingent and unstable. For Saussure, Derrida and others, it depends on relations within a language system. Rather than link particular words to particular objects in the real world, they conceive two parallel systems: a linguistic one that relates *as a whole* to the other system, reality (Jameson, 1972: 32-3). A word or sign that acquires value in the linguistic system has no independent meaning and no direct relationship with the thing it signifies, because no one signifier is better suited to a signified than any other signifier (Chandler, 2007: 24). The point is not to deny the objective world or the possibility of a broad consensus for what a given signifier denotes. After all, the words an individual uses are usually deliberate, not arbitrary. The point is that objects are mediated by, constructed by, a system of signs. This Saussurean insight contributes to the idea of contingent meanings by destabilising common sense beliefs about relationships between the world and our interpretation of them. Thus the meaning of every signifier, such as the label given to a tension or a knot of tensions, is derived from its interpretive context - its differential position with respect to the words around it (Lewis, 2008: 109). "*L'arbitraire du signe*", the arbitrariness of the sign, is fundamental to all language (Saussure, [1916] 2011: 100). Derrida uses the label logocentrism to describe the imposition of a law-like centre to any structure, including signifiers, which not only fixes meaning but also outlaws excessive variation in this meaning. Derrida's objection to logocentrism, or essentialism, is that its claim to stability is contradictory, self-defeating. It argues that there is a centre to all structure which stabilises it, and hence its meaning also.  Yet logocentrism relies on the idea that the centre is immune to the process of structuration, as if it were outside and not inside structure (Derrida, 1978: 279). In the anti-essentialist view, structure is unstable and negotiable because there is no 'transcendental signified' to fix it. Undecidability contests the assumption that decision-making between

options can be consistent and conclusive (Clegg et al., 2007: 400). Everything becomes discourse if there is no centre (Derrida, 1978: 280). Instead there is a “non-locus”, an empty space, and meaning depends on a binary structure that binds objects in a combination of opposition and co-dependence. In pairings like day-night, male-female, or rationality vs disorder, for example, meaning is possible if it is underpinned by contradiction (Cooper, 1989: 488).

The ambition of Hahn & Knight is to effect a significant upgrade on the “merely cognitive or discursive constructs” offered by constitutive scholars (Hahn & Knight, 2019: 381). A less narrow, more generous interpretation of the linguistic turn could show the relationship between all attempts to manage paradox and chains of signifiers. In other words, it could shed light on the processes whereby actors use certainty to repress the undecidability of life and work (Kallinikos & Cooper, 1996: 5). In the Hahn and Knight conception of paradox management, a paradox is either apprehendable or it is not. Once apprehended it is subject to social construction. When decision-makers understand that they are better equipped, argue Hahn and Knight, to deal effectively with paradox (ibid: 382). And this, they say, makes clearer what is knowable and when and how actors should draw on organisational resources during the management of paradox. The managers in their rather mechanistic portrayal of the organisation are not people so much as bundles of cognition, perception and interpretation (Hahn & Knight, 2021: 418). The quantum approach promises to make paradox more manageable, but the human who will play the manager is nowhere to be seen. Nor do they discuss their own investment in the worldview they describe. In Chapter 4 I return to their perspective through a Lacanian lens.

### 4.4 Sensemaking and the triumph of cognition

Paradox scholarship has made extensive use of the sensemaking literature in its study of paradoxes. In doing so it has aligned itself with the management literature that prizes cognition and gives much less thought to the role of emotion. In this section I discuss the relationship of paradox scholarship with sensemaking so as to explain how it views cognition and why it has devoted so little time to emotion.

The paradox literature has focused more on the individual’s cognition. While the relationship between the two is discussed and emotion is considered an important factor in responses to paradox, the prevailing view is that emotions can be managed by conscious, cognitive mental processes. Emotion is a collective noun that covers both the nonrational, which can be productive, and irrational processes which are not (Simon,

[1957] 1997). Emotion is an important signifier in the literature's now largely settled debate about the relationship between conscious and unconscious processes (discussed in the next section). Scholars have expressed an appetite for a fuller understanding of emotions (Smith et al., 2017) but, to date, the topic has been marginalised and paradox scholars do not understand it well (Schad et al., 2016: 40). Meanwhile, the emphasis on cognition continues, which some of the paradox community sees as a weakness (Putnam et al., 2016: 77).

An important factor explaining this is the literature's widespread use of the sensemaking literature. Karl Weick's notable achievement is to have shifted attention from organisations to the processes of organising (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002: 573). He argues that people actively create the organisation through "enactment" (Weick, 1979) - rebutting Taylorist ideas about passive employees who simply carry out the directions they have been given. (For a more detailed discussion about Taylor (Taylor, [1911] 1982), see the next chapter). Sensemaking research focuses on organising within a process ontology. It concerns itself with the way things come to be constituted, reproduced, adapted and defined via ongoing processes within organisations (Langley, 2007: 271). It is the process through which individuals work to understand unexpected or confusing events. When they experience ambiguity or uncertainty they try to clarify what is going on around them. Making sense of complexity allows them to create rational accounts of organisational life (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014: 64), including the paradoxes they encounter.

Equal status is not accorded to cognition and emotion in either sensemaking or paradox scholarship. The bias in favour of cognition is based on a widely held view among organisation and management scholars that rationality is the driving force of managerial thinking (Townley, 2008: 168; Vince & Broussine, 1996: 3), and critics argue that too many paradox studies reflect a bias for order which "presumes that contradictions need to be resolved or effectively managed to restore the status quo to a sense of predictability" (Putnam et al., 2016: 137). The affective components of reactions to paradox tend to be mentioned only in passing (Smith et al., 2017: 313), and if emotions are discussed they are presented as inevitable, but also potentially unruly and in need of management by the analytical, cognitive mind (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018: 40). In sensemaking research Weick himself acknowledges that emotions receive relatively limited attention (Weick, 1979: 240). Interest in their role has grown but cognition continues to prevail (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014: 99). On the other hand, paradox and sensemaking scholars accept that emotional and cognitive reactions are closely related to one another. Human

resistance to paradox is an emotional reaction, paradox scholars argue. When ambiguity caused by paradox provokes anxiety, it prompts a cognitive move to create temporary order through an either/or response. This reduces (emotional) anxiety by focusing on one of the paradoxical elements, rather than both (or all) together. The reason why emotions need to be managed is to allow the cognitive mind to develop a both/and response. The emotional preference for less ambiguity, more order must be kept in check because even more disorder is stored up for later if one side of a polarity is suppressed. When it finally re-emerges, the ignored side is more insistent than before (Lewis, 2000: 763).

Sensemaking can lead to new ways of organising (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014: 92-3), but it more often confirms established patterns of thought. This is because actors use their existing cognitive frames to give their environment meaning (Hahn et al., 2014). The norms of the organisation are likely to exert a strong influence over these frames, and senior managers reinforce them when they practise “sensegiving” - persuading other actors to use management’s preferred cognitive frames (Schildt et al., 2019). How the actor solves today’s problems is therefore shaped by organisational norms, and these are strongly influenced by ideals of rationality. This is reinforced by researchers who tend to imbue actors’ sensemaking with a desirable instrumentality (Holt & Cornelissen, 2013), a central feature of rationality which I explore in Chapter 3. Sensemaking scholars have recently paid closer attention to power relations and their influence on the organisation’s search for coherence, whereby in-the-moment observations are aligned with broader belief systems (Mikkelsen & Wåhlin, 2019; Schildt et al., 2019). This new sensibility is mirrored in the paradox community whose scholars have begun to address the effect of power relations on paradoxical thinking (Berti & Simpson, 2021). However, neither community has paid attention to actors whose sensemaking is - or seems - unimportant in instrumental terms. Overlooking actor experiences which escape the actor’s post hoc rationalisations is a significant omission, because these experiences might enrich our understanding her/his response to paradox. The sensemaking literature has helped paradox scholars to mine all that seems valuable about individual responses to paradox. But there remains an enormous missed opportunity to penetrate processes that are too nebulous to fit into established cognitive patterns (Holt & Cornelissen, 2013: 529) and which cannot be summoned by the actor at the request of the researcher. This thesis argues that paradox scholarship should widen the lens it uses to understand the actor’s response to paradox. Why? Because this will yield insights into what has not been filtered by their cognition.

## 4.5 The taming of the unconscious

The literature on paradox argues that an individual's cognitive ability to identify a paradox and resist either/or choices depends on certain emotional conditions being met. These are innate and learned emotional reactions to events, and include emotional calm, confidence and emotional equanimity. Only under these conditions can the cognitive aspects of paradoxical thinking work effectively (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018; Smith & Lewis, 2011, 2012). While recent reflections by paradox scholars encourage further investigation into emotions (Bednarek et al., 2021; Schad et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2017), little thought has been applied to the unconscious (Vince, 2019: 953). It is important to add here that the validity of this criticism depends on how that term is defined. The paradox literature scarcely uses insights from psychoanalytic theory because it treats the unconscious as a psychological phenomenon, not a psychoanalytic one.

Vince defines the unconscious as follows: mental processes that are inaccessible to the conscious mind but that influence judgements, feelings and behaviour (ibid: 958). Paradox scholars talk about the unconscious in a specific way. They draw on ego psychology so as to equate it to intuition and do not problematise the assumption that it is accessible to the analytical brain. Building on this definition of the unconscious, paradox scholars claim to cover *all* mental activity with cognition and divide it into two kinds: "hot" and "cold" (Keller & Sadler-Smith, 2019). "Hot" denotes the automatic functions (Pratt & Crosina, 2016), and "cold" points to deliberate, conscious rationality. The two types of cognition have a paradoxical relationship but work together (Keller & Sadler-Smith, 2019). There is consequently a marriage in paradox scholarship between the actor's intuition and her/his conscious, cognitive activity, such that decision makers are able to draw on both (Calabretta et al., 2017: 395). But cognition wears the trousers because, in strategic decision making, rationality is central (ibid: 395).

In the next chapter I discuss rationality more fully. For now it is useful to summarise the reasons for this turn towards intuition and away from the unconscious as Lacan and Freud would define it. I think there are three: first, as discussed earlier, the promotion of intuition draws on a popular and credible theoretical perspective, ego psychology. Secondly, the "hot/cold" conception of intuition makes the inner mind accessible. Thus, when research subjects describe their inner thoughts, enthusiasts for intuition hear evidence of the unconscious at work. The unconscious is thereby folded into paradox scholarship, causing no disruption for the positivist, objectivist outlook with its preference

for observable phenomena. Thirdly, paradox scholars are highly selective about Freud's thinking on the unconscious and concentrate on those of his ideas already favoured by ego psychology. A less selective appreciation of Freud recognises that his thinking evolved from a biological conception of the unconscious into a more radical, less verifiable conception in the latter part of his career, notably after World War I. In Chapter 4 I discuss this gradual transition.

### 4.5.1 Intuition

The "dual process" approach, which divides the mind into intuition and analysis, is sometimes described as "thinking fast and slow" (Kahneman, 2012). There are effectively two minds in one brain: system 1 thinking (intuition) works differently but in tandem with system 2 thinking, analysis. Intuition is seen as largely logical but with the cognition speeded up (Simon, [1957] 1997: 139). The aim of paradox scholars is to help management make more use of system 1 mental activity (fast, experiential) so as to facilitate a more effective response to paradox (Keller & Sadler-Smith, 2019), ie the willingness and capacity to consider all sides of a paradox. Researchers in this sub-field use the word "unconscious" or ``subconscious", or they refer to the nonrational, and their theoretical foundation is psychology. Their approach is endorsed by a Nobel Prize winner, the father of thinking fast and slow:

"In the last 20 years, [psychologists] have rediscovered the unconscious…but it didn't come from Freud: it came from experimental psychology" (Kahneman, 2014).

For Kahneman psychoanalysis is not just unfashionable; it is obsolete. Psychology can therefore explain all mental activity, distinguishing between analytical thinking and intuition which it divides into the nonrational, which informs "expert intuition and judgement", and the irrational decisions that emotions can produce (Simon, [1957] 1997: 139). Having adopted ego psychology, paradox scholars take the same view of the unconscious. With the exception of one or two scholars, they also overlook the Freudian ideas which the ego psychologists decided long ago to ignore.

### 4.5.2 Colonising all mental activity

It is now well established that a large percentage of mental activity occurs below the surface of awareness (Barsade et al., 2009). Penetrating the unconscious mind poses

methodological difficulties because its activity cannot be directly observed and must be inferred. This said, scholars are hopeful that neuroscience will soon (objectively) measure the unconscious brain activity which paradox stimulates (Bednarek et al., 2021: 15). Meanwhile, until then, intuition will remain their stethoscope to the unconscious, unless they are persuaded that Lacan's negative ontology (discussed in Chapter 4) has merit.

Intuition is defined as "affectively charged judgements that arise through rapid, nonconscious and holistic associations" (Dane & Pratt, 2007). One of the benefits of this definition for researchers is that respondents produce evidence of the unconscious when they talk. It also confirms the view of ego psychologists that intuition can be deployed by the conscious, analytical mind for better decision making (Pratt & Crosina, 2016). This conception of the nonconscious or nonrational features in goal setting theory (ibid: 333). Here one of its co-authors explains intuition as he sees it: "Basically it [the unconscious] stores what comes into focal or partial awareness…[and] frees the mind to focus on new facts and new integrations" (Latham, 2007: 190). In this conception the unconscious is like an overflow car park for the times when the conscious mind has too many cars in it. Its role is clearly the junior one. Elsewhere, intuition ("an automatic reaction based on affect", Sonenshein 2007) is characterised as the product of experiences which the individual accumulates and internalises (Sonenshein, 2007: 1033). What is internalised can also be externalised - turned into a training intervention, for example - and there is growing interest in intuition as a management skill that can be developed (ibid: 1036).

Paradox scholars use sensemaking data as evidence for their empirical work because respondents' testimonies are retrospective and plausible (Weick, 1979). The psychoanalytic critique of this approach is that sensemaking is the respondent's conscious speculation about what may or may not have occurred some time before in her/his unconscious. There is no epistemological difficulty for the paradox scholar if the unconscious is categorised as intuition / hot cognition / fast thinking, because these conceptions all see the unconscious as just a subcategory of thought. When the paradox scholar investigates the individual, she/he therefore focuses on cognition. The field sees the relationship between hot and cold cognition as paradoxical, ie both complementary and competitive, and its primary interest is how to manage this paradox (Keller & Sadler-Smith, 2019: 172). Sensemaking is integral to the paradox literature, and data from sensemaking are suffused with intentionality: the intention of actors to find coherence and order, and of researchers to find narratives which are verifiable, coherent and generalisable (eg Keller & Wen Chen, 2017).

Making the unconscious accessible and verifiable is not the original objective of ego psychology, but it has become its chief selling points. By contrast, for late Freud and Jacques Lacan (discussed in Chapter 4), the problem of accessibility is secondary to the primary task of theorising the unconscious in ways that grasp not just the individual but also that individual's relationship to its environment.

The schema outlined by ego psychology is plausible, compatible with sensemaking, and useful. Nonetheless, a question remains: is paradox scholarship using all possible means to understand the individual's response to paradox? Its preference for an existing, well established literature such as sensemaking is logical and pragmatic, but this requires paradox scholars to cherry-pick Freud's ideas and ignore the ones not favoured by ego psychology or sensemaking. For example, in paradox research the assumption of cognitive control over the unconscious informs how it looks at data. All focus is therefore on what the research respondent says. It therefore pays no attention to what the respondent does *not* say, yet this phenomenon is of central importance in psychoanalysis and I explore it further in Chapter 4.

Pratt and Crosina discuss the question of pragmatism in their wide-ranging 2016 review of the research on "nonconscious" processes in work. Since then there has been an interesting and welcome development in sensemaking scholarship: a paper which draws both from Weick and also systems psychodynamics (Mikkelsen et al., 2020). It is the first to bring insights on the unconscious to the sensemaking literature, and it remains unique at the time of writing. Pratt & Crossina propose a straightforward explanation for the fact that organisational and management scholarship gives ego psychology a warmer reception than more radical psychoanalytic perspectives: scholars are not willing to use paradigms which they perceive to be less legitimate, hence riskier for their career, than positivism (Pratt & Crosina, 2016: 335). In the next chapter I investigate how the discourse of rationality rules in - and rules out - what counts as legitimate research. The psychologising of the unconscious is a prime example.

### 4.5.2 Cherry-picking Freudian theory

Openness to paradox requires calmness and comfort with ambiguity (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2017). Surprise, shock, a lack of emotional equanimity cause defences. Freud's theorising about defence mechanisms is indeed one of his major

contributions, developed subsequently by Melanie Klein (Klein, 1975) among others. Paradox scholars concur: complexity and paradox can cause anxiety, an unwanted emotion which can prevent the individual from adapting to her/his environment. Because it is unwanted it spurs defence mechanisms (Vince & Broussine, 1996). Splitting is the most common, whereby a paradox is separated nto its component parts. The either/or approach allows individuals to act as if they are no longer dealing with a paradox. Another, projective identification, is used for example by leaders who must reconcile their desire to be liked with the need to make unpopular decisions. They keep intact the self they prefer by projecting their unwanted self on to others (Petriglieri & Stein, 2012).

When Keller and Sadler-Smith characterise the suppression of paradoxical tensions as a defence mechanism, they make their psychologised outlook explicit, arguing that the individual's defence mechanisms occur at the meeting point of intuition and the unconscious. They further argue that, while the psychoanalytic perspective does not explicitly talk about intuition, it does "conceptualise subconscious and emotionally driven behaviour as a defence mechanism" (Keller & Sadler-Smith, 2019: 172). This qualification allows them to align the unconscious with emotion: the emotional component of intuition is what makes it a legitimate proxy for the unconscious, they say. Emotion therefore becomes a broad term which refers to all mental functioning that is not analytical thinking. And it follows that the unconscious has just one function: a defence against unwelcome emotions that allows conscious cognition to function well. This schema conveys some Freudian theory, but not his decisive shift away from the idea that the conscious ego runs the mind. Having argued for decades that psychoanalysis was compatible with the natural sciences, Freud claimed after the First World War that the unconscious is *not* part of a system that adapts to the external world. But this later development was soon overshadowed. Ego psychology became the dominant school within the IPA, the International Psychoanalytic Association (Evans, 1996) and, in due course, it became a cornerstone of the ideas which underpin the paradox literature.

The movement to psychologise has drawn comfort from Freud's ambivalent relationship with mainstream science. Biology, physiology, evolutionary science and psychology were already established and respected during his career. Until he published *Beyond the Pleasure Principle in 1920* (Freud, 1995) he was torn between two worlds: normal science (Kuhn, [1962] 2012) and something more radical. His ambivalence helped ego psychologists to promote a less controversial interpretation of his work, allowing them to promise, among other benefits, an accessible unconscious and the idea that the ego *is*

master in its own house. Their lack of curiosity has served them well: ego psychology was and remains more palatable to objectivist approaches (Pratt & Crosina, 2016). And so it follows that management and organisation scholars, including those in the paradox community, benefit from an account of the unconscious which is plausible and legitimised by notable psychologists. It misrepresents the full range of Freud's contribution, but few have investigated what it misses. Discussing the ego in a 1917 essay, Freud might be describing the branch of science named ego psychology. When it becomes clear that the ego is not master in its own house, one's self love suffers a psychological blow, he says. "No wonder, then," he adds, "that the ego does not look favourably upon psycho-analysis and obstinately refuses to believe in it" (Freud, 1955: 5).

## 5. Conclusions on paradox

In this chapter I have reviewed the paradox literature and outlined an uneasy truce between those who emphasise the constitutive approach and those who see paradox as a reified phenomenon to be managed. Paradox has intrigued since antiquity, retaining its power to surprise and challenge assumptions. Over twenty (and more) years, paradox scholarship has established itself as a force in organisation and management studies. It has disrupted mainstream research and enriched it, but it is starting show signs of becoming institutionalised, and this jeopardises what made it refreshing in the first place: its power to surprise and subvert. Some explanations have become established and even dominant, such that alternative explanations have been marginalised (Cunha & Putnam, 2019), including ideas which would reinforce paradox scholarship's status as a useful outsider. Its investigation of emotions lags far behind what it knows about cognition, and it has re-cast unconscious processes as intuition. The settled status of ego psychology must appeal, as does its claim to make the unconscious observable. The paradox scholar has willingly followed suit and dismissed as irrelevant the parts she/he cannot easily reach. In doing so the way forward for paradox scholarship becomes more predictable, but I believe this choice is unduly swayed by what is readily measurable. And, for all its attractions, it diminishes the ability of paradox scholarship to subvert received ideas in management and organisation studies (Flaubert, 2010).

In this chapter I dwelled on a paper by Hahn and Knight that typifies a rather mechanistic view of the organisation. It scarcely features the individual manager, a minor player in the last two decades of paradox research (Schad et al., 2016). Instead the paper

concentrates on the component parts of the organisational actor: perception, cognition, social construction and, very occasionally, emotion. It illustrates ego psychology's causal view of the human "as a sort of machine" (Murray, 2016: 93). The result, in this article and more widely across the literature, is a rudimentary and limiting understanding of the senior actor.

The paradox community, including Hahn & Knight, of course reflects on its work: the progress to date, the cul-de-sacs, the disputes between different groups. What one rarely sees, however, is reflexivity about the individual scholar: what she/he hopes to be remembered for and how that ambition may have informed their scholarship. Language appears to separate scholars from the world they study. But they are always personally implicated, and the language they use - or, to borrow a discursive idea, the language that uses them - provides insights into their motives as well as the objects of their research. Hahn & Knight trivialise the linguistic turn but do not spot the irony of their own dependence on language to promote what they dub their "metatheory". I return to this thought in Chapter 4.

In the next chapter, Chapter 3, I look more closely at the ideal of rationality and its relationship with managerialism. In this chapter I have suggested that the paradox community's alliance with ego psychology gives it a convenient but ultimately reductive conception of the human experience. Paradox scholarship does indeed urge us to accept unresolvable contradictions (Calabretta et al., 2017: 368), and to criticise management practices that do not embrace paradox (Smith & Lewis, 2011: 396). But its research priorities to date show a marked preference "for rational solutions and for shoving emotion into the background" (Putnam et al., 2016: 136). I am making the argument for a bolder move away from rationality if the study of paradox is not to be a passing fashion. Paradox scholars might start by interrogating why they give cognition and instrumentality so much more attention than emotion. It is a blind spot that constrains the lives of their research subjects. I believe it also constrains paradox scholarship.

# Chapter 3: Rationality

## 1. Introduction

Reason is the perspective which dominates senior managers and the study of them in large organisations. Reason is the instrument through which they tame uncertainty and achieve their objectives (Vince, 2006: 345), and the more senior the manager the more complex the problems she/he must resolve (Grint, 2005). The tenets of this worldview are that problems are external and observable, that the most credible evidence is observable and objective, and that a course of action should be taken up based on a calculation about the likelihood it will achieve desired goals. In organisations it has expanded its remit over the decades: at the outset it was concerned with reason alone but it now also covers emotion. Although there is an extensive critique of scientific management as conceived by Taylor and others, its ideals remain powerful in both practice and research.

Since management and managerialism are both discussed in this chapter, I should distinguish between them now. Management I use as a collective noun for the organisational cadre of managers, or as a description of what managers do, and the intention is to use it neutrally. Managerialism I use to denote the broad philosophy which informs management. It is a loaded term with two opposing connotations, one positive, the other Critical. Managerialism has been referred to as the consensus view (Deetz, 1996) which trusts the prevailing hegemony, seeing it as the natural order and the most effective way to reform and run organisations. It is based on the principle that managers set the goals of the organisation on behalf of all corporate stakeholders, and then direct the organisation as a whole to pursue the agreed goals. The Critical view is suspicious of managerialism, seeing it as a self-policing, self-promoting, self-serving ideology (Spillane & Joullié, 2021: 2). This view focuses on the consequences of management which are

experienced by junior staff and argues that they are often negative, for example when staff are silenced and marginalised by managers.

This chapter has two aims: to provide a brief history of positivism in organisations and to account for its enduring influence there. Though originally a revolution against dogma in the 17th and 18th centuries, positivism had become “normal” science (Hacking, 2012) by the time it was coined in the 19th century by Auguste Comte. With its objective ontology and epistemology, positivism is featured in detail here because it exerts so much influence on the organisation (eg Klikauer, 2019) and on organisation and management studies. Consistent with the idea that competing paradigms differentiate themselves from each other (Kuhn, [1962] 2012), positivism, and managerialism, overlook central questions about the social world.

## 2. Defining terms

### 2.1 Making sense of complexity

Complexity is the setting for most articles on paradox in the last thirty years where it is characterised as an objective and therefore directly observable phenomenon. (Paradox can be seen as a feature of complexity. Its ontology is debated within the literature and I discuss this in the next chapter). Paradox scholars argue that the case for a paradoxical lens becomes ever more persuasive as globalisation and technology increase the complexity which organisations must confront. The distinction between simple and complex problems is important because it tends to dictate where senior managers are expected to devote their time. I start with Rittel and Webber’s 1973 explanation of tame and “wicked” problems. Unlike the tame sort, wicked problems are said to be not complicated but complex. They are intractable in that they resist linear problem solving whose solutions only generate other problems to be solved. Unlike puzzles that invite right or wrong answers, wicked or complex problems are not so easily assessed. Developing a train timetable or a shift rota is tame. Building a national health system or marketing strategy is complex/wicked because there are many more moving parts which may affect each other. And, because the right answers are not self-evident, those who respond to the challenge must collaborate if they are to develop enduring solutions. Furthermore there is a trade-off between the thoroughness of a response and its speed, because, with complex problems, the chances are strong that an initial plan or solution becomes obsolete as circumstances change. As a result, wicked problems are often the preserve of the most senior and experienced actors in the organisation (Grint, 2005).

Complexity has been described as rich interconnectivity: multiple phenomena interacting in unpredictable ways (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). How best to respond to complexity is a contested area. One view proposes a non-linear approach which some have called contextual intelligence. This is the ability to understand the limits of knowledge and "adapt that knowledge to an environment different from the one in which it was developed" (Khanna, 2014). The implication is that growing complexity causes increasingly complex responses to be developed. Soon after Khanna's Harvard Business Review article a report for the World Economic Forum meeting at Davos proposed that her formula should be upgraded to *inter*-contextual intelligence which assesses the effects of different contexts acting on each other to cause even more radical and unpredictable disruption (Saïd Business School, 2015). The alternative view is that order can be imposed such that the organisation resolves external complexity into priorities and focuses only on the most important or urgent. Advocates of adaptability reason that this view is naive because complex systems are too dynamic and unstable to be reduced in this way (Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001: 390). And yet the linear, cause-and-effect approach to complexity appeals because it offers familiar interventions and more predictable outcomes (within the limited success criteria of these interventions), and this approach is common in both practice and research.

No analysis can offer more than a partial view of complexity's many interdependent permutations because organisations and researchers are obliged to "apply limited conceptions to unlimited interdependencies" (LaPorte, 1975: 353). But Enlightenment approaches have looked for and often found order in the external world, both natural and social, and still exert a powerful influence over organisations and the scholars who study them. They support Kuhn's observation about paradigms that, having previously decided what to look for, what they look for is what they find (Kuhn, [1962] 2012). The Critical view is that the decision whether to treat the external world as separate is a conscious one, and seeing a problem as tame or wicked is also a choice. It is the individual who makes the judgement - even if the choice appears so self-evident that no decision seems necessary. The implication of the Critical view is that actors actively co-create the world in which they find themselves (Grint, 2005: 1470). The positivist, managerialist view holds that scientific analysis makes complexity transparent and is therefore able to treat it as an epiphenomenon: an observable object which can be apprehended, delineated and understood by the actor. This depends in turn on the idea that context and observer can

be separated: the rational actor is able to step outside her/his world so as to understand it. I now look briefly at the rules that make this view of the world possible.

## 2.2 Objectivism

Kant argues that objectivity is made possible by certain *a priori* conditions. In particular he claims that valid knowledge may only be acquired through objective, dispassionate, value-free objective inquiry. This in turn is made possible by human reason, and reason brings autonomy: “Man and, in general, every rational being, exists as an end in himself” (Kant, 2012: 18). He claims also that the principles of this reason are universal and internally consistent (MacIntyre, 1981: 45). Reason therefore determines the conditions of possibility for truth: whether a proposition is “up for grabs as a candidate for being true or false” depends on us having a way to reason about it (Hacking, 2004: 190). Though Kant’s *a priori* conditions appear to be a fixed, settled system for determining what is true and real, it is argued that the system is in fact subject to a consensus which can validate or reject a given approach to acquiring and certifying knowledge. The Greeks’ discovery of deductive proof made a new style of reasoning possible. In other words, it was a human consensus, a majority view, that allowed it to become established (Hacking, 2014). Joseph Priestley’s discovery of the component parts of oxygen is in the pantheon of scientific achievements, but Kuhn in his *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* shows how this depended at the time on a consensus within the scientific community - that oxygen was an entity and Priestley’s methods valid. In other words, the discovery of oxygen cannot be reduced to a simple act of perception by one person. Kuhn made famous the term *paradigm,* defining it as a set of assumed background questions, standards and methods. It stipulates not just standards of reasoning, the kind of question that needs to be answered, what counts as a good answer and, as important, the kind of question that qualifies as irrelevant (Kuhn, [1962] 2012: 37).

The debate on objectivity has profound implications for this thesis and I summarise them here. First, as discussed just now, legitimising a scientific discovery requires more than individual brilliance. Its legitimacy is contingent on a community - a group of people who debate the rules, often disagree and finally come to a collective view - a process Kuhn describes as extraordinarily arduous (Kuhn, [1962] 2012: 15). So consensus is never achieved without a fight, and this takes place in the social world. Secondly, a paradigm presupposes the answers it will find: in choosing a particular paradigm, a scientific

community foresees not just the sorts of problems it will tackle but also the solutions that will be possible. The choice of paradigm therefore determines what a scientist looks for and what she/he overlooks (Kuhn, [1962] 2012: 37). Thirdly, the establishment of a paradigm, such as the Enlightenment, gives its particular set of rules some stability. From this point onwards the paradigm has two notable roles. One is to adjudicate on whether a declaration about the world is true according to the tests dictated by the paradigm. The second is that it allows the claim to be made in the first place, or disqualifies it. The consequence of paradigms ruling in or out which aspects of the world may be discussed is that the perceived world consists of the world *and* the paradigm through which it is observed. A paradigm is a tool "through which to view nature", and so it co-creates the world we see. Kant would agree with this point but not the argument made by Kuhn and others, including Foucault and Hacking, that ontology is historical, ie dependent on a particular set of rules which makes certain scientific claims possible (Sciortino, 2021: 130). A claim that holds as objective, uncontested fact is contingent on a settled view about what qualifies as valid, and this will be founded on standards debated and settled decades or centuries before. It was therefore once contested. And, even if the debate has fallen silent, the standards of any paradigm remain contestable. It is also important to note, in relation to this thesis, that these historic rules are better suited to the study of some things than others. For example Newton's bold claim about the nature of time is still pervasive:

> Absolute, true and mathematical time, of itself and from its own nature, flows equably and without relation to anything external" (Newton, [1686] 1999)

But it is an essentialist perspective that chronological time is independent and immutable. It has little to say about the different ways time can be experienced subjectively (Shipp & Jansen, 2021), or the widely varying opinions on what age marks the point when a member of staff becomes an "older worker" (Taylor et al., 2016), or the role of politics in time zones such that 10am happens once a day across the whole of China, six times a day in Australia and eleven across Russia's 11 time zones (Hassid & Watson, 2014). Two points are relevant here. The first is that findings become less absolute and incontrovertible when they are considered in light of their context. The other is that time zones, old age, subjective time demonstrate that phenomena are objective or constructed depending on the paradigm that informs the observer.

In organisations the objectivist paradigm, whose foundation is principally the Enlightenment, has wide-ranging influence. A "regime of truth" (Foucault, 1980) shapes

perceptions about which aspects of the world merit scientific attention. And, on the basis that it co-creates the world (Hacking, 2004), it also determines what is thought to exist. Critical scholars argue that this worldview is implemented through an “epistemic community” (Haas, 1989), an interconnected body of research in which institutes, professions, political organisations - and academic communities - share a common view of what constitutes knowledge and how one can know it.

## 2.3 Rationality

Rationality is defined as “a mode of reasoning, having reasoning power, a process of constructing knowledge” (Oxford English Dictionary). A commentary on rationality is helpful here because it is closely bound up with objectivism. Rationality, or the application of reason, is more assumed than debated (Halpern & Stern, 2018: 1), yet it is explicit in many early definitions of organisation, including Taylor on scientific management (1911), Weber on bureaucracy (1948) and Fayol’s 1949 work on administrative systems (Townley, 2008). Brubaker argues that rationality is not inherent in organisations. Instead it is relational in the sense that things are rational, or not, according to the actor or academic who is considering them (Brubaker, [1984] 2013: 35). Once adopted, the rational approach offers the ideal of objective knowledge: clear, unequivocal and reliable because reason has stripped it of contextual confusion (Bordo, 1987). For Kant reason is what makes the individual independent from the views of others and from her/his context. Rationality therefore becomes the prism through which she/he understands the social world (Shenhav, 1999). The object and the subject are kept separate thanks to reason, and so the rational actor is able to apprehend the object directly. The object “speaks” to her/him undistorted by her/his subjective perspective.

Add the notion of “utility” and the actor is able to make rational choices which maximise pleasure and minimise pain (MacIntyre, 1981: 70). Translated into the organisational context, decisions are rational if they are determined by their utility, ie a calculation about the benefits vs the costs of a given course of action (Townley, 2008: 29). Thus the decision making process shifts from being a private, subjective experience which is difficult to map. With instrumental rationality it becomes an observable comparison by the individual of a range of possible outcomes - according to how well a given utility is served by the decision. The most rational actor is the one who assesses the available options and instrumentalises them most consistently. It is an individualist, transactional, and

idealised view of the world. It is more narrow than Weber's who argued that rationality should also be assessed according to its non-instrumental consequences, and against the political and ideological backdrop of the decision. Organisational theorists have regularly chosen the side of this equation that does not take account of non-instrumental consequences - outcomes that have not been calculated by the individual or organisation (Shenhav, 2005: 200). Having identified the desired goal the actor then concentrates on the means, not the end. A wealth of empirical support supports the idea that success will follow if the goal difficult, clear, specific; also if the actor is committed and knows the discrepancy that separates her/him from achieving the goal (Latham, 2007). The successful actor focuses entirely on how to reach the goal and, in the rationalist view, tactics like collaboration are just instruments of the ulterior motive (MacIntyre, 1981: 23)

Some illustrations of instrumentalised rationality follow. Goal setting relates to all major theories of work motivation: Vroom's VIE theory, Maslow's and Herzberg's motivation theories, Bandura's social cognitive theory, for example. The setting of goals is ubiquitous in organisations - via management by objectives, management information systems, benchmarking, strategic planning and, especially relevant to this thesis, individual performance goals (Lunenburg, 2011). By the end of the 20th century the capacity of specific, difficult goals to increase performance had been demonstrated on a hundred different tasks using 40,000 participants in eight countries. Goal setting was the most valid and practical theory of employee motivation in the whole of organisational psychology (Latham, 2007: 63), directing the efforts of the individual and the organisation as a whole. In coaching, for example, goals set the agenda by focusing on how best to reduce the discrepancy between the desired goal and the coachee's current skills. Goals are increasingly used to integrate the interests of all parties - in theory at least - by enhancing the skills of the coachee while simultaneously building the capability of the organisation. In reality, however, there are complicating factors like power relations which can safeguard the interests of the organisation better than those of the individual (Shoukry & Cox, 2018). The 2008 global credit crisis demonstrates the potentially noxious effect of focusing on the means while not adequately assessing the ends, ie all the possible outcomes. A month after the fall of Lehman Brothers and other financial institutions, the former chairman of the Federal Reserve testified before the US House Committee for Oversight and Reform. He reflected on the reasons for the economic calamity which all but a few had considered impossible (Lewis, 2010). Although familiar with Wall Street's ability to invent risky products in its pursuit of rapid growth, Greenspan

declared he was “shocked” that the banks had not given more thought to the consequences of excessive risk taking: “I made a mistake in presuming that the self interest of organisations…[was] such that they were best capable of protecting their own shareholders and their equity” (Greenspan, 2008). The credit crisis proved this to be an unwise assumption. His comment also underlines a focus before the crash on means but not ends, ie consequences. Leverage was the means by which financial institutions chose to grow their profits, even if this practice was laying the foundations for the subsequent liquidity crisis (Adrian & Shin, 2008). Banks knowingly passed on the leverage to other investors without making this explicit. The doctrine of self-interest (for the organisation and individual traders) made this possible by marginalising the downside - systemic risk (Roberts & Jones, 2009: 866). Once the goal was set to maximise profits, institutions developed the processes with the greatest utility for achieving it.

### 2.3.1 Institutionalising rationality

It is a short distance from the individual trader in a bank to the idea of a group of managers making collective choices based on the same principles of rationality. Several definitions explicitly link the organisation as a whole to the rational pursuit of the most beneficial outcomes. For example Barnard’s ‘The Functions of the Executive’ claims that the formal organisation consists of “that kind of cooperation among men that is conscious, deliberate and purposeful” (Barnard, 1938: 4). In this way instrumentalised rationality becomes reified or institutionalised. It seems natural because it is the prevailing system; alternative systems are not widely discussed or else they are actively marginalised. Reification is “a modality of consciousness; more precisely, a modality of man’s objectification of the human world” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966: 89). In fact, similar to the fraught evolution of all paradigms discussed above (Kuhn, [1962] 2012: 15), the image of management as the embodiment of rationality hides a turbulent history which begins in the late 19th and early 20th centuries when mechanical engineers aimed to increase their influence in American firms by expanding from their strictly technical realm into organisational design. This article in the November 1902 edition of Engineering Magazine (in Shenhav, 2005: 187) explains the thinking:

> “The cold logic of a mechanical demonstration may be more effective in industrial reform than any sympathetic appeal of the humanitarian”.

The ambition of Frederick Winslow Taylor, himself a mechanical engineer, was to make industrial bureaucracy as objective, systematic and rational as engineering itself.

"Scientific Management" would *reliably* obtain the "hard work, good will and ingenuity" of the workforce, in contrast to alternative approaches. To achieve this, knowledge would need to be gathered, recorded, and "reduced to laws, rules and mathematical formulae" (Taylor, [1911] 1982: 125). Organisational knowledge would no longer be stumbled on: it would be *made through human action* until it became institutionalised, and the creation of this knowledge would be coordinated and centralised (Brown, 1990: 188). Company owners viewed the motives of these engineers with suspicion, however, fearing that they just wanted to grow their professional territory (Shenhav, 1999). The engineers responded by arguing that their technical approach would be the antidote to industrial unrest on the basis that it was impartial and above class politics. "The properties of the machine-like bureaucratic system were expected to transform chaos into order, ambiguity into certainty and irrational into rational behaviour" (Shenhav, 2005: 190). But the conflict that characterised these early days of managerialism has been largely edited out of its history (ibid: 203) and Critical scholars argue that its reification is complete, notably through the rise and rise of management's objective epistemology, which is made coherent through three commitments. The first is positivism's aspiration to make the social world as fully understood by science as the natural world, a phenomenon sometimes called "physics envy" following a disdainful comment attributed to Ernest Rutherford, nuclear physicist and 1908 Nobel Laureate, about the hierarchy of sciences where his subject is at the pinnacle, according to him: "All science is either physics or stamp collecting." This view would certainly include the social sciences under the category of stamp collecting, ie commonplace and unserious. The commitment to positivism also embraces the idea that scientific knowledge is cumulative, allowing management to build an objective evidence base about all aspects of the organisation including its social reality. This ambition is grander than the traditional purview of the engineer and accountant which originally covers only hard, objective, less contested organisational phenomena such as structures, costs, sales, employee satisfaction surveys. Secondly there is a commitment to a particular epistemology: evidence is actively pursued and promoted by managers such that the status of other forms of knowledge is diminished (Morrell, 2008: 617) - unstructured interviews for instance. Thirdly, there is a strong commitment to a common managerial language including value-laden terms like "rigorous", "systematic", "objective", "consistent", "transparent". When they are used to characterise evidence and rationality, the assumption grows that the same characteristics may not be used for other approaches. In addition, metaphor can transform a contestable idea into everyday discourse which seems so much like common sense that it is not questioned. The idea

that “Time is money” is ubiquitous, for example (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Everyday phrases like “You’re wasting my time”, “I’ve invested a lot of time in her”, “That flat tyre cost me an hour” show how powerfully the discourse of financial value influences time, and this in turn shapes how actors think and make decisions. The metaphor “time is money” translates especially well into organisations where the language of the accountant can be all-pervading. Since time is expensive, actors think carefully about how they spend it. Their ability to justify an investment of time depends on how easily they can demonstrate its value to the organisation. Where the utility of an hour is clear and the evidence easily demonstrated, like analysing costs or preparing for next week’s pitch, that hour is easier to legitimise than an hour spent pondering long term priorities or doing “blue sky” thinking. Rational metaphors perfectly suit the disciplines where hard facts like sales data and costings reflect what they do in the organisation. Sales people and accountants naturally bring objective evidence into their talk because the outcome of their work is easily measured and expressed in numbers. Other functions, like human resources, work with non-numerical phenomena and must translate them into an organisational lingua franca. If they do not speak the language of management accounting, the issues they raise are unlikely to find a general audience in the organisation (Barber, 1997: 8). And “evidence-based” language can be so pervasive among scholars that only objectivist research is seen to be legitimate (Morrell & Learmonth, 2015: 521).

### 2.3.2 Uncertainty

What is significant, but unobvious, is the debt language like “rigorous” and “systematic” owes to *uncertainty* for its meaning and influence. The Enlightenment positions rationality, formal order and stability against the “disarray” of the informal (Townley, 2008: 33). Complexity makes life ambiguous: its rich connectivity produces so many possible outcomes that certainties are elusive and, it is widely argued, impossible. Rationality promises predictability, but this is harder to sustain the more complex and unpredictable the world becomes. And yet the more complexity disconcerts the organisation, the more its actors are reassured by rationality and the apparent certainties I have outlined above. The organisation might therefore be seen as the site of a pact with its employees who accept protection from uncertainty in return for their loyalty.

### 2.3.3 Bounded rationality

Rationality is typically defined as intentional, reasoned and goal-directed. Pure rationality, as discussed above, calculates the utility of different options and then chooses based on minimising pain and maximising gain or pleasure (Mumby & Putnam, 1992: 469). Simon proposed that reason in organisations should be moderated (Simon, [1959] 2002: 172), introducing the phrase "bounded rationality" to take account of practical barriers that inhibit rationality in its purest form. These include structural constraints within the organisation and the limits of an actor's or a group's cognitive capacity. Thus "satisficing" means that the optimal choice is abandoned in favour of the best available one that meets the organisational goal in question. A body of evidence supports bounded rationality. The logic is that a pragmatic acceptance of its bounded nature is more useful for the organisation than the unbounded version, not least because it makes better use of scarce resources (Conlisk, 1996). On the other hand, it still assumes that the best metaphor of organising is the brain, evoking Descartes' dualistic vision of the body which is controlled by the mind. And thus cognition is assumed to explain thought, action and choice better than inspiration and sentiment can. Mumby and Putnam argue that bounded rationality scholars either view emotion as detrimental to reason and therefore a threat to the organisation. Or they simply instrumentalise it in the sense that managing emotions becomes another way to serve organisational ends (Mumby & Putnam, 1992: 470). I now look more closely at emotion and how it is understood by managerialism.

## 3. Emotion at work

In the organisational history of rationality, emotion is often presented in opposition to reason and subject to it. Simon contrasts the "conscious analysis" of rationality with the "intuitive and judgemental" decision-making of the "nonrational" and the "irrational" decisions that are based on emotions rather than rationality (Simon, 1989: 57). Work is inevitably emotional because humans are. The organisation is a human intervention which serves human ends and depends on human beings to function (Vince, 2006: 346). The task of managing it is modelled on the Cartesian separation of mind and body. The body carries out the instructions of the mind, and so the "body corporate" becomes the limbs and organs of the managerial brain (Fayol, [1949] 1990: 181).

Over the last fifty years or more organisational scholars have come to accept that understanding emotion is a prerequisite for understanding organisational life. This requires us to theorise "all that becomes apparent when we make the simple assumption

that what we feel is fully as important to the outcome of social affairs as what we think or do" (Hochschild, 1990: 117). The word emotion is shorthand for an enormous range of feelings. Emotion plays a role in many if not all aspects of organising including ethics, communication, motivation, decision making, leadership, the subjective meanings actors attribute to work, happiness, anxiety, anger, stress, emotional labour. Emotion has so many aspects to it that it can be understood from multiple angles. Any approach to the study of emotion will therefore deliver only a partial understanding that is contingent on the assumption of its chosen paradigm (Fineman, 2004: 721).

Emotion is everything that is not rational analysis, to quote Simon (1989). The rational organisation studies and understands emotion according to its rationalist norms, ie according to its preferred ontology and epistemology, both objective. Emotion has been defined as the public display of feelings, while feelings themselves are private experiences (Fineman, 2001): irrational, influential but not readily accessible to the observer. The rational organisation takes a keen interest in emotions because passion often dictates the preferences that people express and act upon (Archer, 2000: 36). Instrumental rationality is deployed to focus on how to achieve goals, yet these goals may well have been chosen *irrationally*. It follows that, from the rational perspective, emotion is something the organisation needs to manage.

Making emotions observable has been a major aspect of the rational project in organisations. Cue decades of effort by management scholars to assess, map, and understand emotion. John Watson, father of behaviourism, argues that the inner workings of the mind should *not* be an object of research, even though the study of emotion implies introspection. It is more fruitful - and accurate - to study the *external* signs of human psychology, he claims, such as "stimulus and response" and "habit formation". This claim reveals a precept of the objectivist approach: that valid evidence depends on the neutrality of the researcher, which is made possible by reason. Any method that entails introspection by the research subject herself/himself is unreliable. "It has been shown," he says, "that improvement in habit comes unconsciously. The first we know of it is when it is achieved, when it becomes an object" (Watson, 1913: 174). The view of behaviourism is as follows: if the study of observable phenomena like "sensori-motor processes" is a reliable window into internal processes, then behaviourism needs to look no further. What occurs behind these observable signs is no longer needed either as an object of research or as a construct (Hoedemaekers, 2019: 306). It is, of course, a

colossal assumption that objective evidence tells the observer what lies behind the evidence.

In the era before 1964 when job satisfaction was thought to predict job performance (Latham, 2007), managers saw job *dis*satisfaction as the enemy and judged that most of these employees were quite wrong to blame their unhappiness on their job. Fisher & Hanna studied petty jealousies, the failure to cooperate "cheerfully", frequent job changes, talk of exhaustion and other aspects of job dissatisfaction. They concluded that these were all signs of "nonadjustive emotional tendencies" (Fisher & Hanna, 1931). It was claimed soon after that these emotionally maladjusted workers explained half of the cost of employee turnover (Viteles, 1932: 589). Subsequent researchers listened more carefully to the needs of employees and, following the Hawthorne studies, paid more attention to job design. Employers were encouraged to foster responsible autonomy among their staff (Friedman, 1977) so as to give them more room to exercise their own judgement over how to do their job.

Mastering the emotional as well as the rational is possible if employees fall in love with the organisation, according to Peters and Waterman (1982). The promotion of shared values and beliefs is thought to make it more likely that employees will identify with their employer (Kunda, 2006). As greater attention is paid to influencing emotions, overt controls become less prominent on the basis that employees who are "engaged" emotionally in the organisation are more likely to deliver successful outcomes for it (Fleming & Sturdy, 2011). To illustrate this shift I now set out two examples of managerial efforts to encourage employees to love their workplace. First, the notion "employee democracy" encourages worker participation and explicitly rejects Taylorism which encouraged employees not to think. Employee democracy is not anticapitalist, nor does it oppose efficiency, competitiveness or profit. Indeed it *advances* these causes by persuading employees to take responsibility for their career (Holtzhausen, 2002: 32). The idea is that, if employees adopt these ideals as their own, then their influential status within the organisation is just a happy coincidence, not an imposition. A second prominent example is the quest for authenticity which encourages employees to express their *preferred* self (Kahn, 1990: 700). There is a problematic assumption here that the actor's preferred self is also her/his true self, and that this should be brought into work unfiltered having been crafted outside (Fleming & Sturdy, 2011: 184). This anti-establishment discourse is managed so that it communicates creativity, disruption, innovation (but not revolt) inside and outside the organisation. Young tech firms, for

example, actively recruit employees with anti-capitalist and counter-cultural values, a process dubbed the “industrialisation of bohemia” (Ross, 2004). But embedding this idea of the anti-organisation organisation is a management task. It is for managers to encourage and demonstrate the virtues that are admired in the new, more emotionally open firm. They must manage by example, “engineer” the positive, and become the heroes who lead their team on heroic quests (Hatcher, 2008: 156). That said, there is significant doubt about the strength of the claimed links between positive emotions and superior performance (Fineman, 2006).

### 3.1 Balancing the rational and the emotional

It is reasonable to wonder why organisations place so much emphasis on emotion and try to present the work experience as non-work, particularly as this approach is useful only if it serves the organisation’s goals. Peters and Waterman argue for the need to “balance” the rational and emotional so as to “stop overdoing things on the rational side” (Peters & Waterman, 1982). During the 20th century the objectivist view becomes progressively more confident that emotions as well as reason could be shaped by management. Emotions would always be potentially unruly and troublesome, but the managerialist view is optimistic that they can be tamed:

“All that stuff you have been dismissing for so long as the intractable, irrational, intuitive, informal organisation can be managed” (Peters & Waterman, 1982).

A significant dividend of this view is that overt coercion becomes unnecessary and control becomes indirect - strongly influencing what employees do and think having first persuaded them that they are masters of their fate. The shift to invisible control is likened by Critical scholars to Weber’s constraining iron cage of capitalism, except that it is now a glass one. The constraints are as limiting as before but invisible (Gabriel, 2005). In the next page or so I explore the management of the “irrational, intuitive, informal organisation” in more detail under three headings: promoting individualism, promoting evidence, and marginalising the context.

#### 3.1.1 The promotion of individualism.

The talk of authenticity, the injunction “just be yourself”, the deliberate selection of “mavericks” and “crazies”: for Fleming (2017) these practices celebrate the individual actor over the collective. The purpose of empowering employees is to make them “self-

starters, self-managers and self-disciplinarians". They instrumentalise what they say and do in order to enhance their own economic value. The better they regulate what they do, the more competitive they are as human capital(ists) (Fleming, 2017: 692). This celebration of the individual draws on neoliberal ideas about what society is for. Neoliberalism is a theory of political and economic practices. It proposes that "human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework" (Harvey, 2005: 2). Inside the organisation, a neoliberal discourse reinforces individual choice and ultimate responsibility (Fleming, 2017: 703), including for things which were formerly promoted by organisations as benefits they were best placed to provide - like oversight of the employee's career.

Goal setting relates overwhelmingly to the individual. Coaching reinforces the status of goal setting as the framework through which the ambitions of both actor and organisation are most likely to be realised. 70% of organisations use coaching and 44% offer it to all their staff (Day et al., 2008). Organisations also promote "emotional self-management", suggesting a merger between feelings and reason where reason is the senior partner. The rational management of emotion, by the individual, thereby becomes an important factor in both personal and organisational success (Hatcher, 2008: 153). This managerial discourse is hard to escape: it is insistent and almost ubiquitous. Nonetheless there is still space in organisations where emotion is able to run free, uninstrumentalised. Gabriel calls it "a kind of organisational dreamworld" in which the actor builds a self of her/his choosing rather than the one created by management (Gabriel, 1995: 477).

### 3.1.2 The promotion of objective evidence

Metrics make it possible for rationality and emotion to cohabit as equal partners within the organisation, and the analysis most conducive to objective assessment is at the individual level. The pervasive influence of the natural sciences as the ideal of scientific thinking means that in the social world, also, numbers are assumed to indicate precision and objective truth (Fineman, 2004: 725). Peters & Waterman (1982) argue that you have to make the soft hard in a world (ie the organisational world) where the hard drives out the soft. 'Hard' in this case meaning objective facts and phenomena that can be represented in numerical form, and 'soft' denoting aspects of organisational life, like values and feelings, that are more difficult to calibrate than sales and costs. If what is soft is influential but not taken seriously, the answer is to find ways to calibrate it.

From the second half of the 20th century, as objective measurement of emotions helps to promote their contribution to performance, new constructs come into use. Employee engagement is a "positive, fulfilling work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption" (Schaufeli et al., 2006: 702). It becomes an ever more popular way to idealise and assess the alliance between organisation and individual. It is assessed through self report employee surveys whose reliability and validity are contested (Valentin, 2014). It has significant definitional problems and is incorrectly seen as a stable trait, such that inadequate attention is paid to the actor's changing context (Francis & Keegan, 2020). In the early 2000s proponents of Emotional Intelligence (EQ) juxtapose it with IQ. The move draws explicitly on the discourse of cognitive intelligence so as to acquire equal status with it. Comparing high EQ with high academic grades is manifestly problematic if it is assessed through self report measures with their notorious validity and reliability limitations (Fineman, 2004: 728), yet this is commonly done. The interesting question is what these constructs of dubious scientific quality offer to managerialism. The most obvious benefit is the alchemy which the rationalist approach performs on an internal feeling that is difficult to verify objectively. Scales and self report surveys turn this feeling into managerial gold and it becomes verifiable, objective evidence that legitimises the decisions managers make.

Diminishing the role of context. Managerialism has a history of making decisions on the basis of evidence alone and without reference to contextual factors. This is often in contrast to the more nuanced position of the academics who develop the evidence. For instance, although neuroscience no doubt yields useful insights about emotion and cognition, scholars advise caution. They argue that brain activity data are not enough on their own: neuroscience insights about the individual actor's responses to work must be considered alongside the effect of context on these responses, not despite them (Waldman et al., 2017). The model for evidence-based management is revealing on this point. The epistemology of managerialism is based on evidence-based medicine (Morrell, 2008) which stipulates that clinicians must use evidence as fully as possible and apply "the conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions" (Sackett et al., 1996: 614). But there is a significant caveat: the clinician's evidence-based expertise must be "situated". This means the "judgement that individual clinicians acquire through clinical experience and practice". And there is an ethical element too: Sackett et al stipulate the "compassionate use of patients' predicaments, rights, and preferences in making clinical decisions" (ibid: 615). In practice, individual

managers may well imitate doctors with exactly this blend of theory, evidence, practical experience and ethics. Managerialism as an ideology is less pragmatic. It calculates the instrumentality of a given decision relative to a performance goal, and makes truth claims based on “partial analysis” which can suffer from “unrealistic and biased assumptions” (Ghoshal, 2005: 77). Managerialism can have a normative effect on the organisation which corrupts the Enlightenment ideal it espouses. That is to say, when the available evidence does not support a truth claim, the manager ought to abandon it and find a new claim which does match the world it describes or predicts. However when managerialism claims causal relationships between variables using data that only show correlation, then it is guilty of constructing the world, not reflecting it (O'Neill, 2010). In such situations managerialism still invokes the highest ideals of positivism, when in truth it displays an ethics-free instrumentality. Perhaps the most trenchant criticism of managerialism is also what makes it so persuasive: it does not recognise the role that power relations play in the achievement of its ambitions (Morrell & Learmonth, 2015). Managerialism often relies on a rather narrow interpretation of Enlightenment principles. In doing it diminishes its authority (Spillane & Joullié, 2021).

## 4. Performance management

As discussed above, the managerialist ontology classes complexity as an external phenomenon to be observed through the systematic gathering of evidence about factors that may include geopolitics, technology, consumer demand and competitor activity. This complexity penetrates the organisation because its external competitiveness depends on how effectively it coordinates its internal efforts (Yukl, 2010: 293). What causes organisational success, ie strong performances against the targets it sets itself, is closely linked to what individual actors achieve. Assessing performance against manufacturing or sales targets is straightforward because the outputs are uncontestable. Measuring less tangible activity like collaboration is more problematic, yet as important where it contributes to the organisation’s value. In organisational theorising the causes of performance must be measured, however easy or problematic the task. One of the most influential pioneers of performance management is Lord Kelvin. In his book *Electrical Units of Measurement* he advocates the quantitative approach:

“I often say that when you can measure what you are speaking about, and express it in numbers, you know something about it; but when you cannot measure it, when

you cannot express it in numbers, your knowledge is of a meagre and unsatisfactory kind. If you cannot measure it, you cannot improve it" (Kelvin, 1883).

If the manager is to be held responsible for her/his performance against agreed goals, the organisation needs to develop a system which defines and measures performance. Objective evaluation allows the organisation to influence performance through feedback, reward good performance through bonuses, salary increases, promotions and so on (Kerr & Slocum, 2005: 130), and sanction actors who do not perform well against their targets. Performance is self-policing in the sense that the actors do not depend on their manager to interpret how to achieve their objectives (ibid: 133). The system, once set up, is consistent with the ethos of self-management, discussed above, and runs itself. The other significant consequence of the performance-based reward system is that it makes actors accountable for the results they achieve, but not necessarily the methods they use. The incentivised individual may pursue her/his targets selfishly in ways that harm organisational needs: behaviour that is rational for the actor may endanger goal attainment by the collective. The danger is that the system incentivises what it measures but overlooks other kinds of behaviour, just as desirable for the organisation, which are not measured. This may be because their importance has been overlooked, or because they do not lend themselves to quantification. In a classic Academy of Management Journal paper, Steven Kerr points out the folly of "rewarding A while hoping for B" (Kerr, 1975). The paper discusses the problem in which actors focus on goals which carry a reward and ignore those that offer no reward or where the actor cannot rely on one.

Several academics developed frameworks in the second half of the 20th century in order to combine financial and nonfinancial measures of organisational performance. In the 1950s General Electric's corporate planners identify one financial and seven nonfinancial metrics (Kaplan, 2009: 5). Peter Drucker introduces the idea of management by objectives arguing that "managers must understand that business results depend on a balance of efforts and results in a number of areas" (Drucker, 1954: 126). Total Quality Management became a significant movement in the 1980s. It followed Deming's work to help rebuild Japanese capability after World War II, and aimed to reduce variance in internal processes so as to improve reliability and service quality (Steingard & Fitzgibbons, 1993: 27). In the 1990s Heskett, Sasser and Schlesinger developed the "service profit chain" - a virtuous circle model that claimed causal links between internal initiatives (many of them "soft", to use the Peters and Waterman phrase), customer service quality and profitability (Heskett et al., 1997). This is the context that shapes the Balanced Scorecard which is

proposed by Kaplan and Norton in 1992. Their aim is to reconcile the organisation's external and internal priorities and give them equal status. Customers need to be understood and satisfied, but how? By giving similar attention to activities inside the organisation. "Managers need to focus on those critical internal operations that enable them to satisfy customer needs" (Kaplan & Norton, 1992: 74). Customer and employee needs do not always align with each other. The priorities of one department may compete with those of other departments: product development is slow and methodical, while sales departments need to fulfil customer needs fast. The Kaplan/Norton model proposes that there is an optimal balance to be found between competing priorities so that managers can "understand these interrelationships" (ibid: 79). The balanced scorecard is the antidote to the problem outlined by Kerr -of rewarding A and hoping for B. Kaplan & Norton argue that "companies should decide what processes and competencies they must excel at and specify measures for each" (ibid: 74). In other words, the answer is to measure all areas of organisational activity under four main "perspectives": financial, customer, internal business, and learning + innovation (ibid: 76). The proposal proves to be influential. The original Harvard Business Review article by Kaplan and Norton has been cited 29,000 times, according to Google Scholar, indicating significant interest in how to solve the problem of competing priorities. The article begets a generation of performance "dashboards" which aim to monitor potentially every aspect of organisational activity. The vehicle dashboard metaphor suggests the accumulation of all the information needed to drive a car. Perhaps this explains the popularity of the term "drivers" to describe the factors that cause organisational performance. At any rate, the dashboard is what the senior management team uses to steer the driver (Yigitbasioglu & Velcu, 2012),

The Balanced Scorecard and subsequent iterations of the dashboard exemplify the ambition of Peters and Waterman (1982) to "manage" all organisational activity from the rational to the irrational. I have outlined some of the ways in which subjective processes within the actor have become subject to measurement, integrating emotion into the organisational lingua franca which claims that all activities are equally quantifiable and observable, as per the Enlightenment ideal. In accordance with the Peters and Waterman injunction to "make the soft hard", performance management systems assign equal status to objective, tangible phenomena and subjective, intangible ones like collaboration. Judging collaboration requires more interpretation by the line manager than assessing, say, sales performance, but in appearance at least the two scores are equally neutral and

objective. The organisation as a whole comes to be represented as a chain of means-end processes where inputs lead to benefits (Meyer, 1983: 235). Performance management systems therefore shape how actors see the world.

In recent years technology has made performance measures more automated, more intrusive. “People analytics” have long been used to monitor the performance of junior, front-line roles in call centres, but are now common across a much broader range including management roles. Already developing fast before Covid 19, productivity monitoring is now common among remote workers (Kantor & Sundaramn, 2022). A recent Deloitte paper reported that 69% of firms are building new, integrated systems to analyse employee data, and 17% have real-time dashboards that can crunch productivity data in old and new ways. The aim of people analytics is to understand “and optimise” the workforce (Tursunbayeva et al., 2018: 224) and for some it represents the apotheosis of performance management: “The people data revolution, predicted for years, has finally arrived” (Agarwal et al., 2018: 89). The incentive scheme featured in this thesis is less automated than these latest developments and may appear crude by comparison. But it remains the dominant way to monitor performance at TechCo.

## 5. Conclusions on rationality

### 5.1 For and against managerialism

In this chapter I have aimed to outline the debt that organisations owe to Enlightenment principles about what is true and how to be sure of it. The rationalist take on the organisation instrumentalises action based on the outcomes the rational actor predicts, and assumes that she/he desires them. Once goals are set the focus is on the means by which they will be achieved and, unless the organisation re-evaluates them, it may overlook ethical and other consequences which have not been instrumentalised during the goal setting process. Obstacles which impair the intended action are seen through this managerial lens. Employee resistance, for example, is understood not on its own terms but, rather, in terms of its effect on the organisation’s strategy. This is on the basis that it sees employee resistance as a threat to the organisation’s ability to grow and thrive. Resistance therefore becomes something to be managed and minimised (Kotter & Schlesinger, 2008). Researchers who adopt the managerial or “consensus” view treat the hegemonic order as natural and aim to reflect management activity with a neutral lens on

the basis that the activity is already legitimised (Deetz, 1996: 197). Its ontology assumes an objective, verifiable reality which is based on objective evidence.

The “dissensus” approach (Deetz, 1996) uses a suspicious, sceptical lens to challenge the hegemonic order and show how it privileges some discourses at the expense of others. Its objective ontology guides it towards truths that have been marginalised, for example where the additional resources of management enable it to silence rival discourses within the organisation (Maguire & Hardy, 2006). The dissensus view doubts managerial truth claims made by either practitioners or academics, drawing attention to rhetoric that is not supported by action. For example it sees managerial empowerment as a cynical ploy that overpromises and under-delivers to junior staff. Managers may *appear* to offer greater discretion and influence for their team members, but actually they cede control for trivial tasks only (where failure by the junior employee poses no risk to the manager), or they only delegate to subordinates they already favour (Ivanova & von Scheve, 2019; Oswick et al., 2002). In such studies managers are seen to claim empowerment for propaganda. From the consensus perspective, empowerment is a genuine sharing of power by managers with junior employees. By contrast, the dissensus view holds that empowerment is a con trick. But there is more to delegation than the dissensus view admits: managers who fail to empower junior staff provide rich material for Critical management studies, which are less interested in how difficult delegation is in practice. Managers must share influence to get things done and, at the same time, retain control because they are accountable for the performance of their team. Consensus research is open to criticism for failing to critique the managerial perspective (viz Kotter and Schlesinger 2008) or the rationalist, instrumentalising assumptions that underpin it.

### 5.2 Consensus and paradox scholarship

Before investigating the radical ideas of Freud and Lacan in the next chapter, it is useful to situate paradox scholarship in relation to rationality, whose influence on organisation and management studies now stretches back more than a century. Paradox scholarship critiques rationality as a primary cause of either/or thinking. It urges the actor to embrace more than one truth at once, to develop cognitive complexity through paradoxical thinking (Smith & Lewis, 2012) and proposes a process ontology in preference to the objective ontology of positivism and managerialism (Smith & Lewis, 2011). These are significant differences. But in other important respects paradox scholarship leaves rationality and

managerialism intact. It sees emotion in a subsidiary role, as a force that can be managed by conscious cognition or paradoxical thinking. Witness the paucity of its research on the topic. And its commitment to understanding emotion better is equivocal: a recent review of the literature asks “Quo vadis, Paradox?” (Where are you going, paradox?). It mentions emotion once, in passing (Schad et al., 2019). As for the unconscious, paradox scholarship picks selectively from Freud to render it as (manageable) intuition which “can be effectively integrated within a rational framework, thus allowing decision makers to benefit from both approaches” (Calabretta et al., 2017: 395). The community's level of comfort with managerialism is evident from its lack of interest in the dark side of paradox. For two decades after Lewis’s seminal paper (Lewis, 2000), it overlooked power relations and the capacity of rationality to constrain the individual (Berti & Simpson, 2021). And its alliance or sympathy with rationality can be seen in its tendency to class paradox as a problem (Cunha & Putnam, 2019; Fredberg, 2014). Its relationship with managerialism is inevitably a paradoxical one: collaborative and, at the same time, competitive. If paradox scholarship is to influence how organisations respond to paradox it must work with the people who run them. But it must also, simultaneously, disrupt managerialism if it is not to become its wholly owned subsidiary. This is a difficult path to tread, certainly. But the community’s vigilance is hard to detect and, once paradox becomes a managerial problem to fix, the outcome does not remain in doubt for long.

# Chapter 5: Lacan

Recap on Chapters 2 and 3

Despite notable differences, paradox scholarship maintains a cosy relationship with rationality which has made it ambivalent about disruption and disorganisation (Cooper, 1986). Rationality offers order thanks to an algorithmic perspective (Petriglieri, 2020) on organisation and management. The human who is the manager is atomised until it is akin to a set of moving parts. She/he is primarily a vehicle for cognition, while her/his emotions and unconscious become knowable (even if poorly understood) and, hence, manageable. The paradox community is anxious to expand its gaze (Cunha & Putnam, 2019; Schad et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2017), but it often treats paradox, and complexity more generally, as a phenomenon waiting to be nailed to the floor by good scholarship (eg Hahn & Knight, 2019; Knight & Hahn, 2021). Always absent is the part which this scholarship plays in the unconscious desire of the paradox scholar. It amounts to a disavowal. Lacan puts disavowal centre stage.

1. Introduction to Lacan

In this chapter I discuss a selection of the psychoanalytic ideas of the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) and link them to those of Freud (1856-1939). Lacan positioned his “return to Freud” as an antidote to the ego psychology movement which, in his view, had reduced Freud’s theorising to a facile account of the unconscious mind. And, since ego psychology specifically rejects Freud’s decision in 1920 to move

away from the biological idea of an adaptive unconscious, Lacan's return to Freud related particularly to "*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*". But it is ego psychology, rather than Freud's most radical thinking about the death drive, that has since been welcomed by organisation and management theorists, including paradox scholars. Critics of rationality have vilified Freud through ego psychology. Their erroneous charge is that Freud aimed to colonise the unconscious by extending "the range of phenomena that are subject to reason explanations" (Townley, 2008: 181).

## 1.1 Freud's ambivalence

This misrepresentation should be forgiven at least partially because Freud was himself torn between the radical implications of his ideas and the expectations of positivism - as Lacan's comment below indicates. Psychoanalysis first offered a revolutionary, new social lens in the second half of the 19th century when medical interest in emotion was considered misguided (Micale, 2008: 102). Reason was masculine and conscious; irrationality female and unconscious. Psychoanalysis has been called the product of an encounter between the hysterical woman and the positivist man of science (Moi, 1989). Biology, physiology, evolutionary science and psychology were already established and respected when Sigmund Freud began his theorising. The dominance of the natural sciences meant that his explorations were provocative, and he exercised caution and tact wherever possible. Even in "*Beyond the Pleasure Principle"* (1920), the flowering of his most radical thinking, his argumentation is compromised by his attempts to explain himself using the language of biology and evolutionary science (Boothby, 1991). Lacan shines a harsh light on Freud's often equivocal stance:

> "The theoretical difficulties encountered by Freud seem, in fact, to stem from the mirage of objectification, inherited from classical psychology, constituted by the idea of the "perception/consciousness" system, in which the existence of everything the ego neglects, scotomises, and misrecognises in the sensations that make it react to reality, and of everything it does't know, exhausts, and ties down in the meanings it receives from language, suddenly seems to be overlooked - a surprising oversight on the part of the man who succeeded in forcing open the borders of the unconscious with the power of his dialectic" (Lacan, 2006: 94-95).

## 1.2 The structure of this chapter explained

Lacan's psychoanalytic theorising presents a chimera. In the case of this thesis, it promises a fuller understanding of subjectivity. In practice a complete understanding is permanently elusive. Failing to master Lacan therefore feels like a personal parallel to the failures of all managers and scholars to master their subject completely. This thesis could provide a deeper exploration of *jouissance*, the name of the father, castration, the id, the superego…and Lacan's four discourses of psychoanalysis play a cameo role only. Still, Chapter 4 sets out the principal Lacanian ideas I use in this thesis and how I intend them to elucidate the unconscious of the senior manager. Below I explain the six sections of this chapter. First, though, a summary in the broadest terms: I investigate the Lacanian subject and the Other. I then look at the death drive to emphasise the distance between psychology and Lacanian ideas. Next I explore fantasy as a pact between the unconscious subject and the Other, touching on the *objet a*, desire and *jouissance* in the process. I also consider the scholar's deployment of knowledge as an ultimately futile effort to recover the *objet a*. Together these elements provide a powerful framework with which to study the data from the case organisation (Chapters 6, 7, 8). Finally I discuss the conditions of possibility that enable to subject to reconfigure its relation to the Other. Here are the sections explained in greater detail.

1.2.1 My first attempt to shed light on Lacanian thinking is in Section 2 where I summarise his negative ontology, the fundamental lack which underpins his theorising.

1.2.2 In Section 3 I consider the unconscious subject from different angles, all of them important for an understanding of Lacan's contribution to the thesis. At an early point in this section I begin to link the unconscious subject to the Other. Their bond is fundamental to Lacan's theorising - and to my empirical study.

1.2.3 In Section 4 I elaborate on Lacan's negative ontology by discussing how it is manifested through the death drive. I pay close attention to Freud's essay "*Beyond the Pleasure Principle"* which marks the change deemed quixotic and unimportant by ego psychology (and therefore paradox scholarship), but which is central to Freud and Lacan. Most of Freud's followers ignored the development of his thinking that he articulates in "*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*", and Lacan is scathing about their decision: "To evade the death instinct in his doctrine is not to know his doctrine at all (Lacan, 2006: 679). In this section I also discuss the *objet a* and two forms of repetition which indicate the subject's attempts to retrieve the cause of its desire.

1.2.4 Section 5 is devoted to fantasy, another idea central to Freud and Lacan and therefore to this thesis. In this section I concentrate particularly on the *objet a*, desire and *jouissance*. Fantasy is not a passing illusion: it is the frame through which all reality is understood by the actor, and through which the subject is able to imagine itself as non-lacking and therefore sustain its desire and the fantasy itself.

1.2.5 In Section 6 I draw on Lacan's discourse of the university to reflect on the Other of the paradox scholar and the desire of all scholar to solve their own *objet a*.

1.2.6. Section 7 borrows from clinical psychoanalysis to sketch how the subject might alter its relation with the Other so as to "traverse the fantasy" (Lacan, 1998: 273-4). The discussion covers two kinds of resistance. One achieves nothing because it occurs only in the (conscious) imaginary, while the other involves changes in the subject's symbolic relation to the Other. This section considers how the conscious world may painstakingly, tentatively, indirectly understand and influence the unconscious.

## 2.Lacan's negative ontology

The joke outlined below from the film Ninotchka introduces an idea which is crucial to Freud and Lacan: their negative ontology. Defining it is not easy because one is bound to explain it by what it is not. In the next few pages I explore the idea from several Lacanian perspectives.

### 2.1 Coffee without cream

Slavoj Žižek likes to tell a joke from the 1939 film Ninotchka by Ernst Lubitsch. He uses it explain the advantage that psychoanalytic theory continues to enjoy over the cognitive sciences.

In the film a customer gets the attention of a waiter and says to him: "I'd like some coffee but without cream please." The waiter replies: "I'm sorry, sir. We have milk but no cream. I can only give you coffee without milk."

The waiter's reply is funny because what the coffee lacks is immaterial to the customer. It is also irrelevant to normal science (Kuhn, [1962] 2012), for which absent milk is identical

to absent cream, and so the difference is non-existent, absurd. But in psychoanalytic theory, by contrast, the identity of an object depends on its negative feature. Neuroscience can measure and predict many things, but it cannot tell the difference between three kinds of coffee: coffee, coffee without cream, coffee without milk. In psychoanalytic theory what is absent is central (Žižek, 2017).

## 2.2 The lack which is the subject

The object of psychoanalysis is not people but what they lack (Lacan, 1998). What Lacan can offer organisation studies is therefore a deeper understanding of what organisations lack (Arnaud, 2012: 1130). This perspective does not have to be in competition with surface-level, conscious concerns, such as when an organisation lacks enough liquidity to grow or when this threatens their survival. The fundamental lack is that the organisation cannot satisfy its own unconscious desire, and it is this which is the reason underlying the preoccupation of rationality to make organisations and people as reliable and predictable as machines.

Lacan "desubstantialises" phenomena that become reified by ego psychology as if they were observable and empirically verifiable (Parker, 2015: 25). Lacanians bemoan what they see as the unwarranted confidence of ego psychologists who believe that actors can readily "surface" their identity tensions so as to relay them to the researcher (eg Smith, 2014: 1594). The implication: access to the self is unproblematic. In Lacanian psychoanalytic theory such access is impossible and we must therefore reject the psychologist's reduction of subjectivity to "a set of fixed properties or attributes" like rationality, the need for attachment etc (Malone & Friedlander, 2000: 6).

For Lacan, identity work is bound to fail because, whatever it may think, the conscious mind is barred from the unconscious and cannot control it. The language the actor uses to express the self can never capture something to which it has no access, and so the (unconscious) subject's identity is fated to be an "extimacy" (Lacan, 2008): remote from the subject because identity is a property of the conscious, and unable to capture what is in the unconscious. Here it is helpful to introduce Lacan's *three-part* mental schema of the mind - the imaginary, the symbolic and the real. What the researcher hears when the actor articulates the self is a conscious construction within the imaginary. It is accessible to the actor and researcher but superficial. Constructions in the imaginary are plausible but contingent and impermanent because they draw from prevailing discourses, not from the

subject. But these constructions cannot articulate or fulfil the actor's unconscious desire, because it lies outside language (Driver, 2009c: 495).

Lacan aims to understand the subject separate from the identity work of the actor: before the effects of subjectivation. All the adornments that give meaning - the actor's experiences, the discourses of identity she/he uses: these are all examples of subjectivation, the process which builds identities on to the 'wire frame' of the subject. But even the idea of a wire frame is misleading. Subjectivation is akin to wrapping an outer layer around a void so as to make the void visible. Once all the layers of subjectivation are removed, what is left is nothing, an empty place (Žižek, 1989: 174), not even a wire frame. Subjectivation and subject are therefore distinct from each other. "What subjectivation masks is…a lack in the structure, *a lack which is the subject*" (Žižek, 1989: 175). Lacan acknowledges that the subject's many identifications may be productive, but none of them repairs the dislocation that defines the subject. And, far from the notion of the self as a potentially coherent identity, the Lacanian subject is no more than a placeholder. The subject *is* lack, and this negative ontology is central to his thinking (Bicknell & Liefooghe, 2010: 320). The Lacanian view may appear similar to the identity discourses of actors which paradox scholars study, but the theoretical underpinnings are not. The psychologised or discourse-theory approach views the subject as the *product* of subjectivation. Lacan, on the other hand, draws on what Žižek (2009) calls a properly Hegelian dialectical process (as opposed to a pseudo-Hegelian notion of dialectical evolution). The Lacanian subject *precedes* subjectivation and stands for the impossibility that the individual will attain subjecthood. "The subject is irreducibly divided between its task (to become subject) and the failure to remain faithful to [this task]" (Žižek, 2009: 343-4).

The non-Lacanian, psychologised ego is master of its thoughts. Actors say "I know who I am" without irony because they are sure their identity is transparent to them. For Lacan, this conception of the ego is "false being" (Lacan, 2002) and the statement "I know who I am" shows the conscious mind rationalising something which the subject does not control. His configuration of the unconscious through the real, the symbolic and the imaginary means that the "I" of "I know who I am" cannot be the subject of anything other than a sentence (Fink, 1995: 37). The subject's project to make sense of the world is voiced within the imaginary order. It is both endless and circular because it is bound to live out established worldviews based on "extant cognitive frames", ie the result of sensemaking that has gone before. Lacan insists that we must distinguish between who

we consciously think we are and who we are as subjects (Lacan, 1998). What is this subject? It is the subject of language, the subject of the symbolic order, and the subject of the unconscious (Chiesa, 2007: 35). The subject is therefore not in the foreground. Nor is it any sort of master, in contrast to the psychologised ego. It is the passive effect of a signifying chain. The agency observed in discourse is an illusion, and the real driving force lies underneath at the level of fundamental cause (Verhaeghe, 1995: 5)

## 3. The Lacanian subject

### 3.1 Subject of language

Following Josef Breuer's "talking cure", Lacan explains the subject through speech, not via psychodynamic processes or instinct. "*Ça parle*", it speaks, says Lacan referring to the unconscious (Lacan, 2006: 578). Humans live in a world of speech. When the psychoanalyst, consultant or researcher listens, the medium is mostly language - what has been symbolised through chains of signification. Lacan argues for the primacy of language following the work of Saussure and others. He includes the unconscious in the linguistic universe, although it cannot be represented formally because it lies outside language, ie what has been symbolised (Fink, 1995: 25). However, it is possible to pick up fragments of the unconscious in the linguistic glitches and omissions that we make but do not intend (Arnaud & Vanheule, 2007: 361). In setting out the subject's relationship to language, Lacan's neologism 'extimate', discussed above, draws on the Greek term *ekstasis* - 'to stand apart from' (Fink, 1995: 122). Its contradictory meaning - both external and intimate - sheds light on the subject's relationship with language.

His emphasis on language presents Lacan with a conundrum: if language determines what we can consciously know of reality, how should we investigate and discuss the unconscious subject? Lacan's answer relates to the subject's fundamental lack: the subject exists insofar as it has been given a name within a symbolic structure. A signifier embodies the subject in the same way a proper name embodies a child. It predates the child's existence and so, at the outset, signifies it no more than any other signifier. In time the name comes to stand in for the child (Fink, 1995: 53), although there is no guarantee the link between child and name or between subject and signifier will strengthen: witness the fact that some choose a different name for themselves than the one they were given[1].

[1] Christened Margery, my mother renamed herself Bunny

In the *Seminar on the Purloined Letter*, 1956, Lacan discusses a paradoxical relationship between language and the subject. Unpacking the French etymology of the word "purloined", he argues that the word means "*mettre de côté"*, to set aside (Lacan, 2006: 20). He explores the idea that the letter is always displaced: words used to convey the unconscious subject fail, so we must *assume* its existence. Although we cannot directly analyse the unconscious, Lacan repeatedly states that "the unconscious is the discourse of the other" (Lacan, 2006: 219). Arnaud & Vanheule explain Lacan's famous definition in relation to alienation. They set out two forms of alienation produced by our dependence on language. First, the discourse that structures humans is an external agency. Language shapes us, despite our impression that we choose the words we use. The child's native language, "mOther tongue" is the phrase that Fink coins (1995: 11), is always unsettling because it is never entirely our own. Even the fantasies we create are unsettling because we cannot be sure who created them: ourselves or the other/Other. Secondly, the unconscious emerges unexpectedly through speech, making us question how much we control what we say. We experience these irruptions as illogical and alien, not part of us, and they destabilise us. The linguistic slips and surprises undermine the conscious, imaginary discourses which provide us with meaning (Roberts, 2005). But they are interesting to the researcher because they point to a truth within the unconscious (Lacan, 2006: 84), and this gives us insights into the subject itself (Arnaud & Vanheule, 2007: 361).

### 3.2 Subject of the symbolic order

Lacan describes the Other in terms of the subject's alienation. To the subject the Other is both intimate and external. When the child accepts that the image in the mirror relates to her/him, there is a symbolic submission to the Other. The moment marks the permanent splitting of the "I", the "*Ichspaltung*" (Freud, 2009: 276) when the subject becomes alienated from itself through the medium of language (Fink, 1995: 50). Lacan uses symbols to explain this life-long condition. The symbol S denotes the signifier. Another stands for the barred subject: 'S' meaning subject, with a strike through it ("/") to indicate that it is barred. The subject is barred from itself because it "chooses" to be symbolised. As a consequence of what Lacan actually sees as a forced choice (Fink, 1995) during the mirror stage, the subject disappears under the signifier (hence the horizontal line in the Lacan's quasi-mathematical equation), and becomes a placeholder.

$$\frac{S}{\$}$$

The subject's life-altering early discovery at the mirror stage launches a reliance on social relations, the subject's prerequisite for an identity (Vanheule et al., 2003: 323; Vanheule & Verhaeghe, 2005). A social network allows the subject to take up a particular position in a 'circuit of exchange' (Frosh, 1997: 236-7), offering the possibility of greater subjective completion. The communication we see between actors in the dataset is about them forming and re-forming symbolic pacts with each other and with the Other.

These are all attempts to solve the subject's unsolved and impossible puzzle which originates at the mirror stage. If the subject could know itself unaided, the Other would be unnecessary. "It is because subjects are opaque to themselves and each other that they must posit the big Other" (Kotsko, 2008: 56). If the conversations between them actually completed the (subjects of the) focus group participants, they would soon run out of things to say (Verhaeghe, 1995: 5). Actors keep talking because communication fails, not because it works. What drives their talk is the impossibility of saying enough to achieve completion.

Consistent with the mother's vindication of the child at the mirror stage, the subject's primary object of desire is to be recognised by the other (Lacan, 2006: 222). The subject's lack is true of both the subject and the Other: they are equally barred. The parent is divided just like the child, though not consciously aware of what he or she wants unconsciously. The subject desires what it lacks and, to solve its alienation, the subject aspires to fill the mOther's lack with its own (Fink, 1995: 54). The mirror stage brings about alienation but also the prospect that the subject may fix it. Lacan's formulation for this coincidence of lacks is deliberately ambiguous:

"*Le désir de l'homme, c'est le désir de l'Autre*" (Lacan, 2006: 222).

In one sense this means that man's desire is to desire the Other. It also means that man desires what the other desires. And man's desire is structured like the Other's, ie he/she desires not just what the Other desires, but desires it in the same way. The unconscious subject learns to desire as if it were another person. Desire springs from two coinciding lacks - the lack in the subject and the lack in the Other. Because what the subject desires is central to this thesis, what the Other desires is central also. In addition to this formulation about coinciding lacks, Lacan identifies the Other's desire as *objet a* ('a' standing for '*autre*' or other). This is again grounded in the mirror stage when the infant experiences an intrusion from the outside that prevents her/him from achieving a complete intersection with the mother. The child becomes fascinated by what could be

preventing the mother from entirely reciprocating the child's desire. The cause of the mother's distraction might be many things: the mother's family, friends, a lover, the neighbours, religious customs, social customs and so on. Lacan characterises the source of the intrusion as the Name of the Father or the *Nom du Père* (Fink, 1995: 185). The significant point for the desire of the subject is that there is something about the mother's desire which always escapes the child. The child's failure to satisfy all of her/his mother's desire sets the conditions for a life time of fascination because the desire is never fully requited. Notably the subject fixates on the morsel of the Other's desire that remains elusive, and *not* on the part which the subject *does* satisfy. *Objet a* is the enduring reminder of unachieved unity with the Other. By clinging[2] to *objet a*, the subject is able to sustain the illusion of wholeness and ignore its own constitutive division and lack (Fink, 1995: 59). The fixation with *objet a* is what Lacan means by fantasy, in which the senior actor at TechCo works out how to position itself in relation to the Other's desire.

### 3.3 Subject of the Other

The subject must also be understood in terms of its relation to the Other. This Lacanian idea is so rich that Lacan and the many scholars who write about him make multiple attempts on the target. According to Lacan, each individual comprises "numerous intersubjective relations, ie bonds with others (little-o) and to trans-subjective structures, ie ties to the big-O Other" (Johnston, 2004: 260). The precise relationship between the other and the Other is not easily simplified, particularly as the Other contains multiple definitions and functions. Over the course of his career as a theorist Lacan gives much thought to what the Other is not. It is emphatically not a category of the psychologised "autonomous ego" which he dismisses as a misleading reduction of Freud's original thinking (Lacan, 2006: 435). The Other cannot be collapsed into the imaginary realm; nor can it be reduced to 'private' intersubjective relations between individuals (Muller & Richardson, 1982: 172). During Lacan's formulation of the Other and the subject, he resists what he sees as crude distinctions between individual vs collective levels of existence. He is also a frequent critic of the tendency, in his view, to reduce complex, ambiguous relationships between phenomena down to either/or positions in a bid to make them more readily understood (Bicknell & Liefooghe, 2010:

[2] Discussions like this one about Lacan's formulations are problematic because the language I use (eg 'clinging') implies that Lacan sees the subject as sentient. He does not. The aim is to describe unconscious mechanisms which influence conscious activity.

320). He uses a möbius strip (see image) to illustrate how oppositions can be misleading. It is like a wrist band with a single twist in it and it works as a metaphor. For example the relationship between the conscious and the unconscious is not what we may suppose, because apparently discrete and opposing categories flow into each other in practice. At a given point the two surfaces oppose each other: the upper side is opposite the underside. But over the whole length of the strip side A becomes side B and vice versa. What was visible becomes hidden. What was hidden becomes visible. The twist reminds us that notionally different phenomena are actually similar. It is a visual representation of a long-term ambition of Lacan to complicate dualities and show that the distinctions between them shift. Lacan explores how opposites confound the subject in multiple ways. The Other offers symbolic recognition but at the same time demands the subject's symbolic castration. The senior actor in an organisation must build an identity, but the words she/he uses to describe herself/himself are provided by the Other. The subject is never autonomous (Žižek, 2006), and yet Lacan complicates this too, because the vulnerability of the subject is matched only by that of the Other. The Other's lack causes it to depend on the subject.

## 4. Drives

### 4.1 Introduction

The Freud-influenced (but then psychologised) perspective on the unconscious gives the ego agency. The self is separated from what it hopes to become, but completeness remains possible. The success of ego psychology is paradoxical. It is Freudian, ie drawn from Freud. It is the most successful, best known interpretation of his work. And yet it overshadows Freud's later-career ideas which come to fruition in his short 1920 book *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. I discuss it here because it distinguishes Freud from the ego psychology movement, and is central to Lacan's subsequent contribution.

For Freud and Lacan both, unconscious drive, as it is formally conceived after 1920, underpins unconscious desire. It is desire's permanent engine because it causes an inexhaustible and futile effort to resolve the interior absence that Freud articulated in "*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*". But this is a problem with no solution: it is the *objet a*, the non-centre of Lacan's negative ontology and Freud's also. In this section I look at drives and repetition. In the next section I interrogate the *objet a*, desire and *jouissance*.

## 4.2 Beyond the Pleasure Principle unpacked

It is 1920 and for more than a year Freud has been listening to survivors of the First World War try to make sense of their suffering which endures long after they leave the battlefield. His patients show a need to return again and again to traumatic events. At around the same time he observes something comparable in his grandson's Fort/Da game which is discussed in more detail below. In both his grandson and the war veterans Freud observes a tendency he calls *Wiederholungszwang*, or repetition compulsion which causes him to rethink his ideas. As he feels his way towards a radical, new formulation of the unconscious drive, he does not hide his uncertainty: "What follows is speculation, often far-fetched speculation" (Freud, 1995: 594).

Freud is disorientated by his discovery of the *Wiederholungszwang*. Up to this point he has assumed that the psychic processes are explained by the pursuit of pleasure - what he calls the Pleasure Principle. But in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* the rituals of soldiers and his grandson bring no pleasure, no relief: only repeated trauma. At first Freud wants to explain and justify this incongruence with his Pleasure Principle, and so he tries to argue that the urge to remember traumatic events shows something inherent to organic life: a need to restore an earlier state of things, ie the way things were before the trauma. To support this claim he proposes that the repetition compulsion expresses a biological desire for death, or a return to an inorganic state. According to his argument this is consistent with the Pleasure Principle because it entails a reduction of tension. It is likely to appeal to Freud because a biological explanation aligns him with the legitimised and respected natural sciences. But the idea does not work because the repetition compulsion causes displeasure, while the Pleasure Principle holds that the reduction of tension causes an *increase* of pleasure. And so the compulsion to repeat cannot be a biological return to an earlier state (Boothby, 1991: 79).

I have argued that the paradox community is selective in its use of Freudian theorising about the unconscious. Two of its scholars *do* discuss *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, one of them the co-author of an article that is foundational to the community's limited study of emotional defences (Vince & Broussine, 1996). They cite Freud's biological claim in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that "the aim of all life is death" (Jarrett & Vince, 2017: 50), but do not discuss his subsequent shift away from biology. Freud's decision allows him to offer an unorthodox but fruitful explanation for what he has observed in war veterans and his grandson. He is also able to give a more coherent explanation for the claim he made three years earlier (Freud, 1955) that the ego is not master in its own house. The shift

involves contrasting binding and unbinding, two psychical instincts that oppose each other. The first seeks unity and coherence and the second seeks to disconnect, break free. Freud argues that the unconscious subject's ability to bind is defeated if there is a large "influx of stimulus". On one side of this conflict is a psychological entity, the conscious ego, which aims to bind. The other is an instinct or drive that opposes the ego, ie seeks to unbind. As Freud puts it in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Freud, 1995: 613): the purpose of the "secondary process" [the ego] is to bind [or subdue] the instinctual excitation reaching the primary process [the drive].

This shift away from mainstream science has significant implications even if the change has gone unnoticed by many. Until now Freud has conveyed the idea of organisms adapting to their *external* environment. But here he accepts that the influx of stimulus can come from *within* the organism. Thus he moves from a relationship between organism and environment to one between two opposing forces that are *both* internal. It is an important break with ego psychology which continues to base its theorising on Freud's early career notion of a "reality-ego", the idea of a defensive structure which is designed to adapt to external reality. Ego-oriented theorists who frame Freud's work with reference to the external world are among the fiercest critics of the death drive hypothesis. Lacan agrees with ego psychologists that Freud's early thinking is of central importance. Unlike them, however, he insists that the death drive is the culminating insight of Freud's earlier thinking about the ego (Boothby, 1991: 99).

A second point to note is that there are recurring dualisms here, ie pairs of reified forces that oppose each other:  the secondary vs primary processes, and also what Freud calls the life vs death drives. Lacan is wary of dualisms because they invite a search for balance which distracts from the irreducible ambiguities that underpin them (Farjoun, 2010). Žižek describes the attraction of scholars to dualisms as philosophical domestication (Žižek, 2014: 123). In contrast to a dualism, the ego's repeated attempts to master internal psychic forces, binding and unbinding, resemble a dialectical oscillation between opposite polls.

Freud argues that the traumatic experience the patient is compelled to repeat is an instinctual search for expression, and it should be understood as an attempt to fulfil an unconscious wish (Freud, [1933] 2001). Its cause is the subject's unconscious desire. The death drive is a wild, untamed instinct that disconcerts the ego because it lies beyond its influence (Boothby, 1991: 88). In ego psychology, defensive splitting separates an unwanted self away from the wanted self, allowing the ego to maintain unity and

coherence. But this falls short of Freud's radical shift in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* because it clearly implies that the conscious ego retains control. Freud and subsequently Lacan argue, by contrast, that what thwarts the ego is ungovernable. The opposition between binding and unbinding is a conflict between the ego and forces which are psychically unmastered and unmasterable (ie the death drive). This said, it is possible to miss the conflict altogether, because the ego often achieves an apparently stable identity or what is sometimes called "a unitary sense of self" (Nkomo & Cox, 1996). Lacan emphasises that this can only happen when the ego disavows the psychical forces it cannot control. In Lacanian terms, the site of the illusion which obscures the conflict is the imaginary register, and it is continually undermined by the real. The ego cannot do the same in reverse because the real is outside thought and language, and yet it is compelled to keep trying. Freud himself argued that the death drive is mute (Freud, 1995), and Lacan envisages a never-ending project to put the non-verbal of the unconscious into words. The most the individual can hope to articulate of the unconscious is what Lacan calls the "*mi-dire de la vérité*", a partial expression of the truth (Lacan, 2007: 36)

There is another point to note about the distance between radical Freud and ego psychology Freud, and it concerns the translation of the word *Trieb*. It is important because it may account for the different interpretations of the unconscious drive which are offered by Freud on the one hand and ego psychologists (and paradox scholars) on the other. In his *Écrits* Lacan strongly criticises a detail of the translation of Freud's original text by Strachey. For *Trieb* Strachey offers the English word "instinct" (Lacan, 2006: 680). This is a curious choice because there is already a German word for instinct and it is *Instinkt*. Lacan insists that what Freud means by *Trieb* is the drive that resides in the depths of the unconscious. *Trieb* is *eine konstante Kraft*, a constant force that is internal (Lacan, 1998: 164-5), unlike instinct which adapts to external stimuli through short-lived, automated responses, or thinking fast (Kahneman, 2012) or hot cognition (Pratt & Crosina, 2016).

Drives are represented through *Vorstellungs-repräsentanzen*, though Freud never quite nails their status (Fink, 1995: 73). For Lacan the object of interest is the death drive which is above all disruptive (Hook, 2018). He translates from Freud's *Vorstellungs-repräsentanzen* as follows: drives are detectable through the *représentants de la représentation* (representatives of the representation). Following Saussure and Derrida, Lacan equates these representatives to signifiers (Fink, 1995: 8), and unconscious drives are represented within the symbolic order through unfolding signifying chains (Fink, 1995:

74). As we have seen, the subject's quest for autonomy is continually undermined by its dependence on the Other for an identity. Signifiers give the subject insights into itself but are problematic: they both identify *and* entrap the subject because it never consists of anything more than the label given to it by signifiers in the symbolic order. As a result there is always ambiguity about whether a given subject position originates within the subject, or is just on loan from the Other, in which case whose identity is it really? The ambiguity causes permanent, unsolvable instability.

Repetition is a window into the unconscious because it indicates the individual's repeated and usually futile attempts to overcome the limitations of the symbolic in order to find the lost object. The symbolic register provides only a mirage in the subject's efforts to get back to the *objet a*, but it also constitutionally pulls the subject away from the *objet a* because the object is an emptiness, a void, where everything is the same and nothing is different. Thought cannot encounter it (Lacan, 1998: 49). Nor can language because the signifier is necessarily about difference. Repetition is of central importance to Freud and Lacan because what is repeated is the return of what is self-identical, and that can only be the *objet a* (Fink, 1995: 224). I now outline two forms of repetition drawn from Freud and elucidated by Lacan.

### 4.2 Repetition: *automaton*

Like Freud, Lacan is interested in human repetition and how it sheds light on unconscious drives. Repetition shows not just how the symbolic does its work on us but, also, the consequences of its failure to solve its lack. Lacan distinguishes between two kinds of repetition (Lacan, 1998: 53-64). One draws on the symbolic order and involves repeating ideas that are accessible to the subject. The other shows the subject's frustrated desire to penetrate the real - a desire it can never satisfy. Instability and frustration follow because the real is beyond the realm of signification and thought and therefore inaccessible. The first sort of repetition is Lacan's *automaton*. This is what the analyst hears when the analysand circles repeatedly around an idea, trying but always failing to name it. The symbolic misleads the subject in the sense that it makes the unthinkable appear accessible by batching together ideas, but they are spawned in the conscious/the imaginary, not in the real. The symbolic deceives the subject by making certain ideas *seem* familiar and convincing. In fact *automaton* is a compulsion to repeat because the subject can never quite name objects that do not exist and never did. The closest it can get is to conflate a non-object with ones that have names because they have already been symbolised. But the object in question remains unthinkable because it necessarily

lies outside thought. *Automaton* is therefore a hunt for words that define a nothing, an absence. As Fink puts it, the thing that has been lost is re-presented indirectly through speech, but never directly presented (Fink, 1995: 227).

4.3.1 Repetition: *Tuché*

So as to discuss the subject's attempts to deal directly with the real, Lacan also talks about *tuché* - from τυχη in Ancient Greek. It means luck, fortune or chance and is an idea used by Aristotle in his search for cause). Lacan translates this search as an encounter with the real, ie what lies beyond the scope of automaton (Lacan, 1998: 53). It is at the level of "oracular speech" and it yields non-sense, ie what cannot be thought (Fink, 1995: 225) or named. The subject cannot stop itself from repeating this encounter with the real - because it is compelled to keep returning to the site of an absence. It hopes to obtain the real thing but is condemned to fail. On the other hand the repetition makes the absent object prominent *as if it were there*. Cue Freud's observation, in "*Beyond the Pleasure Principle"*, of his grandson who is unhappy because Sophie, the child's mother and Freud's daughter, is not at home (Freud, 1995: 599-601). Freud watches the game his grandson frequently repeats - casting away a wooden reel while holding on to the string and then pulling the reel back, each time saying *Fort* (gone) and *Da* (here). The repetitive play gives no relief but it is useful in that it enacts something that has made a strong impression in the life of his grandson. For Lacan this is *tuché*, an obsessive repetition that points to something in the real, though trying to name it is futile. It is more profound than any particular, specific object (such as his mother) that happens to be absent. This is Freud's grandson trying to recover the lost *objet a* he never had.

4.4 This section has looked in detail at the dramatic, full expression of the death drive in "*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*" so as to leave no doubt about the philosophical gap that separates mainstream organisation and management psychology from Lacan. This exploration also aims to provide a full explanation why the ego is not master in its own house, because this is also the strongest possible antidote to the notions of ideals of control which pervade rationality and managerialism. The discussion includes repetition compulsion because repetition is central to Freud's breakthrough in "*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*", and because it offers a window into the unconscious operations of the actor.

# 5. Fantasy

## 5.1 Introduction

Fantasy provides an extraordinarily powerful framework with which to understand organisational life: not just the aspects which rational approaches consider trivial, like the actor's unconscious operations which inform her/his cognition and emotions, but also the reasons that underpin the rationalist project itself. For Lacan, fantasy is the lens through which the individual filters all aspects of life. To reduce it to a particular image is therefore "a permanent misconception", says Lacan critiquing the Kleinian view (Lacan, 2006: 532). His conception of fantasy envisages a series of scenes in which the subject imagines itself. The effect of each new scene is to reinforce the fantasy by affirming the subject's place in it.

In this section my aim is to shed light on the main components of this framework. First I will outline what Lacan believed to be his most significant contribution to psychoanalysis (Fink, 1995: 83), the *objet a*. Then I look at the consequence of *objet a*, desire. Since desire always fails to retrieve the *objet a*, it is important also to consider its counterpoint, its consolation: *jouissance* - Lacan's powerful, flexible idea which first appeared in 1953 and really flourished from 1960 when it evolved into a paradoxical relationship between pleasure and *jouissance* (Evans, 1996: 91). The word has so many facets that the French original, *jouissance*, has been retained in Lacanian studies. Possible translations include enjoyment, pleasure, orgasm. I conclude this section by looking again at the bond between subject and Other which the fantasy sustains.

## 5.2 The *objet a*

The *objet a* or *objet petit a* (the 'a' standing for *autre* or other). This central idea in Lacanian theorising starts with the earliest development of the individual. Lacan's departure point is Freud's claim that unconscious activity can be analysed via what the subject desires. Freud argues that the earliest sexual satisfaction is linked to food, so the *object* of the infant's most basic sexual instinct is external to her/him: the mother's breast (Freud, 1995: 288). The child sucking at the mother's breast becomes a proxy in the unconscious, and every subsequent love stands in for this original 'object-choice' of the child. In later life the subject returns repeatedly to rediscover its original object-choice. In his 1925 essay *Negation* Freud claims that "a precondition for the setting up of reality-testing is that objects *shall have been*

*lost* which once brought real satisfaction" (Freud, 1995: 669). The original German for 'shall have been lost' can be read either in the future perfect tense, shall have, or as a past subjunctive, ie '*may* have been lost'. Lacan pounces on this ambiguity (Fink, 1995: 190) to argue that the object does not relate to a remembered experience at all, because the infant did not at the time have words to describe the seminal, original object-choice: his/her first encounter with the mother's breast. Recollections may come to the subject (of caring parents, a loving mother and so on) but, for Lacan, these are conscious discourses borrowed by the subject and not original or unique to it. They reside in the imaginary register and are therefore superficial and give little insight into the unconscious. Lacan reinforces the interpretation that the object *may* have been lost by making it a fully negative ontology: it is *always already lost*. He turns the ambiguity he sees in Freud's discussion about the lost object into the object that never even existed (Fink, 1995: 94). It is a scrap of something that resides in the domain of the real; inaccessible because it can never be symbolised. In his later writings, Lacan shifts the formula from "*objet a"* to "*objet (a)"*. The point of the brackets is to emphasise that it is to be located in the real, not the imaginary register (Lacan, 2006: 41). Crucial to Lacanian theory is the insight that the subject sees this missing object as the cause of its incompleteness. It therefore fixates about what denotes this cause, the *objet a*. The lost-object-that-never-was becomes a lifelong obsession with two consequences for action: first, the subject latches on to anything that might solve the void. Secondly it pretends that the absent object does exist, because only by overlooking the object's non-existence can the subject imagine that completeness is possible. Simply put, a cover-up is necessary because the absent object does not stand up to scrutiny. "It cannot be approached too closely: if we get too near it, it loses its sublime features and…changes into an everyday object. It dissipates precisely because in itself it is nothing at all" (Žižek, 1989: 192).

The researcher cannot observe the *objet a* but can infer its influence from the frenzy of activity that it provokes. The endless project to overlook the nothingness of the *objet a* allows actors not to see the illusions that shape their world. This radical idea by Lacan is expressed elegantly by Žižek. People "know very well how things really are, but are still doing it as if they did not know…And this overlooked, unconscious illusion is what may be called the ideological fantasy" (Žižek, 1989: 30). To be clear, Lacan is not talking about a superficial illusion which hides what is really going on -

as if we will understand the true state of things once the illusion is dismissed. No: the subject's entire reality is structured by an unconscious fantasy. It mostly goes unnoticed because it is fundamental to the subject's quest to solve the conundrum of the *objet a*.

5.3 Desire

The idea developed by Lacan is that the *objet a* is the cause of desire. What remains from the earliest primal state is the fantasy that the child was once connected with her/his mother's breast as if it were part of the child's body. In later life this fantasy does not revolve around a particular object but, rather, "a *sequence* in which the subject has his own part to play and in which permutations of roles and attributions are possible" (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1978: 318). Desire seeks neither an endpoint nor satisfaction, so it is futile for the subject to aim for a particular object because there is no specifiable object that can satisfy its desire. The subject simply aims to go on desiring (ibid: 91). Lacan characterises the relationship between the subject and the *objet a* with a diamond as follows (Lacan, 2006: 692):

$ ♢ a

The subject's constitutional lack means that it is barred or split (hence the symbol $). Because it cannot find the lost object (a) or *objet a* it continually hunts for alternatives that might bring completeness. There are a few explanations for Lacan's choice of a diamond to convey these alternatives. It suggests a mark of authenticity, a stamp (*poinçon*), meaning that, for the subject, all quests to achieve completeness are legitimate. It also indicates an impossibility. We might say the diamond is made from two symbols, < and > denoting an object that is both less than and greater than. Since it is not possible to be both of these things at once, the diamond represents all fantasy aiming *and failing* to resolve the problem of the missing *objet a* (Muller & Richardson, 1982: 406).

Here it is important to add the linguistic dimension of this impossibility: no signifier can capture the precise object of desire. The objects expressed in speech only approximate to the *objet a* because they are formed within the symbolic and outside the unconscious real. Because it emanates from the real, desire can be seen "in the dialectical movement of one signifier to the next" (Fink, 1995: 90) and is detected in the slips between conscious talk that occurs in the imaginary register, a phenomenon I am occasionally able to observe in my findings. But this

approximation still serves the subject and, to the extent that desire is knowable through words (Fink, 1995: 190), language conveys the objects which are desired by the Other.

### 5.4 *Jouissance*

It is typical of Lacan that the function of *jouissance* shifts over time. At first he suggests that it sustains desire. From Seminar X (Lacan, 2016) he suggests instead that desire aims at what the subject does not already have - *jouissance* (Lacan, 2016). In Seminar VII Lacan develops the idea by arguing that there is, within *jouissance*, an interdependent relationship between pleasure and pain (Lacan, 2008). Unlike the rational calculation required of the actor to sign up to a performance goal, here there is an unconscious appraisal of a deal. Pleasure must come with pain - the two are indivisible - and the pursuit of *jouissance* runs much deeper than the instrumentalised, cognitively processed satisfying of a need. For Lacan it is a lifelong project to satisfy the death drive (Lacan, 2008: 258). Therefore, while *jouissance* can be a source of horror and pain, it also "pleases" the unconscious subject by fuelling its desire and keeping it on the path to solving its lack. This serves the Other too because the pursuit of *jouissance* sustains unconscious fantasy and the subject's pact with the Other. In the clinical setting this complicates the task of the analyst who aims to alleviate the difficulty which has been articulated by the analysand. What appears on the surface to trouble the analysand, not least because she/he can discuss it, is also crucial to her/him at the level of the unconscious. This makes the analysand depend, for example, on an abusive relationship in ways that may very well never reach the imaginary - such that only the discomfort is apprehendable in the conscious. The paradoxical mix of pain and pleasure also illustrates *jouissance* in Freud's account of the obsessional neurotic, the Rat Man (Freud, 2010 [1955]): The horror registers consciously, but there is pleasure also. The pleasure is vital to the Rat Man's continuing desire and yet hidden from him (Fink, 2017: 19) because it operates at the level of the unconscious. In a further example (see the discussion about the Master/Slave dialectic) the slave resents the dominance on the master and simultaneously disavows his dependence on it, because it functions at the level of the subject.

*Jouissance* is closely linked to repetition, discussed in the previous section (4) because it makes repetition necessary, underpinning all attempts by the subject to solve its lack and find the misplaced *objet a* (Lacan, 2007: 46). It is also linked to the

subject's appeal to the Other which the subject assumes to enjoy an infinite supply of only pleasurable *jouissance* - as opposed to the blend of pleasure and pain experienced by the subject (Evans, 2017: 8).

### 5.5 The enduring bond between subject and Other

The sustainability of the fantasy hangs on an interdependence between subject and Other. It is a phenomenon that begins early in the life of the subject. A small child is embedded in a complex network of social relations. Although aware of her/his role, the child cannot work out "what object, precisely, he is to others" (Žižek, 1997: 9). The Other is the subject's source of external rules: the arbiter that recognises it. The primary role of fantasy is to show the Other's desire to the subject. In this way it offers a solution to the subject's own lack. That the subject has what it takes to appeal to the Other is part of the fantasy. In the unconscious, then, the Other is the place from which the actor is seen and also vindicated. The subject hopes to satisfy the desire of the Other in order to recover the *objet a* and make itself complete. There is another, crucial reason, according to Lacan, why the Other is useful to the subject: it is the subject's source of language (the mOther tongue) through which the subject may build and maintain its identity as a successful senior actor in a successful organisation.

In his *Seminar XI* Lacan explains the pact between subject and Other in terms of two lacks which overlap (Lacan, 1998: 204-5), meaning that the subject unconsciously sees the Other's desire, infers from it a lack in the Other, and responds with a "prior lack", its own. Žižek borrows from Hegel to argue that the subject experiences the object-cause of desire as *already missing from the Other itself*" (Žižek, 2006: 39-40, italics in the original). To summarise, the fantasy functions because of two lacks, not one. The Other's desire, fuelled by its lack, drives the desire of the subject. A focus on the subject and its need can make one overlook the Other's dependence on the subject's dependence on it, yet the fantasy depends on it. I will explore this idea further in the findings.

### 5.6 Concluding thoughts on fantasy

If the *objet a* has never existed, it cannot be won back. For Lacan the barred subject overcomes this impossibility by building a fantasy such that the subject's whole reality is structured by it (Glynos, 2010: 22). The fantasy makes everything seem possible, including the idea that one's innermost, unconscious desire will be satisfied. The fantasy works like a charm so long as its impossibility is denied. Any

exit from the fantasy is therefore fraught with jeopardy. Traversing it (Lacan, 1998: 273-4) offers the possibility of a re-set in the relation of the subject to the Other. It also requires an encounter with the impossibility of the fantasy, the terrifying Lacanian real. This is what I discuss in Section 7, below, after I touch on Lacan's insights into the unconscious of scholarship.

## 6. The discourse of the university

I now apply insights from Lacan's discourse of the university so as to make some observations about my literature review in Chapters 2 and 3. Discourse, for Lacan, concerns social relations founded in language (Lacan, 1999: 24). In the master's discourse the master represents the divided subject, $, for all other signifiers. Its effect is to hide the subject's lack from view (Lacan, 2007: 103). But something is always left over, unexpressed: the *objet a,* and even the master is unable to retrieve it. All four discourses demonstrate different attempts at mastery which ultimately fail (Evans, 1996: 46).

$$\frac{S2}{S1} \rightarrow \frac{a}{\$}$$

The discourse of the university is derived from Lacan's discourse of the master. It relates less to universities than to the of role knowledge in the subject's search for the *objet a*. It also supports the master's discourse, gives it legitimacy and, over time, helps to establish and maintain regimes of truth (Foucault, 1980). Knowledge, the dominant feature of the university discourse, is made possible by a master signifier (S1) which operates as the truth and underwrites or guarantees knowledge. Importantly, this guarantee is concealed, as indicated by the bar that separates S2 and S1, above. The implications of this concealment are significant: knowledge from science is able to say that its truth claims depend not on language but on phenomena outside language (Parker, 2001: 72). Lacan, however, insists on the dependence of knowledge on the "truth" of a master signifier which is in fact always contingent and therefore unable to fix or guarantee any truth claim. The S2/S1 formulation indicates a sleight of hand within knowledge, particularly scientific knowledge. It succeeds because the way it really works is hidden, repressed. This, in turn, allows the subject to imagine itself as non-lacking, to believe that it has mastered the field of signifiers and even that it is perfectly transparent to itself (ibid: 74). It is not reality or evidence, rather the operation of fantasy, that works to convince the subject in the discourse of the university.

The other - on the receiving end of knowledge - is the *objet a*, the cause of all activity. This might be the student or, in the case of psychology, the participant (Parker, 2001: 73). This other is unknowing, particularly in comparison with the expertise of the agent, and the outcome (the $ underneath the a) is the divided subject: ignorant and alienated from itself. For knowledge to be valuable the unknowing, barred subject is necessary, but the $, like S1 on the left side of the formula, is repressed. One should add that the discourse of the university depends on the divided subject. This neatly captures the contingency of knowledge in the sense that teaching has no purpose if the other already knows all the answers. This interdependence is structurally important but unsaid, disavowed by the agent of the university discourse.

In Chapter 2 I discuss a summary demotion of the linguistic turn (Hahn & Knight, 2019) and argue that the authors' error is to ignore its potential to explain the relationship between subject and object - whether the subject is a practitioner or an academic. Also absent from the paper is reflexivity by them about the contingency of their truth claims, yet their dependence on language tells a different story. Theirs is the fantasy of a metalanguage (Woźniak, 2010: 398). It is a fantasy because nothing places them outside discourse. But the point is not their failure to recognise their dependence on a master signifier that is unstable. The point is that it is this disavowal that makes these claims possible - that they have created a metatheory and at the same time a metalanguage.

Hahn & Knight typify what Morrell called a wistful attachment to normal science (Morrell, 2008: 621) when they "mobilise the ontological underpinnings of quantum mechanics" (Hahn & Knight, 2019: 362). When we read the article we see their ingenuity. Also visible, if we look, is their own quest for the *objet a.* During the course of 23 pages they mention their "quantum approach" on 96 occasions. In psychoanalytic terms this is their pitch to be recognised in the symbolic as exemplars, the *sujet supposé savoir,* who will one day acquire all scientific knowledge (Nobus, 2002: 100). Their article is therefore an *act* of communication as well as a discussion about their quantum approach. Žižek offers a metaphor to show that the act can be more illuminating than the content. In it a labourer pushes a wheelbarrow out of the factory every afternoon following work. A security guard checks it daily for goods which the worker might have stolen, but finds nothing. Every day the worker is allowed to leave until it finally transpires that what he is stealing is wheelbarrows. The unconscious is not hidden in the wheelbarrow; it is the wheelbarrow itself (Žižek, 2006: 21).

## 7. Becoming subject

### 7.1 Introduction

In the coming pages I discuss factors that make it possible for the subject to alter the pact between subject and Other. I do this with particular reference to the paradox of learning, the tension that occurs between new knowledge and what we already know. This is the last of the three paradoxical lenses I apply in my findings (in Chapter 8).

Within the imaginary it is possible to calculate that old and new ways of seeing are interdependent, not simply in competition with each other. Unlike the conscious, cognitive manoeuvres which are depicted by paradox scholars, such thinking has no effect on the primordial pact between the subject and the Other. If it is to be reconfigured, the subject must find other ways.

Following the Lacanian logic of the fantasy as structuring the subject's experience the world, "reality" is where the symbiotic relationship between the subject and the Other is stable and comforting (Fleming & Spicer, 2003; Hoedemaekers, 2010). Here the symbolic register governs the interdependence of subject and Other, the Other's lack remaining the answer to that of the subject. Resistance within the imaginary has the status of a hissy fit. It gives some satisfaction to the subject but does not threaten the symbolic ecosystem. In any case, transgression is already priced into the fantasy that binds them. In the dialectic of the Master and Servant, the servant wrongly assumes that the master monopolises all the pleasure and therefore enjoys taking back a few crumbs of it (Žižek, 1997: 45). The *jouissance* these transgressions afford might be seen as a payment to the subject for its continued loyalty to the Other and for the part it plays to sustain the fantasy (Žižek, 1997: 59). The reason why transgressions do nothing to undermine the fantasy is the subject's own investment in it. So there is a quid pro quo: the subject upholds the fantasy even when transgressing against it and, in return, the Other sustains the subject's desire. In the unconscious this is valuable because, if desire is not upheld, it (as a subject of desire) vanishes (Glynos, 2010: 29). Far from disrupting the "economy of enjoyment" (Contu, 2008), grumbling instead feeds it. As Contu puts it, "Decaf resistance, just as decaf coffee, makes it possible for us to enjoy without the costs and risks involved. We can have the thing (coffee) without actually having it" (ibid: 374).

In the coming pages I set out the conditions of possibility under which the subject may reconfigure its relation to the Other. I do so with reference to Lacanian clinical practice and a discussion of the Master/Slave dialectic.

## 7.2 Borrowing from clinical psychoanalysis

Looking at psychoanalysis in a clinical setting, drawing mainly from Fink 1999, helps us to consider how the analyst can enable the analysand to position herself/himself differently relative to the Other. The subject is configured to maintain its own desire by catering for that of the Other. To be exact, the subject is mobilised by what it *assumes* the Other desires. The analysand will repeatedly act out tried and trusted ways of relating to a world shaped by parental others. The origin of this modus operandi is the analysand's fundamental fantasy (following the "primal scene" proposed by Freud). It enacts the unconscious belief that the Other still desires what it has always desired of her/him (see Fink, 1999: 56-8).

The analyst becomes the cause of the analysand's desire by taking on a role within the discourse that is already playing out for the analysand/subject. The analyst achieves this by inferring from the analysand what the Other desires, and then articulating it in different ways. Once the analyst has begun to represent the Other's desire, the analysand transfers her/his unconscious attention on to the analyst and repeatedly tries to deliver what the analyst seems to want. As ever, the analysand's motive for satisfying the Other's desire is to hold on to her/his own. But now the analyst has an opportunity to disrupt the analysand's relationship with the Other. She/he does this by not conforming to what the analysand expects; for example by withholding reassuring comments the analysand would expect to hear about her/his relationship with the Other. But if the analyst is not vigilant, the analysand takes charge and interactions with the analyst quickly revert to the old formula so that the analysand can act out her/his usual routines for sustaining her/his desire. The norm is that talk maintains the fundamental fantasy, ensuring that the subject keeps desiring in the usual way. By changing tack, not reacting as the analysand expects, the analyst makes the cause of the analysand's desire enigmatic, surprising. The shift which the analyst hopes to engineer clearly straddles two worlds: the unconscious one which lacks language and the conscious world where language systematically blocks the subject from changing what it is to the Other at the level of the symbolic. This is a conundrum: how does the analyst say something new in the conscious world of language so that the analysand acts upon it in the unconscious, causing the subject to adopt different ways to relate to the Other?

## 7.3 Oracular speech

The origin of “oracular speech” is the delphic oracle in Greek mythology, which delivered cryptic and ambiguous messages from Apollo. In the Lacanian context it delivers “non-sense” - what cannot be thought or named (Fink, 1995: 225). The analysand needs to hear an “oracular reply” which takes the form of *chè vuoi*?, or what do you want? This is the question that is most likely to take “the subject to the path of his own desire, assuming that, thanks to the know-how of a partner known as the psychoanalyst, he takes up that question, even without knowing it, in the following form: ‘What does he want from me?’” (Lacan, 2006: 690). The crucial difference between oracular speech and the sort that fails during analysis is that it resonates with the analysand *even though* she/he does not understand it. Oracular talk by the analyst must therefore hint at new possibilities enough to arouse the curiosity of the analysand, but it must also be cryptic enough to prevent the analysand from simply framing it within one of her/his routinised interpretations (Fink, 1999: 46). It must guide the analysand towards new interpretations *and* keep her/him guessing - so that the analysand subsequently formulates her/his subjectivity with her/his own discourse, not one that belongs to the Other and/or the analyst. The psychoanalyst must then investigate whether or not the discourse is truly original to the analysand.

## 7.4 Redefining the Master/Slave dialectic

When the subject’s relation to the Other changes there is a moment of peril which is also an opportunity. The discovery that a shift is possible creates a space in which the subject can explore alternative constructions (Holmer-Nadesan, 1996: 59). To shed more light on this moment I draw from research by Vanheule et al (2003 and 2005) which offers a Lacanian analysis of professional burnout, a psychological concept that refers to exhaustion and distress brought on by work. Most research seeks to explain burnout with a single, underlying, psychological mechanism (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998). Vanheule et al focus instead on burnout as an outcome of the position the subject takes up in relation to the Other at work (Vanheule & Verhaeghe, 2005: 301). Following Lacan, their contribution distinguishes between two kinds of identification: imaginary (ideal ego) vs symbolic (ego ideal) and they argue that the two sorts of identification correlate with two groups in their study, one reporting high levels of burnout and the other reporting little or no burnout. The theoretical basis of this study is the Master/Slave dialectic which Lacan

himself used to develop insights on the transference that occurs between analyst and analysand during psychoanalysis (Vanheule et al., 2003: 337).

In the Master/Slave dialectic each role owes its status to the other; one is sustained by the desire of the other; and each depends on the other's *symbolic* recognition (Vanheule et al., 2003: 324). The slave aims to solve *its* lack by taking up a particular position with respect to the master - ie a role that will satisfy the master's desire. These dependencies are in the unconscious - not recognised or understood by the conscious actor. At the level of the (conscious) imaginary, the slave recognises its enslavement and often wants to escape it, but it is this imaginary formation that keeps the slave in its place: each time the slave protests, it reconfirms its subordinate status (Vanheule et al., 2003: 326). The dialectic endures in the unconscious because it feeds the subject's desire. "Decaf" resistance is the norm because it avoids the risk of jeopardising this desire. What differentiates a repositioning of the subject in the symbolic register from mere decaf manoeuvres is whether or not the subject re-appraises its primordial position there. Resistance within the established narrative is superficial because it remains in the imaginary only. In contrast, if the subject redefines relations with the master in its own terms, the shift is symbolic, not imaginary, and both the subject/slave and the Other/master are then assigned to different roles relative to each other. But this manoeuvre poses a danger to the slave's/subject's existence which, because it is a subject of desire, is contingent on the Other recognising it. When the slave/subject changes its identity *within the symbolic*, it risks non-recognition by the Other and therefore its own obliteration.

It is inevitable that the subject is drawn into a dialectic with the Other because the subject's lack is inevitable. However the precise form of the dialectic is not. But if the slave/subject is ever to reposition itself relative to the master, it must come to "see that its role is not fixed in perpetuity. If the slave/subject can see the dialectic in new ways, creative possibilities emerge and a degree of independence may follow. In the case study presented by Vanheule et al (2003), one respondent manages not to fall into a vicious cycle within the symbolic. He explains that he has *learned* not to be drawn into pointless disputes with his manager. In the Lacanian interpretation he avoids (imaginary) conflicts which perpetuate the master/slave dialectic in the unconscious. The respondent says this about his manager:

> "If you stand up for yourself she reacts by taking advantage of your emotions. I have learned not to get hit any more….With her I [am] more task and duty oriented. We

> enter into clear agreements and, if she does not fulfil them, I tell her. I know what I'm talking about." (Vanheule et al., 2003: 334)

This respondent outlines a progression from powerless to skilful team member, according to Vanheule et al. At first his manager takes advantage of his emotions, as he puts it. His method becomes more sophisticated when he penetrates the structure of the relationship and understands it. Without the help of an analyst, he has discovered that it is counterproductive to stand up to his manager. His testimony points to a suite of learned strategies, self-confidence ("I know what I am talking about"), and an awareness of a game where his boss is not the only player with options. The authors argue that actors with low burnout find creative ways to distance themselves from the routines that determine work relations. By contrast the respondents who report high levels of burnout slip into roles that complement the one played by the master/Other. Whether their preferred mode is rebellious or subservient, they remain imprisoned in a narrative that structures this relation. Imprisoned because the narrative is played out in the imaginary register which is powerless to change a dialectic that operates in the unconscious. Vanheule et al do not claim a causal relationship between symbolic identification and burnout. Their aim is more modest - to explore contrasting approaches to work relations.

## 8. Concluding thoughts on Lacan

In this chapter I have investigated aspects of Lacanian theory and glossed over or omitted numerous other ideas of his. I have discussed Lacan's negative ontology, the Lacanian subject and the Other from a variety of angles. I have looked at "*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*" to chart Freud's hesitant but, in the end, emphatic parting with what would become ego psychology. Ego psychologists would go on to develop a positivist and causal view of humans (Murray, 2016: 93) and persuade the majority of organisation and management scholars that psychology explains all they need to know about the unconscious (eg Kahneman, 2014). I have offered a brief and imperfect synopsis of Lacanian fantasy. I have sketched out how the scholar operates within the discourse of the university, and borrowed from clinical psychoanalysis to outline how the subject might achieve a degree of emancipation in relation to the Other.

All of this struggles to compete with the delicious simplicity which rationalist approaches do so well: the models, the theories, the practical guides, the tips on

how managers can be more decisive, the bar charts, the aphorisms. No wonder ego psychologists are more popular than Lacanians. And yet Lacan's theorising could be a revelation if academics and even practitioners (the ones who are disappointed with the limitations of rationality) could be persuaded to listen. I posit three arguments in favour of a Lacanian perspective which this thesis aims to promote:

Psychology has become a master of objective reality. But psychoanalysis insists that this reality is always overwritten by psychical reality, or fantasy (Hook, 2017: 5).

Instrumentality is foundational to mainstream organisation and management studies. Lacan argues that fantasy explains much more about the case organisation than goal setting theory (Evans, 2017: 7).

The conscious ego is dedicated to seeing itself as non-lacking and in charge. But if it turns out that the ego is in fact a guest in the house he thought was his, then all thinking to date about management should be reviewed, including the management of paradox.

# Chapter 5: Method

1. Introduction

Parallel to my research interest in paradox is a career as a practitioner in organisations. I have worked as an employee, as an external consultant in organisations of different sizes, and as a qualitative researcher to investigate and report on a range of cultural phenomena. These projects revolved around organisational culture and leadership capability. And, as my knowledge of organisational paradoxes grew, clients found my experience and research in this area increasingly useful, particularly when they became aware of the paradoxical challenges they faced. One example: I joined a joint venture between a client and Saïd Business School on the basis of my know-how in paradox. In 2015 this team presented a report to the World Economic Forum about leaders' experiences with paradox. It was based on semi-structured interviews with 150 CEOs (Saïd Business School, 2015).

Since I had already decided my thesis would revolve around paradox, one obvious option was that an organisation with which I was working might become the site for my data collection if the client agreed. During 2017 I was on the lookout for a research site that fit my PhD thesis. I investigated data collection opportunities through all my contacts. My network of academics and students at Birkbeck College, University of London, included members of a consultancy team with whom I was in regular touch. It was working on a change programme in what was to become the case organisation for this thesis: the UK operating company of TechCo. In the end I joined this consultancy team and analysed my TechCo dataset twice. The first time was when I conducted focus group research and analysed the resulting dataset for TechCo. The second analysis was for this PhD thesis when I returned to the dataset with TechCo's blessing and, this time, viewed it through a Lacanian discourse lens. In April 2017 I completed my ethics proposal, anticipating that

TechCo would become the research site for this thesis. It was approved by the departmental research ethics officer at Birkbeck, University of London.

## 2. TechCo

### 2.1 Overview

TechCo is a publicly listed, global organisation which sells software and hardware to consumers and businesses. It generates revenue through a wide range of cloud and other services and develops and sells a continually evolving suite of devices and software products. It has expanded rapidly since it was launched several decades ago. Its products and services sell across the world, it has subsidiaries in a hundred countries and employs 200,000+ people, half of whom work outside the USA where the firm originated. Measured in innovation and sales revenue, TechCo has been extraordinarily successful for more than forty years. Some of its size is due to corporate acquisitions, but most is the consequence of organic growth. Over this period it has grown its revenue and market share by systematically building demand for its products and services. As is common among large organisations, a central concern has been management control over its complex operations (Ferreira & Otley, 2009). TechCo's performance management system consisted of two incentives designed to cause the two kinds of behaviour it needed from its senior managers. One promoted the generation of revenue (through the revenue-based incentive, RBI), and the other promoted collaboration (the commitment based incentive, CBI). Across TechCo's internal communications the two components had equal status. Revenue generation was considered crucial to the firm's history of growth. Collaboration was also promoted: not just through the performance management system but also via a long-standing internal campaign, "One TechCo". The combination of the two incentives reflected the firm's intention to avoid the mistake of rewarding for A and hoping for B (Kerr, 1975).

TechCo's change programme had already run for six months and was expected to last a further twelve. It was rolling out across the EMEA region as part of a strategy for growth. The leadership team in TechCo UK wanted to probe the views of its senior managers so as to understand the extent to which they were "aligned" with the strategy.

## 2.2 A commentary on TechCo's culture

This section encapsulates the observations by the consultancy team which I joined in 2017. It also reflects my own impressions from the start of the project with TechCo, although what I write here is inevitably shaped in part by my second analysis of the dataset and therefore draws on psychoanalytic theory.

TechCo had experienced challenging market conditions in the years preceding this research exercise. The firm had obvious strengths as a brand, an innovator, a product designer, a manufacturer, a marketing operation and an employer of thousands. Yet there had been a change of leadership, a wave of redundancies had unsettled the company, and staff were unsure about TechCo's ambitions and their own careers at the firm. As always, questions about its purpose were a potential catalyst for new ideas and change. They were also disconcerting. From the earliest days of my involvement there was a sense among TechCo managers across the organisation of an orderly, sometimes disorderly, retreat from innovation to safety and predictability. The most common way to keep things safe was all-or-nothing thinking: a tendency towards unequivocal decisions in ambiguous situations, a fear among senior managers about the consequence of being caught without a ready answer to a given problem and, in relation to paradoxes, a marked preference for either/or thinking (see Chapter 2) over the both/and approach (which became one of the main planks of the recommendations we made to TechCo).

There is, of course, a risk that the researcher reliably finds what she/he looks for. I came to TechCo expecting to find paradoxes. Once aware of them one tends to see them everywhere. In any case they are inherent to organisational life (Lewis, 2000), a point I discussed in Chapter 2. However an awareness of paradoxes existed at TechCo well before I arrived, as demonstrated in its recent employee pulse surveys, and they were evident to us (the consultancy team and me) before and during the data collection process. For example, TechCo struggled to square organisational performance with a "people focus", another characteristic it desired. The leadership team and other management levels maintained a strong faith in the organisation's systems, most notably its performance management, but this conflicted with ideas about the pastoral care owed to staff, which was consequently hard to find except in the firm's HRM (human resources management) rhetoric. And so, while the discourse of 'people first' was evident, a stronger sense of 'me first' prevailed: employees honing their personal brand and network in order to survive and succeed. As a consequence, consensus was common and dissent rare, unless in private and off the record. Tortuous email escalations claimed to

demonstrate collaboration; instead they revealed conflict-avoidance. Much was made of unity and tolerance but this was contradicted in practice: through informal conversations with TechCo staff at all levels, and also in the focus groups, there was evidence of self-editing behaviour suggesting a culture which was guiding employees, including senior personnel, towards conformity. So the unity was manufactured rather than spontaneous. TechCo was apparently accepting and tolerant: one's gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation made no apparent difference. You could just be yourself, but with the proviso that you acted like a TechCo person. Unity across the firm was a powerful managerial discourse, notably in the "One TechCo" campaign following the original "one-firm firm" idea coined 30 years earlier (Maister, 1985). It loudly promoted collaboration across the organisation. On the other hand, managers often described departments, and TechCo generally, using the silo metaphor. Difficult times and alienating practices had given TechCo a shadowy side which was anything but kindly. But this was not acknowledged in any official forum. Indeed it was usually denied by the firm's senior managers and Board members who preferred instead to talk of respect, respectfulness and the pleasures of working in a "grown up" organisation. These optimistic discourses were so insistent that one wondered what was not being said.

## 3. Data collection

### 3.1 Background

TechCo decided to carry out some form of qualitative research after a series of four pulse surveys conducted across the UK identified some disquiet among senior managers about the firm's strategy. The surveys had also revealed some evidence that managers were struggling with the contradictory nature of the demands they faced in their work, notably in relation to the performance management system. Although the system was established and validated, the leadership team was keen to identify the factors that would ensure that it would run as efficiently as possible in the coming months and years.

The subject of paradox then became salient in discussions between TechCo and the consultancy team I knew. In part this was because the surveys had surfaced tensions between competing management priorities. In addition, the leadership team (I later learned) was receptive to a discussion about organisational tensions because two of its members had read the recent Harvard Business Review's recent article written by three major paradox scholars (Smith et al., 2016). The decision having been made early in the

process to conduct qualitative research so as to explore the underlying reasons for the pulse survey findings, TechCo's conversations with the consultancy team concentrated on the most suitable approach to yield valuable data. It was at this point that I was introduced to TechCo's leadership as an associate member of the team. Although the details of the research project were not settled, the leadership team had accepted the case for a qualitative approach, I had relevant experience and my familiarity with paradox was seen as a useful asset by the consultancy team and, in due course, its client, TechCo. Conversations began in the first quarter of 2017 about my involvement, but it was not until late 2017 that TechCo formally agreed that I should take on the research lead role for this exercise.

### 3.2 Choosing between a priori and emergent approaches to the data

There was significant debate between TechCo and the consultancy team about the extent to which the research should be emergent and exploratory, focusing on local meanings; or elite/a priori, on the basis of essentialist assumptions and tending more towards the universalistic and theory driven (Deetz, 1996: 196). It seems fair to contend that TechCo is more familiar with the second approach. Its leadership team preferred research findings it could readily generalise to the whole organisation (ibid: 195), even if the methodology was qualitative. It had reason to trust the objectivist, reductionist approach: its successful performance management system was the embodiment of (a priori) hypothesis-testing: the claim that desirable individual and organisational performance *will* follow if the goals set are difficult, precise, clear, if the individuals are committed to the goal and able to plot the discrepancy that separates them from their target (Latham, 2007). However, if confirmed, the surprising responses of TechCo managers to the pulse surveys would amount to evidence that might undermine the firm's strategic aims. The leadership team was therefore receptive to the argument that, though an emergent, open-ended methodology, it would understand better the reasons that underlay the surprising response to the pulse surveys and, therefore, how to remove barriers that might prevent the organisation from embracing the change programme. Although more comfortable with research to test and confirm a priori truth claims, TechCo's top team recognised limitations of this approach. It accepted that, if the findings simply reproduced TechCo's world view and the assumptions underpinning it (Knights, 1992), they might rubber-stamp the change strategy but fail to identify important shortcomings. An important implication accepted by the leadership team was that the research would produce knowledge that was inevitably tied to its context - in contrast to positivist findings that could be freed

from the local, temporal conditions that prevail where data are gathered (Deetz, 1996: 196). Stripping out these local phenomena could deprive it of valuable insights about these local conditions. And since the pulse surveys showed variations in the level of misgivings across different departments, it was agreed to explore the detail of underlying factors, and resist the appeal of generalised, organisation-wide truths.

### 3.3 The methodology for data collection

Two options were considered. An early decision determined that, whatever form the data collection took, it must be done by outsiders. This was considered a prerequisite for persuading the respondents to be candid so that TechCo could be confident that the findings would reflect reality as each senior manager saw it, rather than a sanitised version of the truth. The anonymised pulse surveys had produced a level of candour the leadership team found disarming but useful. It was keen that the next stage of research should achieve the same.

Semi-structured interviews appealed because they seemed a good way to explore senior managers' opinions, experience, attitudes and processes. They would allow us to investigate the subjective meanings interviewees ascribed to ideas and events (Gray, 2014: 386), and the format of this sort of interview - a loose set of questions which the interviewer may change depending on the trajectory of the conversation - would allow the researcher to explore pathways chosen by the respondent.

TechCo's leadership team wanted to canvas the opinions of a wide range of senior managers. After several discussions it decided for two reasons that focus groups would suit its objectives better than interviews. The first and most important: it was persuaded to adopt a qualitative, emergent inquiry into the ways in which its senior managers were constructing their work challenges. And, since the respondents often collaborated and met in team settings, it was decided that focus groups would allow the researcher to collect verbal data from the *interaction* of group members (Millward, 2012). The pulse surveys had already told the leadership team that there was widespread awareness of tensions around the firm. Through focus group discussions it had an opportunity to understand in details how senior managers, collectively and individually, were responding to these tensions. The informal structure of the focus group process would allow the researcher to explore what the respondents said *and* how the group chose to articulate particular views (Munday, 2006). This was likely to be more fruitful than an analysis of reasoned answers by individuals to direct questions (Morgan, 2010), a view which had

recently been endorsed in a book chapter about methodologies for investigating paradox, its authors seeing focus groups as a valuable way for scholars to learn more about how discourses about paradox work in a group setting (Andriopoulos & Gotsi, 2017: 522). I would explore this via the dynamic, social interactions which formed them (Fairhurst et al., 2016: 176), and this would provide insights at multiple levels: that of the group through interpersonal talk between actors; and at the intrapersonal level - thoughts and feelings within each individual (Millward, 2012). This would draw from the constitutive perspective on paradox discussed in Chapter 2 which holds that language, discourse and social interactions shape reality. The constitutive perspective is also interested in the conditions under which actors respond to paradoxes (Putnam et al., 2016). The second reason for choosing focus groups was timing. The leadership team wanted to be able to act on the findings of the research by the end of the first quarter of 2018. It also wanted the sample of participants to represent at least 25% of the firm's population of senior managers. Although it accepted that this methodology would not yield statistically representative data (Smithson, 2008), it took the view that a sample of this size was needed if the findings, which they expected to share in outline at least, were to be credible with this group. Organising the diaries of 70-80 senior managers would be difficult and complex. It would necessitate an intensive coordination exercise, but choosing focus groups made it possible to complete the data collection within 20 working days. TechCo judged that this would not have been possible had interviews been the chosen method.

### 3.4 The participants

There is an extensive debate inside and outside academia on the differences that distinguish managers from senior managers from leaders (Nahavandi, 2006). I do not wish to make a generalised point about the status of the participants in the case organisation, except to situate them in the local hierarchy where they were all classed as senior managers. This was the group selected by the leadership team to be participants in this research exercise: employees at the levels immediately below the leadership team. There were three principal reasons for this decision. First, it would fall to this cadre of management to implement the decisions that would flow from the research findings. They would be expected to shift aspects of the firm's culture in the ways judged to be most likely to advance TechCo's change programme. Also, if the research pointed to new ways to manage TechCo's competing priorities, it would be important to hear directly from senior managers because they would necessarily model any new practices for the rest of

the organisation. This was based on the view that the senior manager's response to paradox shapes that of the whole organisation (Lewis et al., 2014; Smith & Lewis, 2022; Smith et al., 2016). It also seemed logical to identify any misgivings among this group that would stop it from wholeheartedly implementing new practices. Thirdly, the leadership team was impatient to acquire these research insights quickly. Since senior managers are less numerous than the much larger group of middle and junior managers, investigating their views would give the firm a larger representative sample of opinions within the short number of weeks envisaged for data collection.

At the time of the focus groups, the length of the participants' employment history was anything from a few months to 15 years. The line managers of the most experienced were on TechCo's leadership team (or executive board). The more junior participants would be working up to three seniority levels away from the Board.

### 3.4.1 Defining senior managers

Dissensus/Critical theory (Deetz, 1996) tends to present managers as the personification of capitalism on the basis that they are complicit with it (de Gaulejac & Hanique, 2015; Gabriel, 2008). Where organisations are understood as a verb - organising - employees are divided between the organisers and the organised. The focus of Critical theory on the experiences of the latter makes a necessity of its antipathy to management, the organisers. It is rare to find a dissensus investigation that adopts a neutral, still less a sympathetic, view of management. Indeed the dissensus view is that any curiosity about the trials of managers, about their failure to achieve the levels of control they might wish for, will reveal a desire on the part of the researcher to identify with managerialism and its ideals (Klikauer, 2019). This dissensus view considers that empathy for senior managers cannot also extend to ordinary "working people" (ibid: 428). The implication is that the researcher should pick a side.

But senior actors are working people too, and are subject to many of the organisational constraints that affect all actors (Berti & Simpson, 2021). This is not to deny the discursive resources - budget, network, number of supporting staff, options for communication - that help them shape organisational discourse (Knights & Morgan, 1991: 262). Nor does it try to diminish their marginalising effect on staff whose voices may consequently go unheard. However, the location of senior managers 3/4 of the way up the TechCo hierarchy means that it falls to them to "pick up the pieces" and turn the firm's intentions into operational reality (Courpasson et al., 2021: 3). Research that refuses to be curious

about managers (because its mind is already made up about them) seems unlikely to produce insights that might help senior actors improve management.

This thesis sees the senior manager as an instrument of the organisation's ambitions and, indeed, a willing accomplice. However her/his relationship with the organisation is not as easy or harmonious as it may appear to the Critical scholar. TechCo offers many benefits to senior actors, especially to those who perform well against their incentives. In the coming chapters I will explore how it also entraps them.

### 3.5 Focus group selection and logistics

All participants were senior managers in the organisation. An initial communication to the entire population of UK senior managers explained the research exercise. It was to explore views on the organisation's culture so as to understand what was helping and what was potentially obstructing the change programme. The communication explained the reasons for choosing to research their opinions, that it was designed to discuss insights that had emerged from the pulse surveys. The communication also set out the rudiments of the research process. It would comprise 11 focus groups in early 2018; each would number between 4 and 8 colleagues in senior management; it would be conducted by an external consultant; and numerous measures were being taken to protect the anonymity of every participant because the Board wanted to hear what senior managers thought.

A target list of 80 participants was approached. The aim: to achieve an equal representation of male and female senior managers, of departments across the organisation, and length of service to the firm: from a few months to fifteen years. The logistics team adhered to these criteria not just across the whole population of participants but also, as far as possible, within each focus group. Business commitments and absences caused participants to move, in some cases several times, from one scheduled focus group to another. In the end these same factors meant that the initial list of participants had to be revised many times. In the end 11 focus group took place over four weeks. Each one had a maximum of 8 and a minimum of 4 participants. In total the exercise involved 72 senior manager participants and they represented all 9 major divisions of the firm.

Each focus group lasted up to 90 minutes. They all lasted over 60 minutes. I led the discussion in all 11 focus groups. A member of the external consultancy team was also present to take care of logistics including email reminders, participant permissions, and

the recording of each focus group. This person did not take part in the discussions. The recording was sent immediately afterwards to be transcribed by an external agency. The final dataset amounted to 120,000 words. Even though transcriptions were anonymised and subsequently checked by me for anonymity, TechCo never saw a full transcription, only select quotations. Please note that in my findings chapters (6, 7, 8) I give names to participants to help clarify my commentary on the data. These are not their real names.

### 3.6 The focus groups

Before the focus group discussion started, I introduced myself to the participants present. I also introduced my research assistant and outlined the scope of his role. With three exceptions I had not previously met any of the participants. The consultancy team was known to most of them and my role within it had already been explained before the focus groups started to roll out. My credentials were kept short in the introductory email. The main aim was to reassure participants that I was likely to be competent. However, between the arrival of the email and the start of focus groups, I did notice more hits than usual on my Linkedin profile. It seemed that participants were curious to discover more about the researcher.

The research assistant explained the permission form to each participant and asked her/him to sign it. All participants did this. The form permitted us external consultants to include them in the recording and its transcription. After participants had signed it I repeated the assurance that their anonymity would be carefully preserved. TechCo would know they had taken part (by looking at their calendar). But it would have no way of knowing what they had said or even which focus group they had joined. Despite these efforts to reassure, some participants were at first wary about speaking their mind. This was noteworthy considering how senior they all were in the organisation. But most became much more forthcoming as the discussion developed. They were evidently keen to be heard, and the similarity of their ranks helped to ensure that they spoke freely.

Before each discussion I also reiterated the aims and style of the data collection, explaining why the approach was emergent and exploratory, that my aim was to interrupt the conversations as little as possible, to remain a neutral observer as much as I could. This was necessary because many of the participants were unfamiliar with qualitative methods. Some believed this approach to be a poor cousin of quantitative

research. On the other hand, all but a few were reassured that the research team had no brief to test some *a priori* theory which had already been decided (Deetz, 1996: 195-6). As each focus group unfolded participants were able to see this for themselves: the discussion was loosely structured, providing many opportunities for participants to raise points of importance to them. Also, my questions tended to be open-ended, not designed to test a hypothesis.

I initiated each focus group discussion by asking participants about TechCo's modus operandi. Early questions like "What works well in the organisation?" were useful for generating talk, and they allowed me to follow the particular experiences of participants. As discussed above, one of my objectives was to surface tensions. However, I did this cautiously so as to avoid making paradox the main topic. Tensions therefore took time to emerge but this time was productive. It helped to show the resistance of many senior managers to class paradoxes as difficult problems. This shed light on the performative nature of their discussions: even when senior managers said a given tension was difficult, actors almost invariably characterised it as manageable. Where I thought it helpful, I sometimes guided the conversation so that it covered not just organisation-level tensions, which participants tended to discuss "managerially", but also the personal tensions they faced: between their work and their family, for example.

## 4. Data analysis

### 4.1 Introduction

The dataset comprises the transcribed data from 11 focus groups. On the basis of these 120,000 words I developed an analysis of the transcriptions and presented it, five weeks later, to the UK leadership team of TechCo. We set out our findings in a thirty page document which consisted of an executive summary, a commentary with verbatim quotations from the focus groups, and the actions we recommended. My analysis of the data - to which the consultancy team had contributed - was divided into five themes. These were machines vs humans, self vs others, sameness vs difference, and inside vs outside which discussed the introspection I had observed vs the firm's desire for outstanding customer service. The final theme was good vs bad: the discourse of an idealised corporate culture celebrated at TechCo vs its darker side. These initial findings would all reappear in some form in the subsequent

analysis conducted over a year later for this thesis. My second approach to the dataset was very different to the original analysis, and I explain this in the next section but one.

### 4.1.1 Permission to analyse the TechCo dataset for my PhD thesis

Before the data collection began at TechCo I discussed with the consultancy team the possibility of asking our client to allow me to return to the dataset after the end of the exercise which it had commissioned. I explained that I was looking for a case organisation for my PhD, and that the phenomena I had already observed seemed to offer a rich opportunity to understand better how senior managers respond to paradox, an aspect of the literature I knew to be under-researched (Schad et al., 2016). This idea was put to the consultancy team's principal contact on the leadership team. Permission was granted shortly after the presentation of the findings. The only condition was that all identities in the dataset must remain meticulously anonymised; particularly, of course, that of TechCo itself.

### 4.1.2 One dataset, two analyses

During the focus groups I knew it was possible, though not certain, that I would be allowed to work on the data for my thesis. During this time I was guided by TechCo's objectives and am as sure as I can be that my own selfish research interests did not influence the data capture. I offer the following reasons to substantiate this claim.

First, the five themes we developed and presented to TechCo were shaped in general terms by the paradox literature, but not specifically by the three paradox types I subsequently used to structure my analysis, the ones featured in Chapters 6, 7 and 8: Belonging, Performing and Learning. Secondly, analysing the data for my own thesis was much slower than for the investigation which I completed over a few short weeks for TechCo. And more than a year separated the end of the research project for TechCo and my return to the dataset. For the second data analysis I had had much more time to reflect on the focus groups, complicate the picture I originally formed of the data, and make more connections. Thirdly, at the time of the research exercise for TechCo, my understanding of Lacan was rudimentary. I was only just beginning to read Lacan and Lacanian commentators. During the data collection and first analysis I did notice possibilities for a psychoanalytic reading, for example what participants did not say when they protested that all was benign at

TechCo. However, my focus was a discourse analytic approach as set out by the scholars who argue for a constitutive view of paradox (Putnam et al., 2016), and this approach is not informed by Freudian or Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. Of Freud's work I was only familiar with *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud, 2010 [1955]). I was therefore still a long way from being able to frame the data in the terms I set out in Chapters 4 and 5.

## 4.2 Analysing the data for TechCo

At the start of the analysis process I read transcriptions guided by the constitutive approach to paradox. I became familiar with the data by reading the focus group transcriptions multiple times. I also re-read the reflections I had written during the data collection process. I used Nvivo to code the data according to the most prominent themes that emerged in the TechCo focus group conversations, whether or not they appeared to be paradoxical. Comments in the text that illustrated the recurring claim that TechCo was a "nice" organisation, for example; the notion that TechCo or particular departments had been "McKinsey'd", ie streamlined by teams of management consultants; the idea of "misalignment", a term often used as a proxy for discourses that were in conflict with each other. Over the course of multiple readings, the themes expanded and contracted as I reorganised and renamed them.

My aim was to show how the firm and its senior staff were creating meaning (Maguire & Hardy, 2009: 149) in a variety of ways and how these meanings collided. Discourses were sometimes complementary, often in competition one with another. I built and refined a list of discourses which were privileged at TechCo to the extent they had become reified (Clegg, 1989). I also developed a dynamic (ie changeable) list of the discourses that seemed to have been marginalised (Grant & Hardy, 2003). I studied the interactions between the different sorts of discourses - established and subverted - so as to understand the relationship between them and the reasons that might explain why some were more insistent than others. I was as vigilant as I could be about the different ways in which participant comments might be interpreted: as a neutral account of some phenomenon, the expression of a belief, a mirror of a broader corporate reality, or a blend of all three (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000: 157). I was also anxious to tread a line, as far as possible, between Critical-Theory-scepticism about management vs an over-enthusiastic, uncritical vindication of managerialism. My aim was to adopt an unpolitical, neutral investigation of the

discourses in play so as to develop an understanding about how they were socially constructed (Burr & Dick, 2017). I resisted the temptation to read any comments as self-evident or common sense. It helped to be new to TechCo because this made it more likely that I would see its norms and processes as unfamiliar, unnatural (Alvesson, 1993).

Vigilance had been necessary during the focus group discussions about tensions. Because I knew the paradox literature well and was aware of the wide range of the paradoxes it had investigated, I knew I was as capable as any participant of constructing them. I reviewed the data so as to check whether I really had elicited TechCo's tensions from participants and not projected my own sensemaking within the empirical setting (Andriopoulos & Gotsi, 2017: 515). This distinction in the *Oxford Handbook of Organisational Paradox* is somewhat problematic, however. It assumes the researcher coolly decides whether to elicit paradoxes from respondents or impose them. But I did not sit behind smoked glass observing the focus groups. Paradoxes are socially constructed and it follows that I co-created to some degree the data I collected at TechCo.

### 4.3 The second analysis

When I returned to the dataset more than a year later my developing understanding of Lacan had caused me to decide that two separate readings would complement each other: first, a look at the construction of paradoxes by senior managers. Like the first analysis conducted for TechCo, this would approach the data from a constitutive perspective. It would view the discourses at play in the context of the context in which they arose, but it would nonetheless accept their potential to shed light on aspects of "reality" at TechCo. And insofar as the discourses offer insights into particular actors, it would assume their talk was conscious. To this reading I added a second one: a further layer of analysis in order to shed light on the unconscious operations of the senior manager, this time not through her/his conscious talk but rather the linguistic slips and surprises which were undermining the conscious, imaginary, discourses which were dedicated to making meaning (Roberts, 2005). The intention was not to discover a rival truth to TechCo's corporate line, but instead to show the contradictions within each actor, the continual subversion *by the senior manager* of the senior manager's own "official" discourse.

### 4.3.1 Coding for two readings

In each of my findings chapters (Chapters 6, 7, 8) I follow the same structure: I briefly discuss a paradox archetype: belonging, performing and learning. Within that archetype I review the conscious operations that are noteworthy in the data, and I apply a Lacanian reading so as to develop insights into the unconscious aspects of that paradox.

Developing my commentary involved shuttling between the data and the defining features of the three paradox types as set out in the literature (which I briefly summarise below). During this phase I built on the themes I had identified during the data analysis I had conducted for TechCo. I sifted carefully through data already coded for TechCo themes such as misalignment, the McKinsey'd idea, collaboration, the One TechCo discourse, and so on. And I reallocated these examples to the three archetypal paradoxes explained below. At the same time I coded talk from each focus group that shed light on the senior manager's quest for recognition by others and the Other. Some trial and error was required to identify talk and speech acts that pointed to activity beyond the imaginary. I read and re-read the transcripts many times to consider the talk of the participants through my two lenses: one familiar to the paradox literature, focusing on conscious talk and corresponding to Lacan's imaginary; and then any indications of actors' unconscious operations and the subject's pact with the Other to solve its and the Other's lack. Through re-reading the dataset I discovered examples I had previously missed that added evidence to the codes which reflected the conscious operations of the actor. And, after several passes, I began to gather a fund of interactions that illustrated - or at least plausibly illustrated - points of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. I gradually refined my coding, adding new ones, merging codes that were not distinct enough to remain separated, removing codes altogether. This was an ongoing process, and no typology ever felt conclusive. The final selection was the one I judged to be the most coherent representation of what I had observed.

## 4.4 The three paradox types used in the findings

### 4.4.1 Introduction

In each of my findings chapters (Chapters 6, 7, 8) I follow the same structure: I briefly discuss the paradox archetype, I review the conscious operations that are

noteworthy in the data, and I develop insights into the unconscious based on a Lacanian reading.

Three distinct archetypal paradoxes had been set out by scholars in early theorising articles (Lewis, 2000; Smith & Lewis, 2011) and widely adopted around the paradox community. I chose this structure for my findings because the most intractable conundrums facing the TechCo participants resolved quite neatly into the three archetypes - the paradoxes of belonging, performing and learning. I provide two readings because in combination they offer a richer set of insights than if the dataset were studied from the perspective of paradox scholarship only. Assembling my findings under the three paradox types provides a way to embellish current paradox scholarship and, at the same time, to argue why and how the Lacanian angle adds to it.

I now summarise the three paradox types.

### 4.4.2 The paradox of belonging

The paradox of belonging (see Chapter 6) is a conundrum for every actor who must somehow reconcile her/his identity with that of a group or organisation (Lewis, 2000). An independent identity competes with group membership but in any organisation the two are also contingent on each other. We want to be accepted. We also want to be distinctive and pursue priorities that correspond to our own, selfish needs. For two decades the paradox of belonging has been a pillar of the paradox literature (Lewis, 2000; Schad et al., 2019). It is a major consideration for globalised firms which create and maintain operations that are both centralised and diversified. They urge their whole workforce to embrace unifying ideas, but the ideal of a single, cohesive unit can also be problematic when individual employees want to realise personal ambitions, or when the needs of local customers prevent regional offices from conforming to the organisation's centralised standards. Tensions soon develop between efforts at the centre to homogenise and the opposing pull of heterogeneity, and the ideal of a coherent, collective identity is often undermined by the organisation's own structures, processes and capabilities (Smith & Lewis, 2011: 391), because contrasting priorities in different parts of the organisation encourage disparate responses - such that practices around the organisation come to contradict each other. This can be experienced in the tensions between departments. The paradox of belonging also challenges individuals (Brewer, 1991; Hahn et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2012) because they must reconcile their own identity

with the collective one. Scholars argue that we attach ourselves to the entities which carry meaning for us, including our work (Walker & Caprar, 2020). The collective identity of the organisation gives actors resources that serve their identification. In turn, the identity of individual actors influences the wider social context (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004: 155). Paradox scholars argue that all parties can benefit when they take an enlightened approach which recognises the paradox of belonging and embraces rather than resists it. So, for example, group identities become more stable when members are given latitude to express their individuality (Smith & Berg, 1987: 102). But group membership is always in a state of tension: an overpowering group identity will marginalise that of the group member. On the other hand, if an individual actor's identity becomes overpowering, this may undermine the effectiveness of the collective. Reconciling the competing needs of individual and group is intrinsically difficult: in one study musicians are drawn to quartets because they offer the prospect of more influence than they would enjoy in an orchestra. But a quartet is no free-for-all: it succeeds only because it integrates the efforts of its members, which requires both individual restraint and firm leadership (Murnighan & Conlon, 1991).

While paradox scholars study tensions between the group and a unitary self, identity in Lacanian terms is complicated by a radical split, discussed in the previous chapter, Chapter 4**.** The unconscious of the individual - known as the subject - has to contend with a radical internal split that alienates it from conscious efforts to build an identity. The actor's conscious negotiation between individual and group identity is both driven and undermined by her/his unconscious where belonging is always and inevitably impossible, except through fantasy.

### 4.4.3 The paradox of performing

The paradox literature identifies many paradoxes of performing such as empowerment vs control (eg Denison et al., 1995) and competition vs collaboration (eg Murnighan & Conlon, 1991), the focus of this thesis. Paradoxes of performing occur when stakeholders pursue contradictory priorities (Smith & Lewis, 2011: 384). These priorities depend on each other - such as product development vs sales, or individual targets which push actors towards the selfish pursuit of their own goals vs collaboration which requires actors to suppress their selfish goals and work with their colleagues for the common good. The paradox of performing belongs to a broader category, paradoxes of organising. Paradoxes of organising comprise "conflicting yet simultaneous demands for control and

flexibility" that emerge in studies of performance and empowerment. They are caused by the need to juggle forces that encourage commitment while at the same time maintaining efficiency and order (Lewis, 2000: 765). Large, complex organisations channel their efforts by developing discrete specialisms. Departments and divisions develop around these specialisms - research & development, production, sales and so on - each pursuing its own strategies and goals. A degree of independence is needed to maintain their particular focus and pursue the objectives peculiar to their specialism, but the organisation must also bring its specialisms together to achieve its corporate objectives. In order to integrate specialisms into a coherent offering, organisations need understand how these separate units depend on each other in spite of their disparate objectives (Jarzabkowski & Fenton, 2006), but conflicts can develop between departments that are only partially aligned with each other.

As with other paradoxes, the actor uses (conscious) sensemaking to resolve the paradox of performing into separate entities (either/or thinking), or to embrace the whole paradox and thereby accommodate all its component parts (both/and). In other words, the actor can learn to perform *and* collaborate. In the unconscious, by contrast, paradoxes cannot be thought. In Chapter 7 I explore evidence of the impasse which can confront the Lacanian subject as it tries and fails to satisfy two contradictory demands from the Other. If the subject cannot pragmatically split the paradox and abandon one side, the paradox of performing may amount to an impasse which presents no solution. Alternatively, a fundamental fantasy may obscure this impossibility so that, as many focus group participants claim, the paradox becomes "manageable".

#### 4.4.4 The paradox of learning

Learning, like innovation, produces tensions between building the future and destroying the past (Smith & Lewis, 2011: 383). Organisations must exploit their existing know-how to retain customers. Yet they must also disrupt what they know if they are to find new products and services to retain these same customers in the long term (Christensen, 1997). Existing frames of reference are cognitively useful but can prevent actors from thinking differently (Weick, 1979), ultimately turning the organisation's "core capabilities" into "core rigidities" that inhibit new ways of thinking and hold the organisation back (Leonard-Barton, 1992). Learning generates creative energy and opens up possibilities for change (Schad et al., 2016), but it also subverts what is established by setting out to change it (Vince, 2018: 273). Thinking paradoxically allows the actor to do both.

In Lacan's unconscious there is no paradoxical thinking because there no thought. Learning in the unconscious is a contradiction in terms - see Chapter 4. Any "learning" to change the subject's relationship to the Other necessarily occurs away from thought and speech, away from the Lacanian imaginary where a learning need can be instrumentalised and then solved through training. If the subject does slip the ties that preserve its interdependence with the Other, the evidence for it is necessarily subtle, tentative, and easy to confuse with the "decaf resistance" to the Other which the unconscious fantasy sustains. Furthermore, the evidence is bound to be especially tentative in this dataset which offers just a single-meeting snapshot of unconscious learning within an actor, since no senior manager appeared more than once in the data collection phase.

## 4.5 Analysing the data with a Lacanian lens

I have outlined how I analysed the senior manager's conscious responses to paradox - both during the research exercise for TechCo and the subsequent analysis for the thesis. Now I outline my Lacanian method.

Lacan advocates no methodology for investigating the unconscious through discourse. He instead proposes a set of concepts to guide psychoanalysis. It is a set of principles; there is no body of rules to define good Lacanian practice, and thus it is the researcher who is responsible for applying the principles (Arnaud & Vanheule, 2013: 1671), and resisting the temptation of "objectification" (Lacan, 2006: 284) or "text positivism" (Rorty, 1992), the practice of presenting what someone says as a reliable proxy of the truth.

The 120,000 words of talk in the dataset remind the researcher that we talk because communication fails, not because it works (Verhaeghe, 1995: 5).

Any Lacanian analysis of the focus group transcriptions deals with elements of all three registers - the imaginary, the symbolic and the real (Neill, 2013: 339). As discussed in Chapter 4, Lacan argues that we see glimpses of the unconscious in everyday speech, through fragments of the unconscious that penetrate the (conscious) symbolic order. They enter the symbolic not via comprehensible signifiers but in the incomprehensible links between them.

A paradox sits at the heart of the individual actor's attempt to understand and articulate her/his unconscious desire. All actors have is language, yet the discourses at their disposal belong to the symbolic register and must be borrowed. So the subject is for ever

alienated from itself because its borrowed discourses are inadequate to the task of capturing its desire, still less rediscovering the *objet a* which, at best, is articulated by what surrounds it (Neill, 2013: 346-7). This otherness of language means that all analysis of the subject is an analysis of discourse (Parker, 2005: 172).

### 4.5.1 Investigating the failure of the imaginary

The imaginary is the realm of meaning (Neill, 2013: 339). It occupies much of the data and participants ostensibly operate only in this realm except, of course, the slips that interrupt their otherwise fluent declarations. To understand the reasons for the subject's attempts at subjectivation, Lacan is also interested in what is not said (Driver, 2009c: 496). Inferring the reasons for silences can provide insights into the subject's desire and what it lacks. The Lacanian reading therefore focuses on the failures that commonly mark discourse, including omissions, tangents, slips of the tongue, inconsistencies, distractions and other linguistic and rhetorical constructions. These in turn demonstrate the failure of the imaginary to solve the subject's lack.

Non-sense and repetition point to irruptions of the unconscious into speech. The object of study is not some hidden meaning which sits under the surface of the text. Rather, the aim is to look at how signifiers are organised, because what the signifier does for the subject depends on its relationship with other signifiers in the text (Parker, 2005: 169). What makes no sense indicates the real which is beyond the reach of symbolisation. The subject's failure to solve its lack can cause blockages in the text. Repetition can also point to what is important to the subject and this, in turn, shines a light on what is important to the Other, what the Other lacks. As the subject repeatedly tries to solve the lack of the Other in order to solve its own, the Lacanian reader gains an understanding of what cannot be said (Neill, 2013: 347) or resolved.

### 4.5.2 Investigating the subject's quest for recognition

A major aspect of my analysis is an investigation of the subject's appeal to the Other for validation which might solve its lack (Georgaca & Gordo-López, 1995: 166). Speech manoeuvres the subject into advantageous positions for recognition (Parker, 2005: 173) - either in relation to specific others like other focus group participants, or by the Other. Implicit in all talk is the recurring question the subject asks of itself before and during speaking: "What does the Other want of me?" (Lacan, 2006: 690). Lacan proposes that, in "human language…the sender receives his own message back from the receiver in an inverted form" (Lacan, 2006: 246). In reading the TechCo dataset, therefore, my task is to

study (i) how a speech calls for a response from others, and (ii) how the response may send a message back that exposes something that was concealed in the original speech (Parker, 2005: 175), thereby pointing to what the unconscious subject desires. Insights into the subject inevitably point to the Other's dependence on it and this, in turn, builds a picture of the fundamental fantasy that sustains both subject and Other at TechCo.

### 4.6 Reflections of a researcher

No statement has a guarantee beyond the statement itself - outside existing chains of signification (Lacan, 2006: 688). This means that there is no stepping outside discourse for the protagonists who feature in the data: they are all implicated. Nor is there a metalanguage to separate me, the researcher, entirely from the discourses I study. When I analyse the text it is not from within a privileged independent language. My position is just one more "partial, tendentious, ideological discourse of the Other" (Pavón-Cuéllar, 2014: 331). The reading of discourse is always provisional, and the best approach is therefore to operate reflexively and in relation to the text (Parker, 2005: 176). As soon as one begins to make objective truth claims about the text one is no longer reading but instead starting to write a new text for oneself (Neill, 2013: 336). Nonetheless, this is a PhD thesis which requires originality. And so, however earnest my efforts *not* to collect and analyse the TechCo dataset through some privileged language, I *am* now writing a new text.

As I have explained, my understanding of Lacan's ideas developed before and during the second analysis of the dataset, the one I conducted for this thesis, and after the data collection and the first analysis for the research project commissioned by TechCo. At the time of the data collection, therefore, I was unaware of Lacan's warning to the analyst not to become the subject supposed to know (Lacan, 1998: 267). I also had only a rudimentary understanding of the psychoanalytic importance of unintended slips and what was not being said. Armed with the understanding I have now about Lacanian and Freudian psychoanalytic theorising, I would have heard the talk differently when the focus groups rolled out in early 2018. It would perhaps have made me more vigilant about the transference which turns the analyst into the Other of the senior manager. And my gradual acquisition of Lacanian knowledge makes my findings an amalgam of the discourse analytical approach with a Lacanian lens subsequently added. I try to reflect this in the two separate readings (see my discussion in section 4.3, above).

However, the dataset shows that the unconscious operations registered in the recordings and transcriptions did not depend on a Lacanian researcher. The linguistic slips, the

illusions and silences were all going to happen anyway. And it was clear at the time, despite my ignorance about Lacan, that discourses like job satisfaction, harmony, the benign nature of TechCo, were much too insistent to represent all that was in the mind of the participant - for example when participants claimed incessantly that all problems they encountered were “manageable”. Even to a lay observer it was clear that much was *not* being said. In the next chapter I discuss a moment in the third focus group when “Emma” unintentionally describes a tension as healthy. The slip becomes obvious when the other participants chuckle. I overlaid a Lacanian interpretation in my second analysis of the dataset, but at the time of the data collection it was already clear that the slip indicated a marginalised discourse which was seldom heard or even admitted by the senior manager.

I offer one more example to argue that a Lacanian analysis of the text is not hampered by the non-Lacanian collection of data. In Chapter 8 I discuss what I believe was my boldest intervention during a focus group. It happened during the same one in which Emma’s slip of the tongue occurred, and I touch on it here. Later in the conversation I challenged the participants to address what they were not discussing, and explicitly referred to the unconscious. There was a side to TechCo which was “radical and tyrannical”, I suggested. I deployed the word “unconscious” because it seemed a useful proxy for something that was present but taboo. I used “radical” and “tyrannical” so that there would be no doubt I was confronting the taboo. The intervention yielded useful insights. For example the resistance of some participants left traces in the data and, during the second analysis, this helped to show the power of the fantasy there. It also, in retrospect, revealed something of the interactions between analyst and analysand, according to the discourse of the analyst (Lacan, 2007: 29), in which the knowledge of the analyst functions as an enigmatic version of truth, *le mi-dire* (ibid: 36), or unconscious knowledge which is yet to be subjectified. My intervention was so unsubtle that it was easily contradicted, and it is likely that it failed to catalyse a new master signifier for any of the participants (Fink, 2017: 37), and yet it did seem to produce new reflections on TechCo.

Although the participants will not have mistaken me for an analyst, they did identify me as a specialist in the organisational research field. That was how TechCo introduced me, after all and, as their comments on interventions by McKinsey demonstrate, senior managers were used to consultants at TechCo. It is inevitable that they transferred affect into the analytic/focus group setting (Fink, 1999: 40). Despite my declarations that I did not wish to intervene beyond a minimum, I could not avoid being implicated in each focus group. In retrospect I was its official witness. Statements of loyalty to TechCo were

consequently also directed at me. Contained in each group dialogue were the unconscious longings of participants for the lost *objet a.* In retrospect I was the subject supposed to know about this *objet a*. I was even the cause of the participants' desire. So it seems that I used the transference occurring in the room (Giraldo, 2010) when I interrupted the monotonous talk of TechCo's virtues to elicit different talk - about what was radical and tyrannical at TechCo.

Since I did not see the focus groups through a Lacanian lens when I conducted them, these musings remain speculative, and there must be some doubt whether transference occurred in conversations which lasted at most 90 minutes and were never repeated. But, in any case, my objectives were not those of the analyst. I was a consultant. I therefore regularly played back what participants had said.  And I was representing the external consultancy team, and this was a corporate setting in which it was normal for the researcher to be personable. Establishing empathy was an important aspect of the focus group process but it would be a minor factor for an analyst.

In summary, if I were starting from here the data collection and analysis would have been conducted from the same theoretical starting point. If I were starting from here there would have been much less to-ing and fro-ing between the development of theory and the data analysis. I would have studied, distilled, refined the theory, allowed it to percolate for a year and then carried out the data collection and analysis. But I am not writing a thesis in retrospect, and the imperfections of my research process do at least make it Lacanian in spirit.

# Chapter 6: Belonging

1. Introduction

1.1 The paradox of belonging and the subject

It is straightforward to argue the benefits that accrue to organisation and actor when they successfully juggle the twin priorities, individual independence and subjugation to the group. But the feat is not easy and all paradoxes, including the one of belonging, cause intellectual and emotional difficulties which are widely documented (eg Hahn et al., 2014; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008). In all the focus groups participants relentlessly characterise paradoxes as “manageable”, implying that they routinely find an optimal balance between competing priorities. Lacan sees this as the playing out of the individual’s idealised ego. Here actors can imagine what they want about themselves and fashion their identity as the sort of person who finds all challenges manageable, including paradoxes. For Lacan the ego is situated unambiguously in the conscious. The subject is barred (expressed as $) from the talk because a barrier exists between the subject, which is in the unconscious, and the conscious communication of its desire.

We are divided between who we consciously think we are and who we are unconsciously or, to be precise, who we are as subjects of the unconscious (Lacan, 1998). When actors class problems as manageable, the ego is at work and at odds with the unconscious in this sense: actors confronted by a breach in the discourses that shape their identity tend to assume the breach does not relate to them (Arnaud & Vanheule, 2007: 361). But breaches in intended speech contain messages that deserve close scrutiny even if the actor disavows them - because they reflect a subjective truth (Lacan, 2006: 371). Why are these subjective truths interesting? In part because they offer counterfactuals to the actor’s claims about herself/himself; but especially because they indicate the failure of all

speech, and therefore shed light on the relation between the unconscious and the conscious mind.

As I argued in chapter 2, the paradox literature gives very limited thought to the role of the unconscious, preferring a psychological conception of subjectivity in which actors are understandable to themselves. Lacan's (unconscious) subject does not act; it is acted upon (Arnaud & Vanheule, 2007: 362) and exists only insofar as it is created - in the conscious mind - by words. In the imaginary order actors make sense of themselves and the world, but the language they use is not their own. What they really desire, to use Lacan's phrase, they cannot name (Muller & Richardson, 1982: 373). Actors are facilitated by language and also trapped by it. Chains of signification fold them into prevailing discourses, yet at the same time alienate them from themselves because they must use borrowed language. It cannot directly convey their own unconscious desire which lies outside language.

All this means that there are two struggles of belonging in the data. One is the actor's conscious negotiation of individual and group priorities so as to "manage" the paradox of belonging. The other is a parallel conundrum in the unconscious: desire is outside language but language is the only way for the actor to think and express its most fundamental unconscious desire. If the actor must borrow from available discourses to articulate this fundamental desire, to whom or what does it really belong? The talk in these TechCo focus groups is about the imaginary certainties that feed the actor's identity work. When they fail, as they are bound to, what is left that actors can call their own?

### 1.2 Lacan's big insight

I discussed Lacan's negative ontology in Chapter 4 but it bears repeating because it is crucial to a Lacanian reading of the data. Underpinning the alienation which afflicts the subject is a fundamental absence. It distinguishes Lacan from the psychology-based approach of the paradox literature. Within the unconscious something fundamental is missing which cannot be solved, as elaborated in Lacan's theorising about the mirror stage. As a consequence, the subject's first and last priority is to solve its innate lack. Arguably the original "*manque à être*" is better translated as "want to be", "the radical and humanly unsatisfiable yearning of the infant for the lost paradise of complete fusion…a wanting born of want" (Muller & Richardson, 1982: 22). It is the force that explains everything the actor thinks and does.

There is a linguistic dimension to Lacan's negative ontology: the empty signifier, a space which can point to multiple possible signifieds at once. A little like the term “society” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014), there are phrases in these findings whose ambiguity allows the speaker to promote the meaning of their choice so as to tame the world discursively, even if the effect is illusory (Kelly, 2014: 915). Emma will talk about “healthy tensions” and the widespread “respect” she sees in TechCo. Martin will stress how the firm’s culture allows his colleagues to be “relaxed” and “comfortable”. And Tony describes how he gives 100% to TechCo, except that he is never sure when he has done enough because the meaning of 100% is unclear to him despite its superficial preciseness. The ambiguity of empty signifiers offers creative possibilities for discourse in that they make multiple interpretations possible. But their slipperiness also destabilises, requires constant maintenance. And so the work of actors to fix meaning is never done.

The value of a negative ontology perspective is that it helps to penetrate the relentlessly performative nature of the TechCo focus group conversations and explain the frenetic discursive activity as the conscious actor works to give substance to an empty void which she/he cannot fill. This is productive for TechCo as the individual tries project after project so that the subject gains some substance. But no identity or other achievement lasts because the absence cannot be filled.

### 1.3 Observing the unconscious at work

Investigating the unconscious through language is problematic because “*la lettre tue*” (language kills). If all thinking begins from our position within the symbolic order (which is outside the unconscious), then the Lacanian subject cannot know itself. Lacan contributes nuance to this difficulty by arguing that the unconscious/“the real” is *known unbeknownst* to the individual*,* encoded and locked between signifiers rather than in them (Fink, 1995: 23). How then does one investigate the subject if the “I” expressed in speech does not represent it? The answer is that the Lacanian analyst must decode irruptions of the *real* that unsettle the subject’s (conscious) imaginary constructions (Fink, 1995: 21). She/he is interested in irreducible signifying elements (Lacan, 1998: 250): signifiers reduced until they mean nothing to the conscious mind, because these signifiers indicate kinks in the symbolic order (Fink, 1995: 30), ie evidence of “the real” of the subject.

I start my exploration of the data by noting some initial examples of the unconscious operating during the focus groups. Among the conscious dialogue that occurs between focus group participants as they posit, agree and dispute imaginary constructions about

themselves and their work at TechCo, there is evidence of contradiction and non-sense that do not fit the pattern of imaginary talk. The following extracts are drawn from talk by a senior actor (whom I am calling Emma). She makes a series of unintended slips that complicate her constructions and point to activity which is independent of the 'planned' talk that makes up much of the data. These are more than superficial failures: they point to the subject's inability to solve its own constitutive lack.

1.3.1 Emma's first slip of the tongue: "Lack of, sorry, strong sense of…"

A senior actor in one of the focus groups (Emma) is commenting on collaboration between senior actors when she says something unplanned:

**"…I think this is a genuine lack of, sorry, a really strong sense of self respect for what the other person is doing, so I don't see it spiralling into a problem." (3.7)**

Although "normal service" (Emma's positive commentary on TechCo) is subverted for only a moment, her slip is significant. She undermines her statement by first saying its opposite, and the interruption is enough for us to glimpse the subject minus subjectivation (discussed above by Žižek, 1989: 174), ie the unconscious without the paraphernalia that obscures its constitutive lack. Emma's words "lack of" contradict what immediately follows: "strong sense of". The subsequent "I don't see it spiralling into a problem" confirms the relegation of the phrase "lack of" to the status of an error. But why the slip? One explanation is that she is simply confused after switching between positive statements ("we have these respectful relationships") and negative ones ("I don't think it's an issue"). The alternative explanation is that both the main statement and its contradiction are true - in the sense that they reveal two perceptions running in parallel. One sees respect and the other does not. But Emma is soon on-message again, fluently describing the tension as manageable. However the glitch, though momentary and easily missed, points to the failure of her positive constructions. They are vulnerable not just to rival constructions from other actors, but also to irruptions from within. Emma's "lack of" slip exposes a failure which is ordinarily hidden from the imaginary. The failure can be traumatic. It can also be liberating, giving the receptive actor a glimpse of life without the reassuring but constraining certainties of the imaginary about who the actor is and what she/he wants (Driver, 2017: 621).

1.3.2 Emma's second slip of the tongue: "Did I say healthy tension?"

A second slip lends weight to the idea that senior actor Emma finds it harder to deal with tensions than she cares to admit. Here she is contributing to a discussion about the struggles that continually occur between departments with different and competing objectives:

**"Did I say healthy tension? Erm [audience chuckle]. I think just from my perspective, because I work with business groups, it's very, very, works closely with product groups that create products, which we then market and sell. The product groups are highly technical, move at a different speed, and I just think that's… so I see tension in the space that I work in, I don't know about the other people in the room, but I don't think it's an issue. I just think it's, cos we have these respectful relationships, so I think it works through with how people interact with others here…" (3.7)**

In the broader discussion we see TechCo's actors responding to the paradoxes that emerge in working life. The psychologised approach would record how actors *surface* these tensions through conscious, cognitive processes (that, happily for researchers, give them access to the unconscious responses of actors). In the excerpt above, Emma acknowledges the tensions but classifies them as manageable: 'I don't think it's an issue', she asserts, although the subsequent comment 'I don't know about the other people in the room' suggests her claim is more tentative than it seems at first. From a Lacanian perspective, Emma's claims are being made within the imaginary register and are therefore contestable and unstable. It follows that her statement 'I don't know about the other people in the room' is an invitation to others in the room to vindicate her claim.

Just before the excerpt above, Emma discusses conflicts of interest between people in the sales and marketing operations, as follows:

**Absolutely, you still need to collaborate, but you may get a slightly different set of responses, around the, how would you call…the interpersonal relationships, because I know sometimes, we have, there's a healthy tension sometimes within the sales and marketing organisations (3.7)**

Then I, the researcher, play back her words to her, to which she replies: "Did I say healthy tension? Erm [audience chuckle]". Emma's reaction points to the irruption of something unintended into a speech that otherwise affirms the discourse of tensions that are good for TechCo and its actors. In drawing Emma's attention to her use of the adjective 'healthy', I ask her to confirm that the tensions in question pose no difficulties. The pause indicates a view which is ordinarily disavowed by TechCo actors - that it really is

problematic. A moment later, however, she reclaims her subject position as master of tensions, but her momentary hesitation is a revealing glitch.

The slips show Emma's talk failing. The interesting question to ask here is what purpose is served by the customary discourse of the senior manager in control.

Underlying every actor's efforts to negotiate their work is a quest for recognition - the first object of their desire, as Lacan puts it. Looking at how and why actors seek recognition begins to explain the paradox of belonging in Lacanian terms. I now draw on some more examples from the data:

I am not the only person listening to Emma as she talks about the relationships between TechCo's departments. Her primary audience is the other senior actors taking part in the focus group. Like Emma they are invested in the imaginary construction that the tensions between sales and marketing are negotiable, manageable, even healthy. Her colleagues spot the contradictory voice in her ("Did I say healthy tension? Erm…"). Must she really be held to the word "healthy"? Her question is comical to them in the same way it is funny to watch a person shake their head while saying "I'd be happy to try today's special, camel liver". Emma's slip of the tongue and the reaction to it ('audience chuckle') reveal important details for a psychoanalytic reading. First, the chuckle validates Emma, confirming to her that the tension is difficult for other senior actors too. Nobody contradicts her, and the chuckle indicates that others support her view that "healthy" is problematic. Secondly, it shows that they share Emma's construction before this moment, the one that qualifies the tension as healthy and manageable. Or, to be exact, the construction that helps to identify Emma and other senior actors as capable of handling the tension under discussion. Emma's "Erm" reveals her ambivalence about it. So her audience's enjoyment of the slip contains four messages. First, her colleagues recognise the alternative construction that the tension is actually hard. Secondly they identify with the achievement implied in Emma's response - that she is prevailing over the tension despite finding it difficult. Thirdly, this incident shows how the Other/the symbolic order functions socially. The chuckle of other participants is the recognition that confirms the subject's place in the symbolic order. In fact everyone's place there is confirmed through mutual recognition. Finally, a Lacanian reading draws attention to the Other - the trans-subjective dimension of the talk between focus group participants that is bigger than the witness function they each perform. In Lacanian terms they are all making a collective appeal to a third party which is unconscious and therefore beyond the realm of imaginary (conscious) identification (Hook, 2018: 13). Emma's audience chuckles because she is not

just speaking to them but also ***for*** them. Her speech articulates the shared, unconscious desire - of all senior actors - to gain recognition; in this case to be recognised as masters of the tension between two departments. There is perhaps one more point worth making here. Emma's certainty about the tension is undermined by her doubt, but this does not require us to decide which is more true. Indeed the irruption ("Healthy tension? Erm") indicates two coexisting assessments of the external world: one is persuasive because it is regularly spoken and vindicated. The other subverts it. The alternative is involuntary and therefore unpredictable. The point here is not that the alternative is more or less valid. The point is that the imaginary order fails to fix the subject's identity. This failure usually remains hidden in the actor's conscious operations but, just occasionally, it pops into regular, "planned" speech.

1.3.3 Emma's third slip of the tongue: "Self respect for the other"

Emma recovers quickly from her slip ("Did I say healthy tension. Erm"). Her normal discourse reinforces the subject position of Emma-the-thriving-senior-manager. The data show how it is enabled by the recognition of others (the actors around her) and by the Other.  Emma must reaffirm it continually because her place in this or any social network is always provisional, about to be undermined (Frosh, 1997: 237).

And then there is one more slip that confirms the circuit of exchange through which Emma gains recognition. Here I stitch the two previous extracts together to make the point:

**…A really strong sense of self respect for what the other person is doing […] I just think it's cos we have these respectful relationships, so I think it works through with how people interact with others here… (3.7)**

Why does she say "*self respect* for what the other person is doing"? "Respect" on its own would be more logical. This glitch can either be cast as another trivial departure from the intended speech, or as something significant which represents an unconscious truth. The normal formulation "respect for…" describes a simple relationship between the subject and object of the sentence. The alternative points to an interaction where respect for others is elided with respect for oneself. Emma's odd statement echoes Lacan's observation that "the first object of desire is to be recognised by the other" (Lacan, 2006: 222). The subject does not construct its identity in a solitary, independent effort as if building a personal collection of lego pieces. Instead it is contingent on a social network

and the recognition that brings. Identity accumulates in two steps: first the subject ascribes certain characteristics to others and, secondly, it positions itself in relation to these characteristics (Vanheule et al., 2003: 324). Objective truths are not relevant here. The point to note is that Emma constructs others as respectful and this allows her to locate herself with reference to these respectful relationships. The construction thereby becomes her reality. In Lacanian terms the vindication is reciprocal: Emma recognises the relationships as respectful. And it is recognition of Emma by others in the social group that links her identification with the discourse of respect. The Lacanian reading of Emma's "self respect" slip emphasises the contingency of her own subjectivity. Without recognition the subject is nothing.

2. Mutual recognition and Kudos.

Many focus group participants talk about an informal system of recognition within the organisation. It is known as kudos:

**There's a thing called Kudos inside TechCo, you can put people up for Kudos. It's trust, and the network is also calling out and supporting your peers and your colleagues, and making sure that they're recognised, and they're supported. (2.3)**

Kudos supports TechCo's performance management system by facilitating praise between managers who are situated within the same department as each other or, more commonly, across different departments. The system nicely illustrates Emma's phrase 'self respect for…the other', and here the senior actor/participant explains how the system benefits both the person receiving the praise and the one who gives it:

**By putting somebody up for Kudos, you actually get a lot of respect, just as much as the person who's been given the Kudos gets. (2.3)**

And while praise may be given verbally, what counts is praise written via email or TechCo's messaging platform. Here the actor endorses the construction of Kudos as a vehicle for trust and support, and the financial metaphor ('money in the bank') connects Kudos to the performance management system which plays a central role at TechCo. Unconsciously, actors participate in the system for mutual recognition. Its existence also indicates a collective appeal to a more generalised Other which demands collaboration, as we shall see later in this chapter.

2.1 Martin and individualism

I turn now to further evidence of recognition by others and the light it sheds on the paradox of belonging - in psychoanalytic terms, that is. Here is an account of TechCo's culture by another actor, whom I will call Martin. He is discussing the tension between individualism at TechCo and collaboration.

**This is an environment which encourages individuality. The way you dress, we've got a very relaxed dress code, the hours that you work, when you come in, when you finish, how you want to manage your own diary, and I think we encourage people to be individual and make sure that they can be themselves at work. But, which you would think would create more scope for there to be clashes, but I don't really see much of that actually. No, I think because everyone is so comfortable in being themselves when they're here, that if there is any kind of difference in personality between the two people, they're just so comfortable at being themselves, it doesn't create an issue. (3.9)**

The speech claims that the organisation allows the individual to express herself/himself fully, apparently without limits, as if the paradox of belonging poses no limits on the individual. This is contentious in light of the conformity expected by the organisation, as indicated by this comment later in this focus group session:

**One of the things that's quite important in TechCo is your ability to manage your own profile. (3.18)**

Speeches like Martin's which praise the firm are common. The first observation to be made about this one is the effect it creates. While he accepts there is a potential for conflict ("which you would think would create more scope for there to be clashes"), Martin claims to see no tension day to day and is almost anxious to argue that the opposite is true. TechCo is a broad church, he claims. Any paradox of belonging is therefore easily managed. His evidence includes the relaxed dress code, the freedom to organise your own time, the firm's ability to tolerate a wide range of personality types. Note how the word "comfortable" is used twice and the claim that people can be themselves is made four times. (These claims are repeated many more times in this and other focus groups). Martin's speech emphasises the absence of tension between group conformity and individualism, but the paradox literature argues the opposite - that paradox is cognitively and emotionally difficult. His speech is an effort to deparadoxify (Fiol, 2002) it in an effort to restore at least the appearance of harmony and order (Lewis, 2000: 763), and claim that it does not cause conflict. The question for a Lacanian investigation is why this is, and how it serves the subject.

Speech as an act of communication is as interesting to Lacanian analysis as its content (Žižek, 2006: 16), and gaps provide one way for the reader to investigate how the subject relates to this act. Martin does not seem to recognise the pressure to conform: his account excludes any organisational constraints on the actor. In fact he edits out the paradox of belonging itself. Martin's speech shows how fully an actor must embrace certain discourses for their own identity work. When they make sense of complexity and mess the result is a coherent account of the world through which they affirm a broader narrative and establish their connection to it. Here Martin is taking advantage of an opportunity to be recognised. By whom?

## 3. The Other

In the paradox literature, the individual and the group are on opposite sides of the paradox of belonging. The tensions are between one person and a group or organisation. In Lacanian theory, the tension in the unconscious is between the subject and the Other.

### 3.1 Martin's Other

Martin's speech is ostensibly about a tolerance of individuality that benefits TechCo actors. Most of all it is an act of identification: he claims an affiliation with a particular perspective on TechCo. He presents it to everyone present in the focus group because it is the other senior actors present who will vindicate it . A subsequent comment by one of his colleagues suggests he is succeeding:

**I think people talk more, they express their ideas, their thoughts, things like that more freely, than I've seen in other companies. (3.10)**

We can infer from the speech how the subject (of Martin) also aims to please the Other, a more general vehicle for recognition than the colleagues who happen to be present. The Other represents, variously, a historical reference point to which the subject turns when it wishes to be recognised, because it unifies the subject and others (Žižek, 2006: 34), the notional third party in a dialogue, the set of rules that mediates intersubjective relations, and associations with hegemonic projects like the ones at TechCo that may provide a solution to the subject's crisis of structure, its constitutive lack (Torfing, 1999: 150). In this example Martin carefully associates himself with his employer's inclusion policy. Here the signifier "comfortable" is repeated several times to emphasise Martin's link to the discourse of tolerance. Because the subject position he is promoting relies on a string of

unstable signifiers, the effort to fix the association requires sustained work. The repetition also sheds light on the nature of the signifier. It needs to be repeated because it is slippery

What the speech expresses about the subject is always contingent on something external. The subject itself is empty and needs continual affirmation, but this dependence destabilises the individual. There is an ambiguity about the identity of the subject, and it is a function of the subject's paradoxical relationship with itself. For paradox scholars, the Other simply equates to the external, collective discourses of identity with which Martin's 'self' struggles. In the Lacanian reading, the paradox of belonging is about 'the self's radical ex-centricity to *itself* with which man is confronted' (Lacan, 2006: 435). The independent, at-ease-with-itself identity Martin longs for is never quite his own. The Other simultaneously offers the subject possibilities for identification and castrates it. Is the ambition to embody this idealised tolerance really Martin's? Or is he an instrument of the Other? This uncertainty offers rich pickings for the Critical theorist looking for organisational systems that marginalise. But here the focus is the contingency of the senior actor's identity, and why she/he is permanently unsettled by the impossibility of stabilising it.

3.2 Tony who gives 100%

Another example helps to illustrate what the Other is to the subject. Here focus group participants are discussing why they work. Echoing Martin's idealistic speech on how comfortable everyone is, there is talk here about flexible working. What emerges is that there is no need for the organisation to check hours worked because actors monitor themselves. Or, to be more precise, they work long hours because they can never be sure how many hours are enough. Tony claims: "I will always give 100%". 100% is an idiom that means Tony could not work harder. It might be better described as the idiom which articulates Tony's desire for his efforts to be fully recognised. In one reading this is only a turn of phrase. In another, this reference to a world that is calibrated and predictable expresses a yearning for a certainty which is elusive, as the following speech shows. As we will see in the next part of the Findings, TechCo closely measures the product of all this effort in the form of personal revenue targets. Here Tony explains why he expends all this effort - to avoid 'a reputation for not doing the job', "be seen as a slacker", "as lazy", "as someone you can't go to". Safeguarding his reputation means unspecifiable levels of effort, because there is no objective definition of "100%": "Sometimes it doesn't work in my favour", he confesses, "Because I end up doing more than I should, because I don't

want to say no". Tony's trouble estimating what constitutes 100% is not only a cognitive problem of measurement: it raises a fundamental psychoanalytic point: to the subject, "enough" is unknowable and, in any event, enough is impossible because nothing can cure the subject's lack. The ambiguity about what constitutes enough at TechCo is regularly expressed by focus group participants. Here are two further examples. One actor observes that what is required is "what you do over and above":

**There seems to be an expectation that you do your job and you do your job well, that's like the basic minimum of your role, and it is what you do over and above that that creates success for you as an individual. There is a bit of that. It's not necessarily a type, more an attitude to go over and above what your commitments are, to understand that's what it is all about. (8.3)**

And here actors discuss how they "end up doing more than [they] should":

**Louise: I'd say my number one motivation is money…**

**Jane: It's also…for me…**

**Tony: No, no, money is obviously a natural one, but I'm also a perfectionist. Like I will always give a 100%, and I want it to be recognised, I don't want to be seen as a slacker, I don't want to be seen as lazy, I don't want to be seen as someone you can't go to. You know, if you go to me, I want to be able to do the job that you ask. Sometimes it doesn't work in my favour, because I end up doing more than I should, because I don't want to say no, because I don't want to get a reputation for not doing the job. But I get the impression that everyone at TechCo is like that, everyone wants to do the best that they can, so it's not that we have to work those hours. I decide to start at 10 but I'll work till 8, or whatever it is, you know. You can choose your hours, but I don't think anybody works short hours. Whatever those hours look like, whether it's in the morning then you have the afternoon off, then you work the evening. Or, you know, our director was saying yesterday, that he literally works his arse off Monday to Friday, but then he will not touch his work over the weekend, so he has the weekend off…**

**Louise: People respect that… (1.6)**

By solving the Other's lack, the subject will finally solve its own lack. And so it follows that Tony's speech about the importance of being dependable relates to what he perceives is the Other's lack. Tony sums up his predicament:

**Sometimes it doesn't work in my favour, because I end up doing more than I should, because I don't want to say no.**

In cognitive terms definitive answers, such as what constitutes perfection, are knowable via job descriptions, formal objectives set by managers, team priorities. But in Tony's speech it is possible to see that imaginary constructions do not define what the subject needs. Even if he does have explicit objectives which define in rational terms what "enough" is, something else is at work which is not so easily distilled. "I don't want to say no" is a conscious declaration that points to what cannot fix itself within the unconscious. Here, as elsewhere, repetition in conscious speech conveys the subject returning again and again to a site where it hopes to solve its alienation and achieve the reintegration, harmony, reconciliation it longs for.

Six phrases by Tony articulate the same idea: "give 100%", "want it to be recognised"… not "be seen as a slacker" or "lazy" or "not doing the job" or "someone you can't go to". Tony's quest to be perfectly dependable points us to the demands of the Other. We can also infer the work of the role of the *objet a,* the cause of the subject's desire. So the subject strives to satisfy the Other as a way to rediscover the *objet a* - the placeholder which, for the subject, represents the fundamental lack it longs to solve. So long as the subject clings to the *objet a*, it can imagine itself as non-lacking. But this is successful only at the level of the imaginary, and a nagging, unconscious doubt remains because of the contingencies that still separate the subject from achieving completeness. And so the actor is condemned to repeat herself/himself like an analysand circling around the Lacanian real. The rewards for clinging to the *objet a* are superficial and fleeting. Despite all the effort the subject's lack is not solved, only circumvented.

### 3.3 Some conclusions about Tony

Two questions present themselves. Who demands "perfectionism" of Tony and other senior actors? And why do they aspire to it? It is plain from the speech that Tony decides what effort is necessary. But what constitutes enough is set not by Tony but by the Other or, to be precise, what the subject imagines to be the desire of the Other. The subject is more attached to the Other than to itself (Lacan, 2006: 436), and so Tony's claims about what constitutes enough require continual validation. This resolves into an endless quest for approbation. In this and other focus groups, colleagues provide an echo chamber that gives some endorsement of the claims a speaker makes. Here Tony's claim receives Louise's approval:  "People respect that".

Tony's audience is not just others but also the "trans-subjective" - the Other that transcends particular other work colleagues. This Other "mediates between me and other

subjects" (Hook, 2018: 95), making it "the guarantor of the truth" and "good faith" (Lacan, 2006: 437) . Recalling the mother who names the mirror image for the child, the Other gives the subject clues about how to return to its former state of completeness. Lacan articulates the subject's task by drawing on Freud's formulation: *Wo es war, soll Ich werden*. "Where it was, I must come into being" (Lacan, 2006: 435). Or perhaps: I must become how things were. The task is one of "reintegration and harmony. I could even say of reconciliation" (ibid: 435). This is not to be confused with the psychological quest to "know thyself". Rather it invokes the possibility of reconsidering the ways that lead the subject back to the original "where". The subject's answer to this opportunity is to try to fulfil the Other's desire. The *Other's* desire is to have what it, the Other, lacks.

## 4. Conclusion to Chapter 6

In this chapter I have aimed to show that the actor's conscious efforts to negotiate the paradox of belonging are often undermined by a paradoxical relationship in the unconscious between the subject and the Other.

In the dataset there is ample evidence of the paradox of belonging playing out as it is described in the paradox literature: the actor negotiating conflicting identities - her/his own and that of the group, or TechCo as a whole. Martin, Tony and others must fit in at TechCo and work harmoniously with their colleagues. At the same time they must promote their own private cause, and it is hard for them to reconcile the twin activities: building their individual reputation while also promoting the esprit de corps of the overall group in ways that do not threaten their individual identity. Tensions between individual and group needs are intellectually and emotionally difficult, but the literature advocates a range of cognitive strategies so that the individual actor may juggle or "manage" the paradox. Lacan situates such strategies in the imaginary. He argues that, in the unconscious of the actor, the desirability of any response to paradoxes, for example the quest for a "dynamic equilibrium" between paradoxical elements (Smith, 2014), is shaped by the Other. The data provide useful insights into both cognition and the Lacanian imaginary, but neither yields all that we need to know about the problem of belonging that confronts the subject.

4.1 What, then, does the Lacanian perspective add to paradox scholarship's insights into the paradox of belonging?

The arbiter at the level of the unconscious is the Other, which demands mastery but also undermines the subject. While the imaginary order allows the actor to think of herself/himself as non-lacking, the ego's efforts to claim mastery are problematic because the signifiers it uses to do so are borrowed. Mastery is therefore contingent and elusive. The individual is sustained by an illusory image of herself/himself, and at the same time alienated from it because it is borrowed (Driver, 2017: 621)

Lacan argues that identity is best understood as an absence rather than a presence (Driver, 2009c: 497). He shifts us from studying a tug of war between two definable, discrete, observable identities (for example the individual's vs that of the group) - to a new perspective which Lacan makes possible with a negative ontology. This yields a different way to explore imaginary constructions of identity because its starting point is that they *all* fail. It means, for example, abandoning the idea that work can solve the subject's inner lack (Huber, 1999). On the other hand it also opens up the possibility of new spaces in organisational discourse in which the subject is *able* to be lacking, where constructions are *allowed* to fail. In the final part of these findings (Chapter 8) I will explore the conditions under which this is possible.

The key to these new possibilities is the Lacanian idea of an interdependence between actor and organisation. In the unconscious, at least, they need each other equally. Tony (discussed in the pages above) never knows when he has done enough. If his doubt were simply rational it could be solved rationally. Beyond the rational machinery of performance incentives, TechCo operates at the level of unconscious fantasy and this, much more than the evidence supporting Goal Setting Theory, explains why its effect on the individual is so insidious. Here, "enough" never becomes clear. The ambiguity surrounding the word serves the Other well because it maintains the Other's hold over the subject. And one of great insights made possible by Lacan's theorising about the subject and the Other is that TechCo exploits Tony's perfectionism because it needs to. In Chapter 7, which looks at the paradox of performing, I draw from the data to develop Lacan's argument that the Other depends on the subject because it too is lacking. An actor will join TechCo for coherent, rational reasons. But, in addition, there is a deep, unconscious pact between them which is sustained by the twin lacks of the subject and the Other.

# Chapter 7: Performing

1. Introduction

1.2 The paradox of performing

Ostensibly TechCo's performance management system is a straightforward, logical package of incentives and rewards that instrumentalise the daily priorities of its actors. Applying a Lacanian reading draws attention to the unconscious processes that underpin this apparently straightforward and neutral system. In Lacanian terms, the system expresses a pact between senior actor and firm, and illustrates an elaborate fantasy that serves both the subject/senior actor and the Other/TechCo. In the data as in the paradox literature, TechCo's paradox of performing is framed primarily as a cognitive challenge. There are important additional insights to be gained from an exploration of the paradox within the unconscious.

Before adopting a Lacanian approach, I want to show through the data the conundrum which the system's twin incentives present in the conscious mind. Here an actor explains that personal revenue targets are contingent on collaboration ("building relationships") across the organisation:

**If you look at my part of the business, very simple terms, I have a revenue target to hit for a particular customer segment, and I have a bunch of account managers that report into me and, realistically, they can't actually hit their own targets without building relationships with partners, and partner account managers, to help drive some real accountability and generate demand. And where we're at today, I think there's an acknowledgement that that needs to happen. But the actual relationships between account managers and outside their team, the partner account managers or some partners themselves, just aren't there yet. (4.2)**

As I have observed about other paradoxes, the one of performing is difficult for actors to reconcile cognitively. Focusing at the same time on individual targets and cooperation is cognitively hard because of the mind's cognitive preference for coherence, linearity. At TechCo actors must collaborate and compete with each other, because the targets of one department may undermine those of other departments. Competition and collaboration compete and yet are intertwined. Some actors struggle to juggle both parts of the paradox:

**It's a very self service culture. It relies on you to build your network and your relationships. Some people struggle with what they see as a culture of networking coffee meetings and waving your flag, and actually is it about, surely if I just deliver it, it'll come to me? (3.18)**

Actors are under pressure to deliver revenue. This extract reflects the desire of some to simplify their life by simply delivering revenue, where targets are unequivocal, while and taking a more sceptical view towards collaboration where it never clear how much collaboration, networking and so on is enough. The paradoxical nature of work is a recurring feature in the focus groups and the word "complexity" often stands for the contradictory puzzles of the incentive scheme which actors struggle to solve. For one, the culture at TechCo is both supportive and Machiavellian. 'Supportive' evokes cooperation and Machiavellian suggests its opposite:

**So I had two words actually that came to mind. The first one was supportive. I do think it's an environment that can be very positive and enhancing. The other word that came straight after that was Machiavellian which I think is by the nature of our competitive culture. I guess I spend a lot of my time trying to understand the true intent of individuals across the organisation. (8.2)**

In every focus group the participants discuss this and other contradictions with which they must work. A striking feature of this talk is that the organisation does not intervene to help senior actors negotiate the contradictions. Some scholars contest that this is because firms are instruments of capitalism and therefore complicit in the creation of paradox (eg de Gaulejac & Hanique, 2015). The alternative view, which I adopt here, is that all organising generates paradoxes (Sjoberg 1967 in Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983) no matter what ideology underpins it. Much of the talk in my focus groups flows from the paradoxical features of TechCo's incentive scheme, and so I now explore its consequences.

1.2 The Bear: a metaphor for TechCo's performance management system

There is a recurring story told in TechCo about what to do if you are one of a group of people that stumbles on a hungry bear in the wild. Your instinct is to run as fast as you can, hoping that you might by some miracle run faster than it. The story is used as a metaphor about TechCo's performance management system. Escaping the bear is about meeting your targets, even exceeding them. But that is not how you survive at TechCo, not in practice.

Much is made in the data of two opposing forces: the pursuit of revenue and teamwork. TechCo pushes aggressively for revenue growth while simultaneously promoting the virtues of collaboration through its One TechCo campaign and the individual "commitments based" incentive by which it assesses every senior actor. The firm's performance management system incentivises staff to do both but there is some doubt that collaboration has equal status to revenue, and this extract neatly illustrates how the senior managers who participate in my focus groups - and their line managers - understand TechCo's paradox of performing.

**Jake: That's [Board Member] X's favourite story isn't it? Just gotta run faster than the bear. Outrunning your peers, you're told that every time.**

**Researcher/me: So the story is what? It's about running faster than the bear?**

**Jake: Basically you don't need to be able to outrun the bear. You just need to be able to outrun your colleagues. (10.10)**

The moral of this story is not to be faster than the chasing bear. It is to be faster than the other campers. Translated to the TechCo context, objective performance against targets is ultimately less important than relative performance against colleagues, which transforms the difficult tension between revenue and teamwork into a struggle for survival which is unlikely to foster collaboration. The global tech firm equivalent of the campers caught by the bear and eaten is the selection of actors who earn the lowest score for overall performance (a 5 where the highest is 1) and are earmarked to lose their job via the annual Rank and Yank exercise that removes underperformers from the firm. Rationally, the paradox of performing (revenue vs collaboration) is difficult but possible to negotiate. In this chapter, as in the rest of my findings, there is a yawning gap between the cognitive ideals of paradoxical thinking and the realities of performance in the unconscious mind. My interest is in the day to day experience of the senior actor and how the subject deals with the paradox of performing. Like the bear story it features death and

survival - in contrast to the cool remoteness of TechCo's performance management system whose "scorecard" and "calibrations" suggest order, objectivity and evidence-based fairness.

1.3 The effect of TechCo's incentives

The word "misalignment" is used often in the data to signal competing priorities and the struggle of actors to reconcile them:

**You're trying to do the right thing for your customer, somebody else's scorecard is completely mis-aligned and so you're pulling in opposite directions from people, and can create conflict and all sorts of things like that as well. (5.6)**

On the basis that commercial environments are becoming more, not less, complex, there is growing pressure on senior managers to address demands that are both integral to their overall, corporate strategy and also inconsistent with each other (Smith, 2014: 1618).

Growing complexity is a significant feature at TechCo. There are multiple references to its "silo'd" structure where departments pursue their own objectives in ways that can undermine other departments. For example:

**People sit with the business they operate in. You get silo'd (2.6)**

One of the focus group participants echoes this view:

**When I started, everything was just a lot smaller, in terms of everything felt more contained. We still had a lot of the same challenges that we have now, in terms of process, and tools not doing what they should do, but the number of people you needed to involve in getting something done, or a piece of business conducted, was a lot less. So a lot less moving parts, so that's probably the biggest trend I've seen, the complexity of how we work. And people talk about this matrix organisation, that's kind of the way we compartmentalise things, has become a lot more complex, to the extent that I think we kind of almost apologise about it when we're talking to partners and customers externally, you know: sorry, it's the way that we work. (6.2)**

Another describes how the growing organisation introduces formality which militates against collaboration. Here is Michelle's comparison between an earlier version of TechCo and the current one:

**I was the technical specialist for one of the products project, small in TechCo terms, but a billion dollar business. I was the only technical specialist in the UK. We were small enough to get past the silos, so I spent a lot of time down in building 1, with**

**the field guys. I spent a lot of time talking to my marketing people, which were in building 3 at the time. We were in building 5, so it was easy to move backwards and forwards, and again, I was able to talk to my colleagues over in X, in Y, in Z as well. We could build that up, build those networks up because we were quite small. There wasn't the natural politics getting in the way of us cutting across all these different business areas. As soon as you move into something bigger, and I come from the * team, you know, who do I go and speak to for a technical problem? Wow, that's difficult, that's not easy. I'm not on first name terms with these guys, I don't know anything about their kids, their family, or where they live, so it's much more difficult, so once we get to bigger parts of the organisation, it gets so difficult to punch through, because who do you punch through to? When you're in a mixed office, you respect the rank of the senior guys there, but really you're all mixed in together. When you're in a place like X, you need to talk to somebody in Y field engineers, and you get blasted by one of their managers, because you're disturbing their guys…**

In summary, Michelle claims here that working across departments was easier when TechCo was smaller. As departments grow, their different objectives become more distinct from those of other departments. More separation of objectives increases the potential for conflict and, as discussed in Chapter 2, paradoxes become salient and proliferate when priorities conflict and yet endure because they are intertwined (as they necessarily are across departments within one organisation).

## 2. TechCo's culture of performance

Every senior manager relies on a team of account managers to achieve the revenue targets that have been set. They, in turn, rely on a network of relationships across the firm that enable them to deliver the level of service that will persuade their customers to buy TechCo's products and services.

### 2.1 TechCo's revenue vs collaboration paradox

Revenue and collaboration are interdependent yet also in conflict with each other, even within the same team, as this actor explains:

**You overlay on to that our whole reward and recognition, er, package, and we make great individuals. We often don't make great teams because of the way we're remunerated, because there's always a battle in my team. I want to be better than all my team members, because it gets me a higher calibration. So I know this has been mentioned: we've been McKinsey'd or something. That's how we're measured, and it means quite a lot to us in our, if you're on a sales plan number. That's how you get paid a lot of money.**

**So actually, I need to be better than him in my team, and her in my team, so that I get more money. So it makes for great individuals, and hardworking, but really it's all about me. So I think you overlay that on to the relationship piece, and it's what do I need to make me look better? (6.4)**

There are three points to make here. Collaboration at TechCo is constructed as an ideal. It is an unavoidable feature of TechCo's commercial project: actors must work together to deliver the company's objectives. Collaboration ("the relationship piece") is repeatedly constructed as ethically superior to non-collaboration, though non-collaboration is of course implied in the competition for revenue. Nonetheless, the firm makes actors instrumentalise collaboration, insisting that achieving revenue targets depends on it. But there are hints that the organisation rewards the appearance of collaboration more than collaboration itself. Collaboration helps you to look good, according to the extract above: "It's what do I need to make me look better?" "But really it's all about me", the actor adds, articulating the discourse of individualism, suggesting sales targets are the actor's primary concern. The speaker above (extract 6.4) discusses the role of metrics in the relationship between collaboration and revenue incentives:

**"We've been McKinsey'd…that's how we're measured." (6.4)**

"McKinsey'd" is an effect of working at TechCo and is cited in many of the focus groups. It refers to the firm's privileging of objective metrics and illustrates the business case worldview (Hahn et al, 2014) where what is most readily quantified exerts the most influence over actors. In the context of the paradox of performing, the McKinsey lens views both sides of the paradox according to rules that favour one side above the other. This, actors repeatedly suggest, is a daily reality. It contrasts with TechCo's rhetoric which implies an ideal balance between the imperatives of individual targets and cooperation. Elsewhere in the dataset a senior actor explains her own experience of TechCo's two performance measures, the RBI (Revenue Based Incentive) and the CBI (Commitment Based Incentive). I quote in detail here to explain the system:

**We are measured very strictly on revenue [RBI], and then we've got scorecard metrics [CBI], which are our kind of commitments, er, which we all have. But, in reality, if you miss your revenue number you're going to have a bad year. If you make your number you're probably going to have a pretty good year. (1.15)**

She adds:

**It's quite bizarre how you have all these commitments [CBI], and yet, actually, at the end of the day, it's just on what your revenue is. They put your revenue in your commitment. So if you don't hit your revenue, you don't get your RBI, and if you don't hit your revenue, it's in your CBI, so it's completely dictated by your revenue income. (1.16)**

The status of the CBI is not always helped by the lack of coordination between departments as to what constitutes collaboration. Several participants claim that, far from engendering cooperation between teams, the CBI enshrines rivalries:

**I think people's commitments, they had, they bore no relationship to each other. I could look at a team of account managers, they'd have absolutely no relationship to the commitments embedded in the partner team. (4.3)**

Though they talk more or less cynically about the daily reality which undermines the rhetoric about CBI, the firm promotes collaboration and revenue generation equally, even if the assessment of performance against the two ideals (revenue and commitment) is not equal. For most participants it is revenue goals that motivate because they are the de facto incentive:

**All I'm going to focus on is my RBI, cos actually I've over-achieved on my CBI, and you're not recognising me on that, so I'm just going to go away and smash my number and screw the CBI, you know…(1.15)**

Extraordinary collaboration is endorsed as a legitimate priority by focus group participants, but it endangers the actor unless it is underpinned by good revenue performance. Later in this chapter I investigate why this presents an unsolvable conundrum for the actor.

2.2 Rank and Yank

The second reason why revenue is the de facto incentive is that an overall assessment of individual performance is made at the end of every year by all TechCo's senior line managers. Focus group participants refer to this practice as "Rank and Yank" which considers each actor's performance against the specific targets (RBI and CBI) and then allocates an overall performance rank, which is based in the end on their judgement. The rank has five categories where 1 is the best and 5 the worst. If an actor earns an overall grade of 1, 2 or 3, she/he is considered to have performed satisfactorily. Grade 4 is marginal and actors who score 5 risk losing their job at TechCo. Across most focus

groups the senior actors discuss this system. The possibility an actor will receive an overall score of 5 is a constant threat in their mind. This is because all line managers are obliged to name an annual quota of actors scoring 5 and therefore liable to be fired. One actor comments:

**The rules are very clear. It's very transparent (4.8)**

But "transparent" is an optimistic word to describe a system which bases its decisions about the survival of actors on the subjective (and often opaque) opinions of their line managers. This actor's comment perhaps says more about his need to express faith in TechCo's incentive scheme. From others there is scepticism about Rank and Yank and whether it serves TechCo well:

**I think the actual review system came from someone in the 80s and it was called 'rank and yank', so basically it's just there to get rid of the worst 20% in the company. So the whole basis behind it is flawed, because TechCo doesn't really employ people that aren't good at their job. That's where I struggle as a manager… everyone has performed well so why can't everyone get a grade compared to their…how they have performed? (11.3)**

The search for under-performers is conducted in all teams, including those which perform strongly. This means that every manager must allocate the lowest grade to a percentage of the team members who report to them:

**If I develop a team, and I have an extremely successful team, and everyone in that team is exceeding their commitments, and that team has got 10 people in it, by definition, I've got to have people that have got a 4 or 5. (8.8)**

Several focus group participants find this practice perverse since TechCo "doesn't really employ people that aren't good at their job" (11.3). Senior actors find themselves recruiting replacements for team members who were perfectly good operators but whom they had to fire in order to comply with the system. In one focus group a senior manager comments:

**You're cutting into the lean meat. I mean we have been doing that for several years now, being forced to be put in that position, we've, there aren't many poor performers within the business. (10.12)**

Another argues that TechCo's performance management scheme makes actors pursue the goals it sets, but priority leads the firm to overlook actors who are useful to the business in other ways:

**You don't want to be cutting into the lean muscle, you know. You need to make sure you have that balance, if you like. You need to have some people in the business, and in my business, some people who are called farmers, who are the steady eddies in the team, who go out and do their job. They're never ever going to reach the heady heights of being on the stage at [X] Conference, but they are doing the right thing by the customer, and they are doing the right thing by the business on a daily basis, and they're a constant, you know, and we can't have prima donnas walking around the business the whole time, because I think one of the problems in that, or one of the bad sides in that is the negatives, is they don't have any loyalty. To one of *'s points earlier on, they're out for themselves, they want to earn as much money, and they don't care about the collateral damage that goes on around them (10.12)**

Another senior manager claims that Rank and Yank has alienated him:

**So I would say that at times I have stood to a message and managed individuals to a 5, and therefore out, when I don't always 100% believe that is the right approach. It's at that point you move away from your connection with TechCo. (8.9).**

## 2.3 The consequences of performance management at TechCo

In these next pages I briefly review the data for the consequences of TechCo's approach to performance management:

### 2.3.1 Rank and Yank motivates

There are frequent references in the dataset to the bonuses available to those who meet their revenue targets or exceed them: for the great majority of actors the incentives motivate - further support for the view that clear, specific, achievable goals motivate actors to perform well against their objectives, so long as they are committed (Latham, 2007). The annual cull of a portion of the actors who are given the lowest and most dangerous score, 5, is widely seen to be motivating: the desire of actors to meet targets is fuelled partly by their fear of being graded a 5 and ejected from the firm. The policy is also problematic because it dispenses with valuable employees in a market where good talent is hard to find, and in so doing erodes the loyalty of those allowed to stay:

**I don't always 100% believe that is the right approach. It's at that point you move away from your connection with TechCo". (8.9)**

### 2.3.2 Reward for revenue, pray for collaboration

The imperative to compete pervades the organisation, its departments and teams, as this senior manager testifies:

**I would say in general we have very good individual contributors. We don't tend to have teams. We have individuals who happen to be in a reporting structure. To pull people together as a team and have that level of collaboration requires you to largely not compete with one another and that largely goes against the way that our system works. (10.16)**

TechCo's manager incentive scheme tempers competition with the imperative to collaborate. The performance system champions rational decision making supported by objective evidence - and assumes that line managers can assess performance equally because the criteria are equally straightforward to measure. This is questionable. Performance against *sales targets* is unarguable: actors either meet their sales targets or they fall short. It is harder to be objective about collaboration: the quality of each actor's collaboration is based, in the end, on the subjective judgement of her/his line manager. Furthermore, the default measure of performance is the individual actor's results against the RBI (revenue), not the CBI (collaboration):

**You are put into brackets based on your RBI, your revenue based incentive, and you get your CBI, your commitment based incentive. But actually both pots are governed by your revenue position…(1.15)**

The primacy of revenue generation, as testified by multiple focus group participants, means that actors who meet their revenue targets are not held to the same standards of collaboration, as this comment reveals:

**It's quite bizarre how you have all these commitments [ie targets for collaboration] and yet, actually, at the end of the day, it's just on what your revenue is. (1.15)**

In principle the scheme demands equally high performance on both sides of the paradox, but the principle does not play out in practice, as the above comment and

many others indicate. The person who achieves strong revenue results is less subject to the contradictory imperatives of the RBI/CBI scheme:

**I do think that if somebody is getting good results, em, hitting their forecast. I touched on that before, and said that em, the reason he got away with it is because he was showing the results during a very difficult time, so you've got that problem that yes, ok, from a business perspective he's driving the business hard, but he's getting the results, and if there's collateral damage by the way of people, then tough, because people are expendable at the end of the day. (10.10)**

These comments reflect the practical status of financial performance at TechCo. While the data show that collaboration is a powerful discourse at TechCo, TechCo's incentive scheme exemplifies systems which do not equally support all the priorities for which they were designed. The phenomenon is hardly new. It is investigated in Kerr's classic Academy of Management Journal paper which argues that organisations typically reward for A, in this case revenue generation, and hope for B, collaboration, while claiming to be equally committed to both (Kerr, 1975).

Despite these difficulties, TechCo's operations are governed by the metrics of the performance management system. The organisation's attachment to metrics is regularly observed by focus group participants, for example:

**So we have a metric around delivering for technology x. Technology x is really important. So you've got a scorecard metric to deliver x number for technology x. So is there any way we can bulk up technology x? Can we take 1% from that engagement…we can! Tick, in the box. Does that actually drive the technology forwards? Probably not. Does it make those delivering it satisfied? Probably not. Does it hit the metric? Yes. (9.9)**

I now briefly discuss three practical consequences of this system for TechCo: short termism, innovation and its capacity to make TechCo look inwards.

### 2.3.3 Short termism

A consequence of this imbalance is the privileging of short term priorities because they are more easily justified within TechCo's incentive scheme:

**There is a whole load of talk that goes around scorecard rather than tackling some of the underlying problems which might be something to do with, which can't be fixed, market share, typically it takes a while, more than a year to win share off a competitor in the enterprise race. As people well know, you start**

**talking in January one year, you won't close that bit until March two years later. So there are some I don't…unless you've got that continuous, em, relationship…that sales guy, if that teams gets axed for underperforming in year one, you never get to reap the benefits in year 2 or 3…short termism. Yes, so I can see why some things need to be short term: we need to pay the wages but I think there is too much of that. (7.6)**

This speech explains that the performance management system does not support the development of new business opportunities because the timeframes do not match. It teaches them to set their priorities to the annual demands of the system rather than what might best serve the long term interests of the organisation. This example neatly illustrates actors adapting their priorities according to what TechCo's incentive scheme measures.

### 2.3.4 Innovation

There are related consequences for innovation. The threat of a grade '5' score deters actors from trying new ways of selling TechCo's products and services to its customers, according to several focus group participants. Here is one:

**Innovation gets killed. People haven't got time for it and they don't take the risk on. Because if they fall in some way short, that challenging thing they take on at the start of the year doesn't get reflected at the end…The reality is if I did that and I finished at 98%, and my peers around the world haven't done that, and actually finished on 101%, I would be a five. (7.11-12)**

Taking the long view may make good commercial sense, but the short-term risks associated with changing established ways of working are carried by the individual actor, not the organisation. If she/he adopts a plan which takes more than a year to pay off, there will be trouble. Corporately, TechCo devotes significant resources to innovation, but at the operational level it is individual actors who bear the risk of investing time in initiatives that do not bear fruit within a given financial year.

### 2.3.5 Corporate introspection

If, to a senior actor, colleagues are the competition more than rival organisations, there is a danger that the quality of TechCo's service will be compromised. One participant expresses the firm's introspection like this:

**You know, sometimes we kind of get tunnel vision about our scorecards and our internal metrics, and our internal alignment. We kind of forget about the customers and what works for them. (5.5)**

Another senior actor complains that she is only rarely able to discuss her business with her line manager:

**The problem is, there's too many demands on his time - filling scorecards, forecasting, doing this, CFO forecast, setting quotas, doing something else, something that does not include his team. (5.24)**

There is repeated talk across the focus groups about alignment, or the lack of it, between actors who represent different departments. As discussed above, this consequence is inevitable in any organisation, because different departments pursue different priorities:

**People sit with the business they operate in; you get silo'd. (2.6)**

The salient point is that the performance management system is trusted to solve the problem of alignment. The practical reality is that it falls to the actor who must negotiate between revenue and collaboration. As one actor in sales puts it:

**If I don't make the quota, you can fire my derriere. You know, my bigger problem is that there is no, we're a little bit mis-aligned, or at least in the sales world, mis-aligned with your commitments versus the way we are monetarily targeted, and because of that mis-alignment, that drives the need to build your internal brand and everything else. (5.6)**

The comment in the above extract ("mis-aligned with your commitments") concerns the vexed nature of collaboration across TechCo. The collaboration expected of actors carries a personal risk for each one: the potential to undermine her/his generation of revenue. Actors therefore frequently talk about the need to differentiate themselves through their personal brand. Here is another example:

**And because of that being so mis-aligned, you think, God, if I miss any one of these I need some air cover, I need some air cover, so I bloody well better start building my brand, and going up the chart. So when it hits X** [a board director] **he doesn't go, 'Oh God, *** [* is the actor currently talking'] **is jack-shit.' He goes, 'Yeah, TechCo is a real pain in the arse isn't it? And actually, you're right, *, the processes are broken but we can't fix them. It's not even a UK thing, it's a corp thing. Actually never mind *, we'll still look at you as a good person.'**

And in its pursuit of revenue numbers that will match its predictions, TechCo risks overlooking what its customers need. Comments like this one are made in all the focus groups:

**TechCo is all about growth…I get it. But you have to be realistic with the market. (11.14)**

## 2.4 Summary so far

Daily life at TechCo is paradoxical because actors must demonstrate teamwork, yet their survival depends on them outperforming colleagues with whom they are supposed to collaborate. Performing against revenue targets promises the biggest rewards as well as the most motivating sanctions ('Rank and Yank'). This engenders relentless competition between actors, and yet TechCo's incentives demand that actors satisfy both imperatives of the paradox at once: collaboration as well as revenue. Some do choose one half of the paradox and largely ignore the other.

Performing at TechCo brings with it commercial difficulties which the focus group participants discuss at length: it distracts from the needs of TechCo's customers, and deters actors from trying new, as-yet-unproven revenue opportunities for fear they will be punished if they under-deliver in the short term relative to their revenue targets. Consequently, new ways of working are missed that might serve TechCo better in the long term.

The second point to note is that TechCo's performance management system strongly emphasises the individual. TechCo's corporate success depends on each actor's contribution to it, and the firm's incentives place all responsibility for reconciling the paradox of performing on the individual actor who then bears all the risks that are inherent in it. The incentive scheme enshrines the paradox through its twin incentives, but does not in any sense solve it. And, while the CBI incentive ostensibly promotes collaboration, the focus group talk makes it clear that the responsibility for collaboration is an individual one.

Goal setting theory is central. Although its original authors briefly consider unconscious activity, their thinking on motivation does not stray far from cognition and they assume that the unconscious simply obeys priorities already formulated in the conscious mind (Latham, 2007: 191). Lacan says the opposite - that the

unconscious rules the conscious mind and the latter has no access to the unconscious - at least not consciously or directly. Goal setting theory is optimistic that, under certain conditions, actors will reduce the discrepancy that separates them from what they hope to become. The data provide rich insights into what happens at this level of analysis, allowing me to explore the paradox of performing as it is experienced in the unconscious of the senior actor. The psychoanalytic approach takes us beyond the actor's attempts to reconcile her/his individual performance against the objective measure of TechCo's RBI incentive - and the semi-objective CBI incentive.

The primary condition is the availability of cognitive tools to the individual. These do not exist in the unconscious and the Lacanian perspective provides further insight into the performance anxiety of TechCo's actors.

What drives the unconscious of the actor is always interpersonal: to build symbolic relations within a social environment so as to locate the subject within the structure of the Other. For all the company rhetoric about the individualism of the performance management system, in Lacanian terms it is all about the interdependence between the subject and the Other. It puts into conscious action the Other's injunction to the subject to do its bidding, which is to solve the Other's own primordial lack.

I now outline the role of unconscious fantasy at TechCo and how it frames the desires that bind the subject and the Other together in a pact that, in turn, sustains the fantasy.

## 3. Performance and fantasy at TechCo

### 3.1 Introduction

The paradox of performing is integral to the unconscious fantasy that prevails at TechCo. Fantasy has been defined as "a sort of organisational dreamworld" (Gabriel, 1995: 477) which structures the reality of both organisation and actor: how they see the world, themselves and each other. It also underpins the symbiotic relationship that sustains actor and firm or, in unconscious terms, subject and Other.

In the previous chapter I drew on the data to convey the actor's cognitive struggles with contradictory goals, and her/his reflections on TechCo's performance management system. Conscious cognition is the focus of the paradox literature, corresponding to Lacan's imaginary register. Consciously, actors strive to meet targets which are instrumental to their career at TechCo: they aim to qualify for bonuses, enhance their standing in the firm *and* avoid a dangerous '5' rating from their manager (1 is the best possible, 5 the lowest) which would jeopardise their job. I now return to the dataset to consider what additional light the Lacanian perspective can shed on paradoxes of performing. I discuss why actors willingly embrace a performance system which causes them anguish - and what this tells us about two relationships - with themselves and the organisation. There is an interdependence between actors and TechCo which does not feature strongly in the conscious talk of focus group participants, but which nonetheless exerts a strong influence on both. Actors depend on TechCo's performance system because it shapes their fortunes. They talk little in the focus groups about TechCo's corresponding dependence on them, but this becomes clear when one deconstructs the unconscious fantasy that frames the relationship between senior manager and firm. Indeed, fantasy is central to a Lacanian understanding of the paradox of performing.

### 3.2 Fantasy, the subject and the Other

The question of the subject's desire is always central, but it is displaced in that the subject always "sees" it indirectly, asking "What do others desire of me?" rather than "What do I desire?". What the subject desires is central: the subject is defined by its desire, but it is occluded by that of the Other. This fantasy mechanism can be inferred when the ambitions of TechCo actors are impossible to distinguished from those of TechCo/the Other. The demands of the Other can also be explicit:

**TechCo is very good at communicating what we should be and what we value. (5.21)**

This comment articulates how TechCo functions as the subject's Other. It appears to solve the conundrum of the subject's lack but always in return for demands on the subject. "What we should be" concerns what actors aspire to become. Their own ambitions are intertwined with the firm's ambitions for itself. Talk at the firm frequently expresses what the Other (TechCo) desires. In the exchange below, for

example. the priorities of John and Marianne are entirely shaped by TechCo's demands:

**John: I know what's on the scorecard, I know what ** values, I know exactly what he's driving at the moment, I also know his scorecard metrics around diversity, the fact he hasn't got a female direct report is a real pain for him, all those sorts of things. So you know all that messaging for more or less every manager. So when you're asked a question, you all sit there and think…**

**Researcher/me: You know the right thing to say.**

**John: Probably that, yeah, I probably think that, but actually the right thing to say at this moment is this: Ah there you go, it's the calibration in two weeks' time…**

**Marianne: I think, coming up to the end of the year, I wasn't really sure whether I was coming or going, my first review. I could see everyone running around, ticking boxes for scorecards...**

**John: Yeah, oh God…**

**Marianne: Doing all these things…**

**John: But the problem is, you know, I understand that my manager's doing the same, cos he's got calibration, so the fact that I'm filling his scorecard, he's filling the next guy's scorecard, next guy is filling the next guy's scorecard…I probably understand that it's probably not the right thing for us all to be doing, but it's the way the company is set up, and it goes right to the top. So you know, I'm feeding X with stuff that he can put on his CV, so he can give it to Y, and putting wings on A's scorecard so that he can then give it to B. You know, it's the way the whole company is architected" (5.21-23)**

What does the above conversation show? Ostensibly it revolves around the assessment of individual performance against targets. The corporate preoccupation with the scorecard is evident. The exchange also demonstrates that these actors already know what they should say. Confirming the importance of all this calibration activity is performative. It reinforces their credentials as loyal and ambitious senior managers. At the unconscious level it shows the subject that it belongs, is needed, vindicated.

Integral to this exchange, and the prevailing fantasy at TechCo, is the firm's performance management system. Its incentives remind actors daily "what we should be and what we value" (5.21). In the extract above, participants describe the frenzy of "calibration" which assesses how well actors produce what TechCo wants of them. In conscious, logical

terms there is a straightforward, mutually beneficial exchange to observe between organisation and actor: corporate growth in return for salary, bonus and career. Its component parts can be identified and isolated and its outcomes predicted. If we transpose actor and TechCo into protagonists of the unconscious, the actor's comment on "what we should be" also expresses what the Other desires. The unconscious foundation of the discourse cited above is the symbolic register. It promises the subject completeness and fulfilment - and an opportunity for the Other to solve *its* lack through the activity of the subject. However, the vulnerability of the Other is easy to miss in the focus groups where actors complain about TechCo's performance management system but comply with its demands. Their discussions often confirm their dependence on TechCo is for financial gain, their personal identity and so on. Only rarely do they observe that TechCo needs them. Yet the relationship is a symbiotic one: TechCo/the Other depends on the subject for its corporate growth.

What can Lacan add to an analysis based only on the actor's conscious operations? First, fantasy disavows lack, so the speaker may express certainty or she/he may express doubts. What the speaker never articulates is the constitutive lack of the subject, but a Lacanian reading makes insights on this possible. Secondly, a Lacanian reading shows that the fantasy is precarious. Paradoxically, then, vulnerability is a necessary condition for the fantasy to work. The subject can imagine anything to be possible - that TechCo will always deliver to its shareholders the growth it promises, that the ambitions of the senior actor will be achieved and she/he will earn the highest possible bonuses (unless she/he is among the actors who fail and are removed). Its chief contingency is the belief of actors that what they experience is not fantasy at all but verifiable reality (Žižek, 1989: 124). The vulnerabilities of the fantasy become more obvious as the chorus of support for it rises, because actors' stories of success and fulfilment point to the maintenance required to make the fantasy credible to anyone listening: press, competition, customers, future employees, shareholders, TechCo and, of course, its actors.

## 4. Sustaining the fantasy:

In this section I discuss four ways in which the fantasy remains convincing at TechCo in spite of its vulnerabilities: the fantasy is all-pervading, everywhere; it

protects the subject from encounters with the real; the paradoxical lure of the fantasy because it fails; and the important role of the scapegoat.

4.1 It is everywhere

What the Other/TechCo demands of the subject pervades the organisation. It cannot be avoided. “The way the whole company is architected” (5.21) means there is little or no doubt at TechCo surrounding what the firm demands. One actor describes the effect of the firm’s culture on how employees act:

**I think you walk into an organisation, to survive in the organisation, you have to work with the culture. You can make bold decisions, you can either tinker with the edges or make bold decisions, that probably take up a lot of time to then enforce the change, but to do that, plus your day job, plus achieve the results, it's only a few people who will do that. I think most people will adopt the culture of the organisation. (4.6)**

So there are cues everywhere which point the actor to conformity and its rewards. Established norms are powerful because the pressure to do “your day job” and achieve results leaves no time to change things. And these norms are reinforced by TechCo’s performance management, the mechanism that keeps actors focused on their scorecard.

Underpinned by the two overlapping lacks that constitute the subject and the Other, the fantasy provides a narrative to guide both actors and corporation. And so each actor sustains it as enthusiastically as TechCo does. Even when they express dissent, like disquiet about the firm’s incentive scheme, they still uphold the fantasy by conforming to its demands and it is self interest that guides them: people willingly invest in fantasy to maintain the institutional order (Vince, 2019: 961). Indeed, the more invested they are in the fantasy, the more they read the organisation in ways that reinforce the narrative (Glynos, 2010: 33). Here, Philippa explains why she and her colleagues are perfectionists:

**It's like giving homework back into your teacher. You don't want to give it back and say, I know this is only 5/10 against your scoring mechanism, but you know, I had other stuff to do that night. And people don't feel they can do that, they want to give 10/10 to every single request.**

She goes on to explain why senior actors are driven to achieve “10/10”:

**So the company brand is worth a lot. I think people join TechCo and stay with TechCo. They feel there are some very, very, amazingly bright people making the big decisions, you know even from the sales and marketing, or an engineering and product level, and TechCo is always slated for getting to a market second, you know, that's a bit of an age old argument, some things, and people forget the number of times we've been first into a market place, but you forget all that, the ability to create just the right technology, the best technology…**

**I think that creates just a sense of wanting to, believing that TechCo is going to be a leader in the market place. And that's a really good thing, everybody wants, everybody likes being part of a winning team, and I think that permeates down to individuals, in terms of wanting to be part of that. (4.8)**

The fantasmatic narrative revolves around the attainment of perfection: TechCo is market leader, its actors are successful, talented and dedicated, they give all of themselves in everything they do, and the firm *will* perform according to its forecasts. The firm's actors vigorously defend TechCo's culture: Martin praises its tolerance of individualism and Tony celebrates his dedication to giving "100%" of his effort. Not all focus group commentary is positive; much of it is negative. But the narrative of fulfilled ambitions is seductive and, intoned often enough, the fantasy becomes convincing and its difficulties fade from view.

4.2 The alternative is terrifying.

Though imperfect, fantasy usually obscures the traumatic real, the real being the lack around which the whole symbolic order is structured (Žižek, 1989: 191). The actor is therefore deterred from abandoning TechCo's accepted ways of working having been prompted by something deep in the unconscious. Just occasionally the deterrent is observable in the data. The following commentary is made by senior actor Margot during a focus group conversation about an aspect of TechCo's systems that causes significant anxiety. What I consider here relates to a real that is peculiar to the unconscious of Margot. But I suggest that there is also a generalised real which interrupts the collective fantasy at TechCo. Shortly before the speech below I have offered the group a provocation: would their working lives not improve if they changed things at TechCo? These are all senior managers with significant discretion, after all. Margot's response is telling:

**When you asked the question about what would you like to change, I was like [gasp] don't change anything, don't change anything, I like it the way it is. There was just a real fear of - Are you going to come in and change this, so we**

**don't talk to each other nicely? [laughter], and we turn into this horrible, and I thought, no I can't say anything that might change this, because it's such a delicate balance, and we're all playing this game. What happens if people do start to be more themselves, and develop their personal brand, such that we all don't all modify our behaviour? Will we lose this lovely nice way we talk to one another? And that was a real fear in me. Scary. (3.27)**

When Margot asks the question "Are you going to..change this so we don't talk to each other nicely?" there is laughter from fellow participants as if her question is ironic. It may be, but it is also serious, revealing actors' anxiety about the possibility that the fantasy (ie the current modus operandi) may end: "gasp", "horrible", "will we lose..?", "a real fear in me", "scary", and the command "Don't change anything" is given twice. The speech makes it clear that the status quo, shaped by the fantasy at TechCo, is precarious:

**I can't say anything that might change this, because it's such a delicate balance, and we're all playing this game.**

My intervention simply poses the question which flows logically from the negative comments being made by the participants: if the status quo is problematic, why *not* change it? Margot's response is eloquent. It shows her commitment to the prevailing fantasy and her use of dramatic language points to deep unease about the prospect of altering how the actor relates to TechCo, how the subject relates to the Other. It is as if Margot's unconscious looks into the abyss and sees a world in which the current norms have been abandoned and the paradox of performing reduced to just one of its elements: a brutal competition for revenue between colleagues that leaves no room for comradeship. The "lovely, nice way we talk to one another" tells of the protection from all this which the fantasy provides.

How does the Lacanian angle help us understand the paradox of performing here? The first point is that it draws attention to the actor's investment in TechCo's performance management system and the fantasy more broadly. Margot offers her comments in the same focus group where, a little earlier, Emma makes her slip about 'healthy tension', indicating that she unconsciously classes it as *unhealthy*. Both Margot and Emma show that continual maintenance by actors and TechCo is not always enough to make the fantasy's narrative fully convincing.

Margot's reference to "talking to each other nicely" appears glib, superficial, even disingenuous. What is notable is that she is imagining life without the fantasy's

safety net (Torfing, 1999: 117). The softness of the image she evokes is in deliberate contrast to the bleakness of the real. "Nice talk" functions as a defence.

Some actors are revered for their ability to handle the paradox of performing with a cynical aloofness such that they pursue one half of the paradox (revenue) at the expense of the other (collaboration). Providing they meet their revenue targets their either/or approach to the paradox of performing incurs no sanctions:

**I think you can do no wrong in terms of you're beating your quota, you're keeping your scorecard green, you're meeting your deliverables, I think the company can be, I'm not saying always, can be quite forgiving to somebody who doesn't necessarily have TechCo values…**

**…he's getting the results, and if there's collateral damage by the way of people, then tough, because people are expendable at the end of the day. (10.10)**

It should be noted that this and similar comments may describe a fictional exemplar. For Margot and other, more normal focus group participants, the paradox of performing promises a continual struggle in which the senior actor tries to treat the two elements equally. Notably, she prefers to see it not as a struggle but a "game". The "lovely, nice way" actors talk to each other refers to the collaboration that makes the brutal competition between actors tolerable. Here the fantasy is at work, drawing the subject away from something terrifying and back into a world Margot can characterise as playful. The second point is that the fantasy is not visible to the actor because it is pervasive to the extent that it becomes the lens through which she/he understands reality. Margot's comments read like the speech of a person who has just seen the air she breathes. What prompts her glimpse of the real - what the fantasy cannot eliminate - is the researcher's suggestion that TechCo's actors should challenge a predicament they say they find difficult. For a moment, in the middle of the focus group, Margot is able to see more than she usually does. Her observation about the nature of life at TechCo ("We're all playing this game") represents her shift from being inside and immersed to a position outside where she begins to deconstruct the fantasy and reflect on it, however briefly. It is a notable speech because she both confirms her investment in TechCo and at the same time recognises the fantasy's precarity:

**It's such a delicate balance.**

## 4.3 Pleasure in failure

The *objet a* is the negative ontology at the centre of fantasy. It represents a fissure that undermines the narrative's claim to offer a complete account of the world. And yet the fantasy also depends on this imperfection. The *objet a* is paradoxical. It stands for an impossibility, an object that cannot be found, an objective that cannot be reached. At the same time it sustains the fantasy because it provokes endless, repeated attempts to solve the impossibility. And, although the attempts fail, they succeed in the sense that they cause the pleasure which keeps bringing the subject back for more.

I now consider why this impossibility at the heart of fantasy is so productive. The *objet* a prompts a quest. But the object of the quest is something the subject remembers but which never existed. The quest to find it is therefore futile, yet it causes the fundamental drive discussed by Freud in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" and subsequently, at length, by Lacan. Because the drive is in the unconscious, beyond language and thought, the actor is incapable of recalling the innumerable past failures of the quest. The endless repetition is also explained by *jouissance*, roughly translated as enjoyment. It is also possible to see *jouissance* as the meagre reward the Other hands out to the subject in return for its continuing service and loyalty. *Jouissance* is a "paradoxical satisfaction in dissatisfaction that results from the repeated failure" of the subject (Müller, 2012: 282). So the *objet a* keeps the subject coming back for another hit of this momentary enjoyment and as a consequence the status quo is maintained: the subject works to solve the lack that causes the Other and sustains the fantasy as a whole.

What does all this tell us about the senior actor's struggles with performance? That the performance management system exerts significant influence in the unconscious as well as the conscious mind. Within the symbolic it compels the subject to remain in position to serve the Other's desire and, in the process, its own desire. The performance management system nourishes the fantasy which posits that TechCo controls its own destiny, that its staff are in the best of all possible companies, and so on. The word "performance" appears dozens of times across the focus groups. It is a dominant theme at TechCo and actors are understandably obsessed about it. Performance has a parallel in the unconscious, where the actor's progress towards the targets set by TechCo aligns with progress towards solving her/his unconscious lack.

These interdependencies in the unconscious arguably explain the irresistible nature of the performance management system better than conscious models can. Lacan's insight is that much of what causes performance takes place beyond the scope of TechCo's calibration. The scorecard embodies or represents rational control, and from this flow the discourses of unarguable truths: predictable growth, fairness, the ostensible logic of Rank and Yank, and so on. Even the subjective judgements of senior managers about performance acquire legitimacy once they turn their views into performance scores for each actor. All this reinforces the position that the relationship between performance and calibration is unproblematic. As a consequence, the scorecard absolves TechCo of all responsibility to look past the numbers, develop a better understanding of the system's effects on its senior actors, or interrogate the assumption that all it needs to know about performance is explained through numbers. It is a strikingly reductive use of ideology that sees calibration as neutral. Any failure to perform, according to this view, is human and nothing to do with the scorecard. Numbers do not fail people at TechCo. It is people who fail the numbers. But the story of the bear demonstrates that TechCo actors see past the rhetoric about objectivity and fairness. The objective ontology of the scorecard has nothing to say about the activity it generates which is beyond the scope of measurement because it is in the unconscious. Nor do the numbers say anything about the unconscious operations that cause them. They rely on external signs only: sales figures achieved and commitment scores based on 'Kudos' mentions by colleagues and line managers translating their subjective views about an actor's commitment/collaboration into an objective score. If the ontology of the scorecard offers no insight into the actor's unconscious activity, performance is more usefully represented as a negative ontology because, in the unconscious, the priority is the avoidance of death via Rank and Yank. At TechCo "people are expendable". It is not about the pursuit of glory but a fight where survival depends on others being killed.

### 4.4 The scapegoat

That said, ideals play an influential role at TechCo, and a useful way to detect a fantasy at work is to identify the denunciations that come with it. Žižek characterises this phenomenon as two fantasies (Žižek, 2006: 60). The first is about perfection - the fulfilment of an ideal which the fantasy promises. The second about a foreign body that threatens this ideal. In history the most infamous recent

examples include the Nazi claim in the 1930s that jewry stood between Germans and their rightful fulfilment as a people. Or Stalinism which promised a harmonious new socialist society as soon as all the traitors had been eliminated. The psychological explanation offered for scapegoating is the attribution of a negative quality to the scapegoat, such as corruption or greed (eg Kessler & Mummendey, 2001). The contribution of the psychoanalytic approach is to see it as the fantasy's antidote to its own impossibility. Since there is no moment when the unconscious fantasy becomes fully stable, rooting out scapegoats is an act of defence which reduces the fantasy's failings to a shortlist of individuals and thereby neutralises the risk. So it is at TechCo where Rank and Yank makes sure that the fantasy of corporate perfection, or at least perfectibility, remains credible and intact. A brief recap of the system: senior managers at TechCo give all their team members an overall score each year between 1 and 5. It is based on their performance against the RBI and CBI. Judging the CBI, as well as giving each actor an overall 1 to 5 score, is subjective. Every year a senior manager must assign *all* of these overall scores, ie a percentage of actors must receive a 5. A score between 1 and 3 is good, 4 is weak and annually a portion of actors with a 5 is fired. As Jake puts it, Rank and Yank ensures that actors take the necessary steps to avoid it. That is not about making their numbers so much as making sure some are left behind:

**You don't need to be able to outrun the bear. You just need to be able to outrun your colleagues. (10.10)**

But, as another senior manager explains, it is problematic commercially because of the scarcity of good talent:

**The rules are very clear, it's very transparent. If you have a big team, and eventually, if you have basically hired in good people over a couple of years, you have to manage people out of the business. So if I have to manage out a person, which means I then have to go and hire someone ideally better than the person I'm exiting, there just aren't many world-class people on the market place, and that gives me a serious issue…**

**…If you have delivered to strategy there comes a point where you have culled and culled your team and you don't have any valid 5s any more and you end up in a situation where you don't sleep at night any more. So I would say that at times I have stood to a message and managed individuals to a 5 and therefore out when I don't always 100% believe that is the right approach. (4.8,9)**

Note that this speech begins with the euphemism “manage people out of the business”, the word “manage” lending the act a rational and therefore legitimate quality. This actor’s impersonal language aims to reinforce the rationalism of management, but it does not last, and soon the speaker shifts to the word “cull”, evoking innocent seal pups and cattle. There is a transgression in this shift: the senior manager removes himself temporarily from the fantasmatic discourse that gives rank and yank its authority. It shows the actor “creatively changing the narrative structure in which imaginarily functioning respondents remain imprisoned” (Vanheule et al., 2003: 335). However, decaf resistance (Contu, 2008) is prevalent in the data and actions are more significant than passing criticisms of the fantasy and its paraphernalia. Here we see this actor struggling but still choosing to comply. The transgression gives the subject some *jouissance* as it kicks against the system, but in reality the transgressor simply reinforces the fantasy. This is reminiscent of lecturers teaching marxism to business school students. They know, somewhere, that they can do nothing to change the ideology of their institution which is dedicated to preparing students for a career in (capitalist) management (Hoedemaekers, 2010: 2). The lecturers may persuade themselves they are undermining capitalism, and yet somewhere they also know that their fantasy is impossible. At the end of each month their capitalist employer pays them for their part in preparing students for a career in capitalism. Occasionally the senior actor voices opposition, but the fantasy prevails nonetheless.

Within the conscious mind, its ostensible logic is to motivate actors by adding a stick to the two carrots of the incentive scheme, RBI and CBI. The commercial case for Rank and Yank is contested because it sheds good staff that TechCo can ill afford to lose, according to several in the focus groups. But this has no bearing on the power of scapegoats within the unconscious. Nor is it relevant whether the employees who score a 5 and are sacked deserve their fate. In the unconscious, underperformance constitutes a threat to the fantasy of the successful, predictable market leader. The existence of culprits who must be punished allows actors to imagine TechCo’s fantasy as coherent, complete and stable. In the unconscious, the actors yanked out of TechCo richly deserve their fate. For Jacques-Alain Miller this is akin to the enjoyment of the other which the racist finds unbearable. It the subject’s intolerance of the Other’s jouissance (Miller, 1994). At TechCo, if managers

were to continue in their jobs despite underperforming, they would enjoy surplus *jouissance* unjustly and this is intolerable to the subject (Evans, 2017: 21).

### 4.5 Summary so far

Unconscious fantasy plays a central role in the individual's struggles with paradox. Fantasy is much more than an image or even a specific dream: it is the framework through which actors understand their reality. So the first Lacanian point I have been aiming to make is that fantasy provides conditions of possibility for the subject. These allow it to satisfy the Other's desire and create a pact where the desire of one feeds that of the other. As Laplanche and Pontalis put it, fantasy is the setting for desire (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1968: 17). It provides the context which explains to the subject what the Other desires. It is within the fantasmatic narrative that the subject finds ways to become the solution to the Other's demands. The pact works because the Other's desire remains unmet: it desires what it lacks; it desires *because* it lacks. The subject aims to satisfy the Other's desire and thereby fix its own lack, and the talk of actors at TechCo continually reinforces the union between the subject and the Other. Senior actors grapple consciously with the daily challenges of TechCo, including its contradictions. But there is much more here than the senior actor's clinical, instrumentalised, cognitive treatment of paradox. The unconscious fantasy envelops the firm, dictating how subject and Other relate to each other. This relationship then reciprocates by sustaining the fantasy.

The second point to make is that Rank and Yank allows TechCo and survivors to cast themselves as victims of the underperformers who are given a score of 5. Within the fantasy, the annual Rank and Yank exorcism purifies TechCo. Without it, the underperformers would ruin the fantasy for everyone else, so the logic goes. It also saves the subject and the Other from confronting their own permanent separation from themselves. Within the unconscious the surviving subject looks into a metaphorical mirror and sees an actor still valued by the Other for being a reliable performer - almost like a machine.

Thirdly, fantasy is an elaborate decoy from the unrecoverable *objet a*. It promises fulfilment for the senior actor (and TechCo), but just as the subject is at last poised to satisfy the Other's desire, the *objet a* disappears from view. Fantasy is therefore inherently paradoxical and frustrating. As Lacan puts it: "Fantasy is the means by which the subject maintains himself at the level of his vanishing desire, vanishing

inasmuch as the very satisfaction of demand deprives him of his object" (Lacan, 2006: 532). The *objet a* fascinates the subject because the subject is barred, ie constituted by a lack. The *objet a* is the antidote to this lack, the barred subject hopes; the thing that may finally end its quest for completeness[3].

The hive of activity generated by the fantasy reveals both its vulnerability and the power it exerts. TechCo's fantasmatic narrative is influential, but sometimes the actor nevertheless becomes aware of the real. Props provided by the symbolic register for the subject's identification are abundant, but in the real there are none. The unconscious fantasy which frames the actor's world is fragile. "Unbeknownst to the actor" she/he unconsciously knows this (Fink, 1995: 23). And, just occasionally, the anxiety emerges into conscious speech, for example in Margot's comment:

**That was a real fear in me. Scary. (3.27)**

My exploration of fantasy at TechCo has aimed to explain why it is so powerful. "Paradoxical thinking" offers a pathway for senior managers towards a cool, rational, conscious calculation about how best to negotiate the paradox of performing. The "stuckness" that precedes this in the paradox literature (eg Lüscher & Lewis, 2008) is cognitive. And although "stuckness" has consequences for the actor's emotions, there is always a cognitive solution. In the unconscious, by contrast, the subject is compelled to return endlessly, through repetition compulsion, to a puzzle it cannot think through. In the conception of the unconscious developed by Freud and then Lacan, there are no paradoxical thinking tools to help it.

## 5. The confusing Other

### 5.1 Introduction

In this section I argue that the paradox of performing presents the unconscious subject with an existential crisis. First a brief reprise of the story so far.

The firm's performance management system is credited with strong historical financial results. At the time of the data collection it is vindicated and almost universally applied around the organisation to promote growth:

[3] As expressed in the Lacanian formula $ ♢ a

**When you work for such a large global company you have to measure things to see if you've succeeded…they have to put some type of blanket measurement on everything. (9.9)**

The system is the inevitable consequence of the firm's burgeoning size. Growth at TechCo has been "driven" (a popular word in the focus groups) by the performance "scorecard" that assesses each actor against the targets she/he has been set. Indeed:

**It's the way the whole company is architected. (5.23)**

Measurement and a successful organisation are inseparable according to this statement. And the performance management system is widely credited for curing the operational "woolliness" that prevailed before:

**People generally agree that there is a lot of good in the scorecard. There was an awful lot of woolliness in the organisation before it about what we were trying to achieve. It was great for employees because it basically meant you could go and do whatever you liked…that isn't the way to run an efficient business so X had to introduce something and that scorecard helped make people aligned. (10.18)**

At the heart of the system is the individual actor who reaches her/his targets (or not) and even goes past them:

**That individual excellence, it's kind of what we're all gunning for, and so in theory, if that's true, then we don't have a problem. (6.15)**

This statement articulates an idea at the centre of performance management at TechCo: the idea of individual excellence. And there is an important note of contingency here: ***if*** the theory of individual excellence is true in practice, "then we don't have a problem" and corporate success will follow. Individual excellence is all that is needed, and Rank and Yank will intervene where individual excellence is lacking.

There is also a curious blurring evident here between individual excellence and the generation of revenue (as opposed to the fostering of collaboration), because some actors are so effective at generating revenue that they are not subject to TechCo's expectations about collaboration:

**You can be successful without working with anyone else. (6.15)**

But the norm is to collaborate too, as discussed in previous sections. In focus group discussions participants repeatedly express the belief that the tension between individual interests and cooperation will be solved by the performance management system. The RBI, Revenue Based Incentive, mobilises individual excellence, and the CBI, Commitment Based Incentive, protects TechCo from the potential excesses of individualism by mandating a commitment to the common cause:

**…You really can't do anything without the support of partner, sales, services. You must work across all those different groups. And quite often you find you are the light years, sometimes miles apart, em, and sometimes with good reason as well. And that's also the complexity as well with having all these different agendas to drive, so for me I just feel the simplest way to ingrain that team ethic is you've got to bake it into the review system to incentivise that behaviour. (6.15)**

The twin incentive scheme is successful because it "ingrains" and "bakes" a team ethic into the system. The "different agendas" present an intractable problem to actors yet, according to this claim, the system saves them from reducing contradictory priorities to one and pursuing only the Revenue Based Incentive. It is as if the performance management system removes ambiguity from organisational life, taming the complexity of TechCo until it becomes predictable. Other participants are doubtful that the system can balance TechCo's priorities, echoing Kerr's commentary on the tendency of organisations to reward for A (in this case the revenue-based objectives of each department) and hope for B, cooperation (Kerr, 1975). However, more interesting than the apparent confidence of actors in the RBI/CBI scheme are the reasons why.

The Lacanian perspective considers the system's effect on the unconscious, where one question is of primary importance: what object is the subject, precisely, to the Other (Žižek, 1997: 9)? Only by becoming this object can the subject satisfy what the Other (TechCo) desires. And this is the only way for the subject to solve its own lack. The difficulty is that the Other desires two contradictory things simultaneously: collaboration and predictable revenue. How can the subject solve its own lack when the Other desires two things that oppose each other, even cancel each other out?

The combination of the two imperatives (revenue and collaboration) is a problem to which there are solutions in the conscious mind (Smith & Lewis, 2022). In the next section I aim to show that, in the unconscious, this is not the case. In its quest for

wholeness the subject tries to satisfy both, yet more of one reduces the other. Drawing on Lacan I then discuss how this plays out in practice.

5.2 Thou shalt compete

TechCo's incentive scheme, and therefore the paradox of performing, is integral to the organisation. Focus group participants repeatedly confirm the central part played by competition for revenue results:

**TechCo is all about growth. (11.14)**

For all the anxiety it creates, actors recognise that the revenue based incentive has a beautiful and brutal simplicity to it:

**RBI is really easy, because you either achieve, or you don't. If you excel, oh I came in 110% or whatever, you know, it's very easy to see. (1.16)**

Participants in the focus groups also acknowledge the imperative to work with colleagues around the organisation (and perform well against the commitment based incentive). As this participant explains, collaboration is risky:

**The one thing to watch out for, after a length of time in TechCo, you watch out for people who are commitment driven, so anybody who's driven by commitments is not going to be somebody you want in your network, per se, because the whole purpose of what they are going to do, is do exactly what is required, plus the extras, to get a high score at the end of the year. If they're somebody totally driven by commitments, they're not going to be healthy to be in your network, because you know that whatever request you put on them, will only happen if it affects their commitments in a positive way. (2.8)**

Actors who are too committed to collaboration become a threat to others because they limit a group's revenue potential. Those who forget they are in a competition - for bonuses, for survival - are above all a threat to themselves. Here a participant contrasts the sort of actor who thrives at TechCo with the kind that fails to moderate collaboration:

**Researcher/me: Is there a type that flourishes?**

**Ben: There are the others who do some good stuff but can also manipulate, get promoted and be seen in a good light. To flourish you have to accept that that is the landscape. I've seen lots of people try and stand up against that and do things in a way that has ultimately frustrated them. I know lots of individual contributors that care passionately about other individual contributors, that at**

**first sight you actually think to yourself – do you realise you're in direct competition? So for me it's quite paradoxical what that individual who succeeds is. (8.3)**

Those who thrive at TechCo "manipulate". Some collaboration with colleagues is necessary for them to reach their CBI or 'commitment' targets, but these actors manage to collaborate only to the extent that they are "seen in a good light." Too much collaboration is not only a personal threat to the naïve actors who forget they are in competition with their colleagues. The data suggest that building *any* rapport ("when you do something personal") can make actors vulnerable, as this comment reveals:

**When you do something personal, then it's, you consider it is a risk, in terms of how it might be used against you. My personal experience is, just within my group, anyway, I don't think it has been, and I've been very fortunate in that, but I certainly agree that it's something you are constantly having to think about, and it's fundamentally down to the fact that you are compared to one another, in terms of review. (10.2)**

The actor's survival therefore depends not on collaboration but the generation of revenue relative to one's peers. This is necessarily competitive, as expressed in the metaphor of the chasing bear. Offered in one focus group by Jake, it is a favourite metaphor of senior TechCo managers. If you want to survive at TechCo, make sure the chasing bear reaches your colleagues before you:

**Outrunning your peers is the real agenda. (10.10)**

The idealised actor at TechCo calculates the bare minimum of cooperation required, scores just enough against the CBI, and focuses on the revenue measure, the RBI, so as to achieve the maximum score. The following comment is made about actors who over-estimate how much they must cooperate:

**There are some really successful people inside TechCo, because they are absolutely, totally ruthless on their commitments. It doesn't necessarily mean that they are helping the better good of the wider organisation. That's not measured. (2.8)**

This archetypal, successful actor is a regular feature of focus group talk. It is unclear if this actor is among the participants, but it is regularly invoked as an ideal situated in the symbolic, the place from which the subject is seen and judged by the Other.

## 5.3 Thou shalt collaborate

The two criteria for performance have unequal status in practice. Nonetheless, the discourse of collaboration is ubiquitous and powerful:

**It is an intrinsic part of what you do, and you won't do well if you don't collaborate. Some think that's counter the system but it works. (10.17)**

It is also widely constructed as an ideal:

**Everyone is nice, it's in a nice environment, there is a high amount of respect, erm, everyone seems to bring something. There were a lot more people in my last company, who I sort of thought, mmm, I'm not really sure why you're here, but everyone in TechCo seems to bring something. (3.12)**

Focus group participants attest that collaboration is alive and well around the organisation - to the extent that some deny it is in any sense jeopardised by the competition for revenue targets - as in this exchange between me and a focus group participant. First I tentatively ask if there is a tension between the two (having judged that there is):

**Is there a - tension maybe too strong a word - but is there a time when niceness, and collaboration, and respect, come up against slightly, I need to get performance done, I need to get a lot of other people to shift to allow me to do that, I don't know?**

**No. *[laughing, followed by silence]* (3.17)**

In the next extract the dress code of the firm's senior leaders is held up as evidence that the firm's informal culture "really does break down barriers":

**The MD walks around in jeans and a shirt, sort of thing, it's very, I think that breaks down a lot of barriers when you have a meeting with senior people, they are dressed exactly the same as you. There's no hierarchy of you know, the MD walks around with a monocle and a cane sort of thing [laughter]…I think that helps having that dress down policy here, it really does break down barriers. (1.2)**

### 5.3.1 One TechCo

The notion of collaboration is encapsulated in a corporate campaign that calls itself "One TechCo". Launched some years before this research exercise, it presents a more coherent portfolio of devices and services to the firm's consumers and business customers. With the launch came an internal reorganisation, and brands are now supported by functions across the firm rather than dedicated units for each product or service. One TechCo's emphasis on common ground between disparate parts of the organisation is intended to

unite them and persuade staff to cooperate across the “large, global family”. As such, One TechCo contributes to the paradox of belonging discussed in Chapter 6, where the actor is pulled in opposite directions by the selfish pursuit of revenue on the one hand and collectivism on the other. One TechCo also features in the paradox of performing, where the collaboration it promotes is contradicted by the imperative to pursue revenue targets. Departments nevertheless see each other as rivals:

**That’s the challenge that TechCo has. We talk about One TechCo but we’re actually a portfolio of brands. (6.23)**

One TechCo is a contested discourse:

**I worked in X [rival company] for a couple of years and we used to say, because we call ourselves One TechCo, and they are just killing themselves laughing every single time, because they knew us very well and knew that we are not. The different business groups around this table, if we went round this table we’ve got people who have never met one another. (6.23)**

The candour suggests that these participants are assured of their anonymity. Here they talk freely about the contradiction between One TechCo and the discourse of revenue generation. They may joke about the paradox of performing, but the relief is short-lived. The paradox is unavoidable.

### 5.3.3 Thou shalt celebrate harmony

For most at TechCo, collaboration is the *sine qua non* of revenue generation. It performs an additional role in the focus groups: talk about collaboration is a defence against the harsh reality of the competition for revenue. Participants discuss a range of ploys to reduce the brutalising effects of revenue generation which appear to be unavoidable at TechCo. A common device is the smiley face, for example:

**Someone actually challenges you, and you feel, yeah, I feel quite aggrieved by that, but there's a smiley face on it, so it inoculates, and it sort of almost kind of gets me to not feel aggrieved by that, but actually, if I look at this from a different way, I don't think this is ok. (3.11)**

The content of the exchange described above is competitive. The smiley face “inoculates” against harm, according to this actor. The use of the word “inoculate” is striking: it signifies protection from the aggression inherent in the competitive exchange she describes. And yet this actor does not believe she is fully protected: “If I look at this

from a different way, I don't think this is ok." The next extract demonstrates another use of friendliness to help make the competition tolerable:

**I think people are really careful, deliberately careful, when they're talking to others in meetings, to make sure…it's like on a [text message], people putting smiley faces on… when I first got here, I was like, how many smiley faces do we actually need in a conversation? [group laughter]. Lots. I was against the whole smiley face thing. Now I understand the value of it. Actually, it seems like such a simple thing, but it's just the way that people talk to one another. They just add a little bit extra, just to say, ok, I don't quite agree with that, but here's why, and let me tell you I do value your opinion. They just go that little extra mile don't they, just to say I don't want you to feel bad about what I'm about to say, even though I don't agree with you. The smiley face will make it all better [group laughter]. (3.10)**

The jocular tone here makes the other participants laugh: "I was like, how many smiley faces do we actually need in a conversation?". Despite providing material for sarcasm which actors seem to enjoy, smiley faces fulfil a useful function:

**"I don't want you to feel bad about what I'm about to say. The smiley face will make it all better."**

The tone of the speaker and laughter of other participants suggest an ironic distance. Here it is clear that smiley faces are part of a competitive strategy. At one level its use may be disingenuous: actors competing in earnest and only pretending to be collaborative. However the practice is also a decoy, drawing attention away from the conflict which is a byproduct of actors' efforts to perform against the RBI. Even if the collaborative gesture of the smiley face is insincere, it softens the conflict between actors.

The other collaborative device I include here is Kudos, a widely used system of mutual praise. It helps actors to promote their 'collaborativeness' and hence their performance against the CBI, as these comments explain:

**Our Kudos agreement, nice little kudos talk: just a one liner ('great job') goes to their manager. It's little stuff. It's the sum of all those bits. (3.23)**

And:

**By putting somebody up for Kudos you actually get a lot of respect, just as much as the person who's been given the Kudos gets. So, it's trust is, and the network, is also calling out and supporting your peers and your colleagues, and making sure that they're recognised, and they're supported. So if somebody calls me, or asks me, or emails me with a problem, or pings me on link, which is more likely to happen, then I will prioritise that if possible, because it's money in the bank. (2.3)**

Kudos and the smiley face are recognisably conscious, rational responses to the paradox of performing as manifested in TechCo's performance management system. They are tools that enable the actor to demonstrate collaboration which she/he instrumentalises for the contribution it makes to the "scorecard." The last speaker, above, deploys Kudos in a conscious move to build collaboration 'capital' for herself/himself: "It's money in the bank."

It is *also* possible to see these responses as an *unconscious* defence against the Other's contradictory desires. The use of smiley faces and Kudos celebrate the qualities of politeness, cooperation, teamwork, informality. And, as we have seen already, participants frequently defend the virtues of harmony at TechCo:

**Everyone is nice, it's in a nice environment, there is a high amount of respect, erm, everyone seems to bring something. (3.12)**

Or actors like Martin celebrate the organisation's tolerance for individualism:

**Everyone is so comfortable in being themselves when they're here. (3.9)**

Actors seem rarely to step outside organisational life and reflect on it because this will jeopardise the things "we mustn't lose":

**It's always a trade-off between various things and if you start tuning it too far one way then you start losing some of the really good stuff about TechCo that I don't see elsewhere. So I've kept quiet because I haven't had many niggles or negative things to say, and a number of things I see are really good so we mustn't lose those. (6.27)**

According to this speech, the price of removing the causes of anxiety will be the loss of everything. These and similar examples show actors not celebrating niceness so much as hanging on to it. Across the data actors invest as individuals, often collaborating far beyond what would be rational if they were consciously, and cynically, evaluating how to comply with the incentive scheme. They also invest collectively, working to be recognised by each other as collegiate actors. What is going on? Why are actors so invested in collaboration - which can be so dangerous for their careers - and why so anxious to preserve the performance management system which causes them such anxiety?

## 6. The impossible paradox

In the style of the Adidas tagline, the paradox literature often claims that impossible is nothing: paradox can and should be sustained, the actor can accommodate both/

all elements of a paradox and treat them equally, and she/he may separate paradoxes into their constituent parts so long as the actor subsequently reintegrates the elements back into the whole (eg Smith, 2014). As the literature has developed a suite of tools to improve the practice of paradoxical thinking (eg Jarzabkowski & Lê, 2017), it has become increasingly positive about the potential for practitioners to juggle both or all elements of a paradox. Some actors still find it too difficult cognitively, but the more nimble embrace paradoxes having seen the opportunities they present (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018: 29).

The paradox of performing is a cognitive and emotional challenge (Smith & Lewis, 2011: 389-392). This means it is difficult but manageable, a view echoed regularly in the focus group talk about TechCo's performance management system. Talk and action are not the same, and the data repeatedly show actors separating the paradox of performing and privileging one side, such as when they collaborate only superficially so as not to lose their focus on revenue generation. Thus they split paradoxes, vacillate between opposite poles, reframe and so on (Cunha & Putnam, 2019; Iedema et al., 2004; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008). Such strategies earn the praise of paradox scholars and paradoxical organisations alike.

In the unconscious, by contrast, thoughts are not yet symbolised and the subject cannot simply think through the puzzle which paradox presents. This failure irrupts repeatedly into the conscious talk of TechCo actors and the following conundrum emerges.

### 6.1 The performing subject and the Other's contradictory demands

When the subject knows what (object) it is to the Other, it knows how to solve its own "*manque à être*" (Žižek, 1997: 9) because it knows how to satisfy the Other's desire. But the paradox of performing requires the subject to be simultaneously ***two*** objects for the Other which are mutually exclusive. It is both the ruthless competitor who will satisfy the Other's desire to meet all financial targets, and *also* the collaborator who will satisfy the Other's desire for cohesiveness and cooperation and make One TechCo a reality. The subject is driven to solve its lack by satisfying the Other's desire for revenue, but this quest for revenue confounds the Other's *other* desire for collaboration, and vice versa. The subject must take two distinct paths to solve its lack - and they block each other.  Each injunction from the Other

is confusing: you must perform but we expect you to do it nicely. You must be nice but we will still judge you, no matter how well you collaborate, on your performance.

How does the subject try to resolve this conundrum? We have already seen traces of the struggle to split off what is undesirable - its parallel role as a ruthless competitor. This is an unconscious strategy to preserve a “workable fantasy of a coherent self” (Costas & Fleming, 2009: 358) in which the subject is able to see itself, in this instance, as a team player. As Freud argued in his final essay, written in 1938, this is a primitive defence mechanism to put to one side an incompatible idea, leaving the subject with a simple, uncontradictory version of reality (Freud, 2009). Here is the subject’s conundrum in psychoanalytic terms: a splitting strategy such as projective identification distances the subject from an *unwanted* self (Klein 1946 in Petriglieri & Stein, 2012: 1221), facilitating the subject’s progress towards the self it does want. But what if this defence pushes away a version of the self which is desired? In the conscious mind, strategies are available that enable the actor to oscillate between the two: for example the actor can identify the elements that are interdependent in order to develop a both/and approach where she/he can look after short term deadlines and also carry out tasks that help to prepare for the long term. But if the subject is drawn irresistibly towards the Other’s desire, it follows that it is also drawn towards a second desire in the Other even if it contradicts the first. Thus, the Other’s twin desire for revenue *and* teamwork are the two ways in which the subject must try to satisfy its own lack, though lack is more correctly expressed here as lacks: two contradictory lacks that will be solved only when the subject becomes both collaborator and the competitor. Splitting *does not bring relief* because it simultaneously neglects one lack while nourishing the other.

Some actors exhibit a cynical detachment from the conundrum, for example Andrew who claims to have picked a side:

**I think TechCo would like, try and persuade me I should do consensus building, em, but if I do do my consensus building, we're just going to be here all bloody day (5.11)**

His stance suggests that he has mastered the art of doing just enough to collaborate without jeopardising his revenue generation. The use of “bloody” may just refer to the harm that awaits Andrew if he allows himself to be distracted from revenue building, which is mandatory for his survival, in favour of consensus building which is desirable but whose de facto status at TechCo is optional, so long

as he achieves the revenue expected of him. It suggests he has acquired enough distance to see that TechCo's/the Other's twin desires are in fact not equal and a choice between them is therefore possible. What the data cannot tell us is whether this stance really indicates distance from the symbolic register or is just brave talk.

For the subject enmeshed in this primordial fantasy, unlike Andrew, there is an impasse. It means that the subject inevitably fails to satisfy two contradictory desires and is therefore confronted by an existential threat: the possibility that the failure to satisfy all that the Other desires will jeopardise its own desire. In conscious, rational terms the performance management system offers life-enhancing bonuses and career progression. This impossibility in the unconscious has the opposite force. It threatens death through the Rank and Yank scheme and, in the meantime, it jeopardises the subject's own desire when it fails to satisfy both of the Other's desires.

6.2 The impossible paradox and the real

There are implications for the TechCo fantasy as a whole whose ecology is delicate. The subject's desire depends on the integrity of the fantasy which reinforces the pact that binds the subject's and the Other's desires, enabling the subject to overlook its own lack (Vidaillet & Gamot, 2015: 992). In turn, the pact reinforces the fantasy. Within the imaginary, the subject/actor happily splits away, concentrating on one side of the paradox of performing, or embracing both sides with paradoxical thinking. But it is the unconscious that influences thinking, whether either/or or both/and, not the other way round. In the focus group discussions TechCo seems stable and it is the actors who seem vulnerable - struggling as they do with this impossibility in the unconscious. Far from enabling the unconscious of the actor to become subject, the performance management system threatens to erase the subject's desire altogether, making it a non-subject.

However just sometimes, as in Margot's speech for example, the fragility of the ecosystem is briefly apparent and the failure of its central interdependency appears possible, ie that between the subject and the Other:

**It's such a delicate balance, and we're all playing this game…Will we lose this lovely nice way we talk to one another? (3.27)**

The “game” makes the Other’s contradictory demands tolerable. Her comments also give us a brief glimpse of the contingencies on which the game depends.

## 7. Conclusions to Chapter 7

TechCo’s performance management system is inherently paradoxical because its priorities are interdependent and fight each other. The twin corporate objectives, revenue generation and collaboration, are enshrined in the system’s twin incentives which mobilise TechCo’s employees to do both - generate revenue and collaborate. Thus the organisation leaves its actors to “manage” the paradox as well as they can. Once locked into the pursuit of these incentives, TechCo’s senior actors must solve the paradox of performing alone. Splitting is a common response to doubt, conflicting feelings and anxiety (Fotaki & Hyde, 2015: 445), leading to either/or solutions (eg Smith, 2014). But a paradox mindset makes it possible to manage emotions and therefore paradox (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018: 40).

Paradox scholars would not recognise the impasse I explore in this chapter because they envisage the either/or response intervening like a safety valve to relieve the actor’s anxiety. In contrast to the unconscious envisaged by late Freud and Lacan, ego psychologists and therefore paradox scholars see cognitive solutions where psychoanalytically informed scholars do not. In the domain of cognition, scholars believe that sensemaking can lessen anxiety (Dwyer et al., 2021: 26) and that the “paradox mindset” enables individual actors to manage their emotions so as to “unlock the positive potential of tensions” (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018: 40). Such paradoxical thinking has achieved the status of orthodoxy in paradox studies. It follows that, when actors fail, the first and perhaps also the last question is whether or not they applied a paradox mindset.

The notion - paradoxical thinking - is consistent with the mainstream of scholarship which treats complexity as an epiphenomenon to be understood through cognition; that is, a response which scholars can directly observe because there is no aspect of this response that cannot be surfaced by a skilful researcher and a willing respondent. It seems likely that the coming years will see further refinements along the same lines. The advances of science, particularly psychology (Kahneman, 2014) make this predictable.

The question remains, though: what if the assumptions that underpin solutions like paradoxical thinking are wrong? In the Lacanian conception, paradoxical thinking is possible in the imaginary register. But Lacan insists on the power of the unconscious to thwart the actor's cognitive ambitions. The problem of an ungovernable lack driving the subject does not arise within paradox scholarship because there is nothing that cannot be surfaced or managed. In Chapter 7 I explored a theoretical impasse in the unconscious: the impossibility of satisfying the Other's desire for two contradictory things, because it presents the subject with a zero-sum game: the satisfying of one demand inevitably thwarts the other. If we accept this theoretical outcome of TechCo's performance management system, it is possible only in the imaginary, just so long as its impossibility in the symbolic is repressed. The focus groups reveal the many declarations of senior managers which accentuate the positive and make a virtue of their conundrum. They are not alone: paradox scholarship sees possibilities too. All will be well. But underlying the semblance of optimism is the impossibility which confronts the subject: TechCo's performance management system does not pave the subject's way to the *objet a*; it is a road block. What sustains the subject though this impossibility is the *jouissance* that drives its desire and which also sustains the fantasy (Žižek, 1997: 59).

In this chapter I have also emphasised the role of fantasy at TechCo. The organisation deploys a host of rational mechanisms, chiefly its incentive scheme, to pursue its goals. Rationally its successes are explained by these mechanisms. The aim of this chapter has been to show how this reality is overlaid - and indeed underwritten - by psychical reality (Hook, 2017). TechCo's rational success depends in fact on how completely it sub-contracts its paradox of performing to its managers, because it is they who will wrestle with it, not TechCo. The rational reality is beautifully explained with goal setting theory. The attainment of a goal is the proof that the route taken to attain it was the right one. Beyond this demonstrable evidence the eyes of the goal setting scholar glaze over. However, this chapter demonstrates that much more is understood about the senior actor's response if one studies the psychical, rather than the rational, reality. The desire of the senior manager is assumed by goal setting to be satisfied when she/he achieves the target performance. Whatever the goal attainment does for the actor in the imaginary, it does nothing to diminish the subject's desire. And so the Lacanian perspective allows us to see past Nick's pseudo-scientific claim that he always gives 100%.

What the subject gives is permanently less than 100% because, psychically, 100% equates to the discovery of the *objet a.* Nick always fails, therefore, and this explains why he can never give enough. It is because nothing the subject (of Tony) does can ever fix the permanent lack which constitutes TechCo. In the unconscious, the consolation for this failure is the *jouissance* that comes with trying.

In this chapter I have emphasised the unconscious interplay between the subject and the Other. The rational equivalent is a conscious exchange between senior employee and employer where TechCo grows and so does the career of the manager who makes her/his numbers. But the explanatory power of the unconscious pact goes much further than anything that instrumentality might explain, for example the dependence of the Other on the subject, or the crucial role played by the scapegoat, or the dependence of the performance management system on unconscious phenomena which, by definition, TechCo cannot manage.

In the next chapter I look more closely at the senior actor's relationship with the unconscious subject, and the possibility of the actor/subject creating a space at TechCo where a route through to the other side of this fantasy may be found.

# Chapter 8: Learning

## 1. Introduction

In this, the last chapter of my findings, I look at the paradox of learning and draw on Lacanian theory to focus on how it might operate in the unconscious. I do this by exploring variations of resistance to TechCo as expressed by senior actors in the TechCo focus groups. Most of these reactions demonstrate the robustness of the unconscious fantasy that, I have argued, dominates the TechCo operation. I will show how resistance in the imaginary is easily neutralised, at the level of the symbolic, where the subject's desire is sustained such that learning new ways to relate to the Other is made impossible. Such resistance is "decaf": it not only leaves the unconscious economy of enjoyment intact; it actually feeds it (Contu, 2008). Resistance in the imaginary may be full-blooded, but it is the symbolic that structures the imaginary (Lacan, 2006: 686), and nothing changes until the subject's relation to the symbolic changes.

### 1.1 Two kinds of learning: in the conscious vs the unconscious

Organisation and management scholars justify workplace learning and development in terms of observable benefits. It is assumed to make a positive contribution to performance at the level of the individual and also that of the organisation. Learning is a *sine qua non* for competitiveness (McFarland & Ployhart, 2017). The "learning organisation" receives widespread and enthusiastic support, and indeed the idea suffers from "relentless positivity" (Vince, 2018: 274). Its opposite is therefore overlooked: a resistance to learning when old knowledge and practices are preferred. Paradox scholarship draws attention to the tensions generated by learning, because building the future simultaneously undermines past knowledge (Smith & Lewis, 2011: 383). Tried and tested frames of reference are cognitively useful but can prevent actors from thinking

differently (Weick, 1979). Learning subverts existing knowledge by setting out to change it (Vince, 2018: 273). And so, for paradox scholars, thinking paradoxically allows the actor to use both sorts of knowledge, old and new. As previously discussed, there is no paradoxical thinking in the unconscious because there no thought there, according to Lacan, and learning in the unconscious is a contradiction in terms - see Chapter 4. Any "learning" to change the subject's relationship to the Other necessarily occurs away from thought and speech, away from the coaching, mentoring and other training interventions that occur in the imaginary. But there *is* a psychoanalytic process whereby the analysand may slowly reconfigure her/his relationship with the Other, beginning with glimpses of the assumptions that underpin her/his efforts to satisfy the Other's desire. I discuss this possibility in this chapter (having previously outlined it in Chapter 4, Section 7). The process is not linear, nor is it predictable, which makes it an unlikely intervention to see in an organisation like TechCo.

1.2 The current status of learning at TechCo

For all the professional training that is doubtless available to senior actors at TechCo, learning new ways to function at work is barely discussed in the focus groups, and innovation among senior actors - the alteration of what is established (Oxford English dictionary) - is widely seen as an unacceptable risk because it is borne entirely by the individual:

**Risks are not rewarded. We are penalised, and therefore we are not innovators because it's too risky. (10.17)**

Another is more explicit still:

**I love to go and shoot my targets for the year, some big, bold goals for the year. The reality is if I did that and I finished at 98%, and my peers around the world haven't done that, and actually finished on 101%, I would be a five. So it kills risk-taking. (7.11)**

The theme of *resistance* to learning is more common in the dataset than the evidence of actors embracing it. This resistance is of great interest to an exploration of unconscious activity: an attachment to old ways simultaneously serves the subject and entraps it. Before looking at the data I offer a brief recap of my discussion in Chapter 4 which distinguishes between two modes of relationship to the unconscious. One, automaton, concerns the automatic stringing together of signifiers, which causes repetition because of what Lacan calls the insistence of signs (Lacan, 1998: 54). Automaton allows fragments

of the unconscious to emerge into conscious talk, but attempts to articulate the unconscious only approximate to what is happening in the Lacanian real, ie where the *objet a* is found or, to be exact, not found by the subject. An illustration of automaton is the psychoanalytic setting where the analyst hears the analysand circle around the *objet a*, the object cause of its desire, and fail to name it. The analysand repeatedly tries to express some idea or event that is important to her/him, but gets stuck each time. Something essential always always remains unformulated (Fink, 1999: 48).

While automaton involves traces of the real, Lacan's other category, tuché, relates to a direct encounter with it - such as the Fort/Da episode discussed by Freud in Beyond the Pleasure Principle, 1920. Because the real is beyond symbolisation, the experience of such encounters lies outside words and thought, and the actor is unable to recall them after the event (Fink, 1995: 224). Tuché operates at the level of causality. Time and time again it drives the subject to keep trying to find and obtain the *objet a* via any route that presents itself. In a moment I will try to outline how the cloying attachment to niceness at TechCo presents such a route within the unconscious. Because the *objet a* is always already missing, the subject is destined to fail. In another sense, however, its attempts sustain the subject's desire and are therefore successful.

Whether the encounters discussed here involve traces of the real or a full encounter, they are characterised by repetition which indicates not just a failure but the subject's inability to accept it. I now look at some of the repetitive rituals actors perform and consider what they can tell us about the actor's struggle to learn new ways of operating at TechCo.

## 2. Compliance with the fantasy

### 2.1 Non-learning as a defence of the unconscious fantasy

Senior managers tirelessly maintain the integrity of TechCo's unconscious fantasy. They do so by promoting harmony as a master signifier.

As we have seen, the Revenue Based Incentive generates intense competition within the firm which demands individualism, and yet consensus building is one of the strongest features of the focus groups. One actor will offer a commentary on life at TechCo, which is often positive, and others will always agree that teamwork is strong and satisfying, that the firm's board members are friendly and informal, the dress code relaxed, that the culture allows colleagues to feel comfortable at work, that TechCo is an inspired

employer. The focus groups are echo chambers for positive words like grown up (to describe the culture), respect, consensus and teamwork. All are mentioned dozens of times across the data. As discussed above in relation to the paradox of performing, conflict is woven into life at TechCo, yet is often masked:

**I modify what I want to say all the time. I have a TechCo chip that I've put in, so I don't say, no completely disagree with you on that, I say, interesting, I like your thoughts on that, that's really great, but…(11.11)**

The Kudos system propagates compliments about colleagues and smiley faces help to convey collaboration in messages between colleagues. And "One TechCo" is the firm's internal campaign to posit TechCo as a happy, cohesive family where everyone agrees about all the important things. What is striking is the extent to which actors support this particular idea about TechCo - that it is a "nice", benign, even idyllic. TechCo, like any other organisation, has its dark side, but the exchanges about its virtues largely edit out the negative, and when a focus group discussion does become critical of the firm there is always at least one actor who intervenes before the end to reestablish the optimistic view. For example:

**I don't want to repeat myself but I think there are some really good things about TechCo. Sort of sad that we've spent an hour and a half slating it. Despite the system, I think locally in the UK there are some very good leaders that do demonstrate the right values, that do care about people…(10.17)**

So relentless is the positive spin on TechCo that some actors are bashful about it:

**I'm very aware I'm sounding like I'm part of the scientology cult [laughter]…Just come back from a conference, trying to describe it to someone. I'm very self aware about that. (3.29)**

The question of interest is why actors are so invested in promoting this cheery version of the firm. That they devote so much effort to it shows how much maintenance this framing of TechCo demands. The obvious benefit is that it suppresses aspects of life there which trouble actors, notably the firm's performance management system and the annual Rank and Yank cull of personnel - which are features of every focus group. And, as discussed in the previous findings chapters, it allows actors to craft a particular identification for themselves in the imaginary. But there is something in the discourse of niceness that points the subject to the *objet a* as the antidote to all that is unresolvable for the TechCo subject, the *objet a* being the lost object which would complete it and make its relationship with the Other whole-some.

In the paradox literature there are empirically tested combinations of separation and integration (Smith, 2014). They can provide cognitive answers to the paradox of learning such that both new and old knowledge are embraced. In the unconscious no such mastery is achieved.

2.2 False mastery as a defence of the unconscious fantasy

The suppression of difficult paradox and conflict helps senior managers and TechCo to imagine mastery. Participants in the focus groups claim again and again that tensions are so manageable as to be barely noticeable. For example:

**We encourage people to be individual and make sure that they can be themselves at work. But, which you would think would create more scope for there to be clashes, but I don't really see much of that actually….There's tension, but because everyone is so themselves here, it just kind of washes over you and you just accept that. (3.9)**

The word "manage" crops up dozens of times across the focus groups. It is used to convey the impression that the senior actor is able to control events. In Lacanian terms control is not possible: the subject's desire to manage cannot compete with the infinite demands of the Other, as this comment indicates:

**It does get to a stage where we just start to become a 'more organisation', we just do more and more and more and more… I do wonder if our speed to react is not just a strength but also the speed to get something done. (8.4)**

This statement conveys a randomness about the activity to satisfy the "more organisation": exactly what it achieves is less important than getting something (anything) done. The actor returns again and again to what underpins the infinite demands made by the organisation.

The following comment is a critique of TechCo. It is also a valuable, if unintended, comment on the power of the performance management system to take the subject away from a problem it cannot solve:

**There is a whole load [inaudible] that goes around scorecard rather than tackling some of the underlying problems which might be something to do with, which can't be fixed. (7.6)**

The actor's conscious motives are readily understood: she/he sets priorities according to their perceived instrumentality. Unconsciously, though, the scorecard fixation is all about the subject's endlessly repeated return to the *objet a*. Words like "manage" are often expressed when the actor's unconscious desire for mastery is in jeopardy. The frequent

use of the word points to an ambition which is elusive to the subject. Managing the scorecard seems to be the answer. Meanwhile the subject instrumentalises performance in terms of its potential to reveal or show the way to the *objet a*. The subject is compelled to return endlessly to the scorecard. The subject's never ending bid to solve its lack through performance seems to be a solution to what "can't be fixed", the *objet a.* Repetition seeks *jouissance*, and the meagre reward the subject derives from it is forgotten because the actor cannot remember her/his last unconscious failure. *Jouissance* is paradoxical for the subject because it simultaneously gives too much pleasure and not enough (Contu, 2008: 375). What the subject ultimately desires always eludes it.

In one focus group the claim that all difficulties at TechCo are "manageable" becomes such an insistent refrain that I challenge it. This does not go especially well at the time, but the incident is highly revealing. I turn now to my intervention and its consequences.

2.3 Interrogating the fantasy

Near the end of one focus group I provoke an animated conversation when I suggest that the frequent celebrations of niceness and teamwork I have heard are in fact a tactic to hide something negative about TechCo. I choose the words "radical and tyrannical" to describe this feature:

**I sort of want to take you back to seventy-five minutes ago when we had this story of TechCo where, be what you want to be, and you can do whatever you want and everything is acceptable. But it seems to me there is an unconscious bit going on at the same time. I suppose my hypothesis here is that there is something radical and tyrannical about TechCo, is part of that unconscious bit, and that sort of then gets adjusted for, because we're all terribly polite and nice to each other…(3.19)**

This is the only occasion in a focus group when I discuss the unconscious. It seems apposite at the time. First because the discourse of "niceness" is dominant but at the same time unlikely in such a competitive environment. Secondly because I hope to persuade these actors to reflect on what is going unsaid, unadmitted, and to probe why that may be so. The point of my intervention is to understand why participants in the focus groups are so invested in the discourse of a benign TechCo. Radical and tyrannical are extreme terms, particularly tyrannical which evokes abusive relationships, psychotic behaviour, totalitarian regimes. With hindsight, my aim was to expose "some traumatic kernel" within the unconscious of the participants (Žižek, 1997: 47) by destabilising the subject's normalised relation to the Other. It is a criticism that challenges the prevailing

fantasy at TechCo and the pact which binds the subject and the Other. But, within the psychical reality which overwrites TechCo's rational, physical reality (Hook, 2017: 5), this intervention involves jeopardy because it may threaten the subject's very existence as the subject of desire (Glynos, 2010: 29).

The first reactions are predictably defensive: the participants repeat their positive (imaginary) construction that the firm is benign and refute my suggestion:

**I genuinely enjoy being here, it's a really nice place to work, people are deeply respectful. Having worked in a team where they're like, no you can't work from home, you can't do this, no you can't do that, why do you want to do that, in my old organisation, it's really nice. I think again, radical and tyrannical, nothing in TechCo is radical [laughter] (3.20)**

That is me told and yet, interestingly, this actor does not reject the word "tyrannical". I then encounter resistance when I ask the focus group to comment on the paradox of performing and perhaps even criticise the firm's performance management system. Here is my question:

**Researcher: Is there a, tension may be too strong a word, but is there a time where niceness, and collaboration, and respect, come up against, slightly, I need to get performance done, I need to get a lot of people to shift?**

**Participant: No [laughing, followed by silence]. (3.17)**

The bluntness of the response entertains the other senior actors present. It is comical also because it oversimplifies what actors are experiencing. However, the silence following the laughter points to a moment of reflection brought about by my reference to a tension. It seems to express something these participants recognise in spite of their claims that tensions are perfectly manageable. What is striking is this: at no point does *anyone* reject my use of the word "tyrannical".

After the flat 'No' to my suggestion of a paradox, the conversation moves on to other topics, yet participants repeatedly return to "radical and tyrannical", which suggests that the words do convey a truth about life at TechCo:

**I think tyrannical is an interesting word, bearing in mind everything you've just said about the group…I think we still have a very strong performance culture, so as much as, yes, we all have to work collaboratively, your output, you are still determined, you know, your success is determined on your output, and yes, the how and what are very important, but equally with the results of what an individual**

**achieves, whether individually, or collaboratively with the team, or whatever, I think the performance culture is still the overriding arch in the organisation. (3.17)**

I want to convince participants to reflect on the orthodoxy of positive talk about TechCo, even if for a moment, and the consequences are revealing. Far from disputing the word "tyrannical", this actor discusses it, claiming that TechCo's culture is dominated by the performance management system, thereby confirming that there is something tyrannical about it. The other participants do not contest this actor's claim. At the end of the focus group another comments:

**I liked the subtle insert of "tyranny", because I didn't even pick up on it. It was you guys going, tyranny, no, no…I just kind of thought, mmm mmm [laughter]. (3.30)**

This actor only notices the word because of the resistance it causes. It indicates, in turn, the extent to which actors are invested in a particular discourse. To reiterate: the aim is not to attack TechCo's performance management system. It is to invite participants to reflect on the extent of their investment in the idea that all is "nice" and "manageable" at TechCo.

This actor provokes laughter because of the way he delivers "mmm mmm", signalling his recognition of the "tyrannical" description. Other participants laugh because the note of recognition contrasts so strongly with the view that the firm is benign. It also shows that they recognise the term "tyrannical" and agree that it has merit. It certainly contradicts the "official" discourse about TechCo. As ever, with Lacan, what goes unspoken is helpful for a fuller understanding of what is going on in the talk of these actors - providing we resist the temptation to assign more validity to what is unsaid or disavowed simply because it contradicts the prevailing discourse. The words are unusual because the normal discourse of TechCo usually makes it unsayable: the OneTechCo theme, Kudos, all the talk that reinforces the commitments based incentive, teamwork, collaboration, and of course the legitimacy of the performance management system overall. It has taken an outsider to pause the normal discourse long enough to generate some reflection on it. This exchange about what is radical and tyrannical at TechCo represents no grand transformation. But it does show a deconstruction of life there which is rare. It shows that actors see it is not entirely benign. And so, when they promote it as benign and manageable in their talk, they must overlook its radical and tyrannical elements. Avowed in the conscious or not, the negative elements of life at TechCo are present, and keeping their toxicity out of the prevailing discourse of manageability requires a continual maintenance effort. As with the paradox of performing, this task falls to the individual.

2.4 Retreating back to the fantasy

It is in the context of this “radical and tyrannical” discussion that one senior actor, Margot, identifies my disruption as a threat to TechCo’s ecosystem, ie its prevailing fantasy. I have previously discussed her reaction but quote it again here for clarity:

**I was like [gasp] don't change anything, don't change anything, I like it the way it is, there was just a real fear of - Are you going to come in and change this so we don't talk to each other nicely? [laughter]…**

**And I thought, no I can't say anything that might change this, because it's such a delicate balance, and we're all playing this game…**

**Will we lose this lovely nice way we talk to one another? And that was a real fear in me. Scary. (3.27)**

By disturbing the consensus my intervention provides insights into the subject. The laughter in all these examples indicates recognition of something rarely experienced by the (conscious) actor. The effect is a momentary but significant rupture in the usual discourses that are structured by the Other’s desire.

Margot concludes with this comment:

**I feel safe, I felt safe, that's why I…Oh don't change. Having said all the things I've said, I like it the way it is. (3.27)**

The opening words - “I feel safe, I felt safe” - are striking. The change of tense may be a correction by Margot as she refers to her reaction moments before. They *also* declare that the “radical and tyrannical” conversation has caused something to shift. Margot’s words suggest the conscious expression of an unconscious re-appraisal of the subject’s modus operandi at TechCo with reference to the Other. She does not take up a dramatic new stance, and her comment on not wanting change makes that clear. But the suggestion that she is no longer safe signals a disruption.

The Other nourishes the subject’s preoccupation with its (the Other’s) desire because it depends on the subject to cure its (the Other’s) lack. Here is the possibility that the subject may reconsider its subjectivity, ie its place in the circuit of exchange with the Other (Vanheule et al., 2003: 324). Momentary awareness of the game “we’re all playing” may initiate a shift for Margot. This is the subject seeing - even if for a moment - that its present relationship with the Other is not the only possibility. And it prompts a traumatic encounter with the real because the assumption of non-mastery has been challenged, ie the possibility has been revealed that the subject’s investment in the Other is futile. This is

risky (“scary”) because the subject’s service to the Other is reassuring in the sense that it shields the subject from unsolvable lack, so that it can “imagine” itself as non-lacking. When the subject glimpses the lack in the organisation, the fantasy fades and the subject begins to de-couple from the Other. Dangerous as it is for the subject, this is a moment of opportunity. We have no subsequent data to show us where Margot goes next. But it is at least likely that the subject scuttles back to safety and embraces the Other. For all its constraints the pact brings benefits:

**Having said all the things I've said, I like it the way it is. (3.27)**

2.5 Summary so far

Resistance is always a possible prelude to a “real” shift in the subject that enables it to establish new ways to configure its symbolic pact with the Other. To stop trying to satisfy the performance management system is dangerous in the unconscious as well as the conscious life of the senior manage, because it entails the subject breaking altogether with the Other, a relation that is stable so long as the subject locates its desire in the Other/TechCo and does not commit to finding it elsewhere (Fink, 1999: 52). Any change in the subject’s desire unpicks the fantasmatic narrative that preserves the status quo and keeps subject and Other ticking along, secure in their interdependence. Clare’s stand shows the potential liberating benefits for the subject of such a shift. Margot’s speech, above, reminds us of the risks posed by any disruption in the subject’s strict adherence to TechCo’s established ways: not just the risk of death in corporate terms as the disengaged actor falls short of her/his objectives and is removed through Rank and Yank, but the potential death of the subject as an object of the Other’s desire. Margot’s pragmatic solution also shows the effect of the Lacanian real. She returns again and again to the same scene - where she and colleagues talk nicely to each other. It delivers consolation in the form of *jouissance* but no change in the subject’s symbolic relation with the Other. It is endlessly repetitive because something essential always remains unformulated (Fink, 1999: 48) in this echo chamber of TechCo’s virtues. The repetition also prevents the subject of Margot from moving to a different relation to the Other.

3. Towards emancipation

3.1 Decaf resistance

The context for this discussion is TechCo's Rank and Yank scheme - the annual ritual which expels a selection of actors who are judged to have performed poorly. It is widely disliked by senior managers whose primary task at TechCo is to build effective teams so they can meet revenue targets and grow the firm. They dislike Rank and Yank because it sabotages the very teams senior managers need if they are to perform well and causes them significant anxiety. One of the focus group participants, Julian, comments as follows:

**If you have delivered to strategy there comes a point over the years where you have culled and culled for team and you don't have any valuable 5s any more and you end up in a situation where you don't sleep at night any more. (8.9)**

Julian is echoing observations by other senior managers about the problems that follow when they must force out team members who are good. It generates a resource crisis which is difficult to solve because good replacements are hard to find in the market:

**If I have to manage out a person, which means I then have to go and hire someone ideally better than the person I'm exiting. There just aren't many world-class people on the marketplace, and that gives me a serious issue, and it takes me about two years, but two years, if you've built a team up yourself over two years, hiring good people, the model tends to come undone. (4.8).**

Rank and Yank also overlooks TechCo's reliance on solid performers who ensure that the firm serves its existing customers well. Although good client service depends on people like this, their contribution is undervalued:

**You need to have some people in the business…who are the steady eddies in the team…they are doing the right thing by the customer, and they are doing the right thing by the business on a daily basis. (10.12)**

And it is so disliked that some senior managers appear to distance themselves from the firm:

**Personally I've seen more people buy an X [competitor product] in the last few years. I don't think it is to do with the product but the emotional connection being lost and that identification with TechCo. (8.9)**

None of these grievances undermines the actor's unconscious pact with the Other. Indeed they strengthen it. Inside a focus group the actor can enjoy a little light resistance without fear of consequences, and afterwards conform as usual to TechCo's demands.

The subject is mobilised by the illusion that it can master its lack through work (Huber 1999 in Arnaud & Vanheule, 2007: 363). Much of the evidence I have presented so far shows how powerful the illusion is. Here, though, I present an example of resistance and argue that it does show an actor learning to reconfigure her unconscious relationship with TechCo to the extent that a degree of "subjective independence" (Vanheule et al., 2003) becomes possible. In one of the last focus groups in chronological terms, an experienced senior manager describes her quiet revolution against the will of TechCo's performance management system. In a long monologue she sets out her resistance and her reasons for shifting her relationship to TechCo. Her speech is prompted by a twenty minute discussion about Rank and Yank immediately beforehand.

### 3.2 The paradox of desire

Unlike the more popular, more easily verifiable psychological view favoured in the paradox literature, the Lacanian conception does not allow the actor to import unconscious operations into the conscious and deconstruct them as if she/he were sensemaking. Lacan calls this gulf between conscious and unconscious the "paradox of desire", and the actor's only possible route to understanding it is circuitous. This is because she/he must necessarily straddle two domains: conscious discourse where the actor cannot influence the unconscious, and the unconscious where there is no discourse. Desire is paradoxical (Lacan, 2006: 532-3) because it can be articulated in conscious discourse, where words operate, but is separated from the unconscious where desire operates and words do not (Muller & Richardson, 1982: 329). In mainstream research, language presents no such difficulty: the scholar draws on moments of dialogue in the data to glean what the respondent makes of a paradox (Lüscher & Lewis, 2008: 224). With some provisos about the need for scholarly reflexivity (Andriopoulos & Gotsi, 2017: 514-5), she/he assumes that the data captured is a faithful mirror of the respondent's mental processes, and analysis of the spoken word is unproblematic. By contrast, the Lacanian process for connecting the two realms is hit and miss, and discourse in the analytic setting "is valuable only insofar as it stumbles or is interrupted" (Lacan, 2006: 678). Although language may express a little of our unconscious desire, it remains beyond the actor's conscious grasp because desire is outside language.

The changes envisaged by Lacan are slow, tentative and hard to reconcile with organisational ideas about self realisation. In the psychoanalytic setting the influence of the analyst is indirect and finite. The analyst works with an *analysand*, not a patient, the term implying active participation in the analysis. ("*Psychanalysant*" was the phrase coined by Lacan in 1967 to supersede "patient", the word he had previously used to denote the person in psychoanalysis (Evans, 1996: 9). Indeed, subjectivation, the subject achieving more influence over its position in the symbolic, is possible only when the analysand becomes independent of the analyst. This is no place for the manager/coach who guides the coachee to new levels of performance for the coachee and, of course, for the organisation also. For Lacan, that model risks simply swapping one discourse for another - the analysand's old worldview for a new one. Neither one belongs to the subject and, in that sense, the managerialist conception of analysis side-steps the paradox of learning. The tension between old and new is collapsed into a single, unproblematic idea: the discourse of the Other. The newer iteration only seems to be determined by the subject when, in truth, it is just more of the subject conflating the Other's desire with its own. The dénouement of the subject's renegotiation of its symbolic pact is not a set of external goals achieved. Instead it consists of a return to the cause of the subject and a new relation to the *objet a* and it comes without an organisational fanfare.

## 4. The resistance of the senior manager

### 4.1 Introduction to Clare

Clare is senior manager with a long record of service at TechCo. Her monologue, which I explore here, shows how learning provides an emancipatory space in which to contest the forces of power and control (Driver, 2010: 561). Her real - rather than decaf - resistance is based on a plausible Lacanian reading of her desire to change her unconscious relationship with TechCo. Her talk indicates a degree of successful subjectification - the process of bringing the subject into being through a greater understanding of its relation to the Other (Fink, 1999: 159). During it the subject gains some "awareness" of what it is to the Other and how it might reconfigure its symbolic pact. But these insights are inconclusive, not least because her reflections happen in a single focus group, not on the couch over weeks, months, even years. And at TechCo there was no opportunity to follow up and assess whether her resistance was lasting - still less whether it really did involve a re-setting of the subject's pact with the Other.

## 4.2 Resistance and the fundamental fantasy

Fantasy depends on a tension between two forces (Žižek, 2017: 192). First there is a stabilising dimension. It allows the subject to develop an identity and fulfil ambitions. Fantasy also destabilises, undermining the very ambitions it makes possible. The annual cull which so angers Clare reveals a vulnerability in the fantasy. Whatever it achieves in the conscious - deterring individual underperformance relative to revenue targets, for example - Rank and Yank also protects the unconscious fantasy. The discourse of success at TechCo is powerful thanks to its counterpoint, underperformance.

In his discussion about Descartes Lacan argues that the only significant point about the Cogito is that it is spoken and thought. He shifts the famous claim from a proof of existence ("I am thinking, therefore I am") to something less grandiose, a simple act of speech: "I am thinking: 'Therefore I am' " (Lacan, 2006: 734) or: "Therefore I am is what I'm thinking". Descartes' statement is grounded in the imaginary and therefore limited by it. It is not neutral but a contestable claim just like the ones TechCo and its actors make about themselves, and its contingency makes it inherently precarious. Rank and Yank is crucial to the unconscious of the organisation because it allows TechCo and its (remaining) actors to frame underperformance as a real threat. Under this logic the cull becomes the unavoidable price of success - even though it removes only a handful of underperformers each year. Its effect in the unconscious is to make the fantasy's contingencies invisible. If it were not for the underperformers, so the narrative goes, TechCo's own unconscious lack would be filled. Underperformance legitimises not just Rank and Yank but the performance management system as a whole.

## 4.3 Clare's defiance

Clare "won't take ownership" of the firm's demand that she should embrace and promote Rank and Yank as righteous. She tells the people present at the focus group that she has broken with the official line and confided in a team member who had fallen victim to Rank and Yank, telling him why she refused to "own" the decision to get rid of him. She openly criticises the firm, saying:

**You need to…be able to push back and say no. (10.14)**

This is because the decision to cull this person was “so evidently false”. She adds:

**I actually met with him early the following week and told him exactly what the score was, because it was just ridiculous and I wasn’t willing to own that. (10.14)**

This suggests a successful alteration to the narrative in which “imaginarily functioning” actors remain imprisoned (Vanheule et al, 2003: 335).

Departing from the official script for Rank and Yank is not Clare’s only act of defiance. She also refuses to accept the financial targets imposed on her team because they have not taken its reduced size into account:

**So I've actually pushed back and said, well, I'm not going to give my individuals a ridiculous quota, because I don't want to kill them, and I want them to stay motivated. So I will not accept the quota and be the hero. (10.14)**

It seems that she has prevailed:

**I’m not going to give that to my individuals and it’s been accepted. (10.14)**

Here, supposing for a moment that Clare’s monologue accurately reflects the unconscious, the subject’s resistance threatens the Other’s desire. Decaf resistance does not, because its transgressions remain in the imaginary and change neither the subject’s position nor that of the Other (relative to the subject) within the symbolic (Hoedemaekers, 2010: 2).

However, Clare’s stand against TechCo is a qualified one. She can resist TechCo’s will only “to a certain extent”, as she puts it. Resisting locally is possible, but not if the situation escalates and TechCo’s corporate division becomes involved:

**Quite often, you know, you have this override from Corp which is very, very difficult. (10.14)**

The scope of her resistance is limited: she embraces the performance management system and the resulting need to keep “tracking poor performance”. But declares her strong opposition to TechCo’s failure to consult her before culling members of her team; and its attempt to reduce staff numbers in her department of I.T. without reducing the burden of the targets it must achieve.

Clare’s statement indicates that the normative power of TechCo/the Other is not to be dismissed lightly:

**I actually tried, I'm being completely honest and open here on the assumption this isn't going anywhere outside this room…I did try and own the message initially, and it was so evidently false that…I wasn't willing to own that. (10.14)**

Her phrase “taking ownership” reflects an expectation of conformity at TechCo. Her stand poses no material threat to Rank and Yank whose hold on senior actors is firm, but nonconformity is evidently unusual and Clare’s nervousness about confidentiality is a reminder that dissent could be dangerous for her.

Within rational reality, TechCo’s Corporate function can “override” any local interference and Clare’s stand easily crushed. And yet, in the unconscious, her resistance has the potential to cause havoc. If the subject abandons its current configuration with respect to the Other, it risks its own annihilation as a subject of desire. The other beneficiary of the status quo is the Other which remains stable so long as it is the only place the subject identifies as the solution to its lack (Fink, 1999: 52). Insurrection from senior managers over Rank and Yank threatens the whole unconscious ecosystem that sustains desire at TechCo, and this includes the desire of the Other. To solve *its* lack the Other depends on the subject. The corporate intervention that makes Clare anxious might therefore also be seen as the Other moving to protect its interests. In spite of these personal risks, we can detect the start of a shift in Clare’s unconscious relation with the Other. If it is possible for the subject to re-orientate itself relative to the Other, then it is also possible for it to influence the predicament caused by the Other’s contradictory desires (Chapter 7).

In Clare’s explanation of her position there are clues to her gaining a degree of independence from TechCo:

**I think that a lot of it…comes down to confidence in your own ability…**

**I think you need to be confident in yourself…**

**I’m a bit more confident in my own skin…**

**I don’t have any trouble pushing back…**

**I’ve got to have the courage of my own convictions…**

**I have the courage of my convictions to say… (10.14)**

She adds this insight to TechCo:

**Em, I'm a lady of a certain age in I.T., so you know, that works for me as well. It's worked against me for many years [laughs], so you know, I don't have any trouble pushing back now. (10.14)**

Her construction as “a lady of a certain age” evokes the respondents in Vanheule’s study who report low burnout. They have become less dependent on the approbation of others, enabling them to develop a “meta-perspective” on the structure of their relation with the Other. This is the ability to understand something of the subject-Other relation from outside the “circuit of exchange” (Frosh, 1997: 237). Vanheule et al argue that this meta-perspective correlates with a willingness to act (Vanheule et al., 2003: 333). Resistance in the imaginary can evolve into a “wider view of life” which grants the actor some independence from the demands of the symbolic (ibid: 334).

4.4 Clare’s defiance: a reflection

Where is the subject (of Clare) in this ecosystem? The subject is compelled, driven, to sustain its desire, without which it cannot exist. It sustains its desire by trying to find the lost object that never was - on the basis that it (the barred subject) would be completed if it ever found this object. Fantasy not only sustains desire; it also structures how the subject relates to the lost object. In Lacan’s formula the diamond expresses the multiple ways in which the split or barred subject tries to connect to the *objet a*. The prevailing fantasy organises the subject’s search, leading it in a merry and endless dance. But the diamond expresses *all* possible routes to the ‘re’-discovery of the lost object:

$ ♢ a

The prevailing fantasy is not the only possibility and the particular, current relation to the Other is not set in stone. A shift in the symbolic relation to the Other is possible for Clare, though it implies a radical (unconscious) encounter with the real. Her (conscious) speech does not prove such an encounter and we cannot judge whether she “traverses the fantasy” - shifts her unconscious relationship with the Other (Lacan, 1998: 273-4). But we do see evidence of her unpicking the ties that bind her existing pact within the symbolic. What follows is plausible Lacanian speculation about how Clare might reconfigure the TechCo fantasy.

To sustain its own desire the subject tries to identify with signifiers in the field of the Other. Fantasy consists of “an ever more complex signifying ensemble” (Lacan, 1998: 185). Though it never fills the divide that separates subject and Other, it produces a “flywheel movement around the lack in the chain of signifiers” (Libbrecht, 2017: 168). It is a dance that brings no advantage to either subject or

Other, except to ensure that they both carry on desiring (ibid: 169). The “flywheel movement” generates ever more signifiers in repeated attempts to identify and articulate the *objet a.* Beyond this signifying chain is a fundamental emptiness and an encounter with it can cause both the subject and the Other to become displaced, which indicates the traversing of the fantasy. In Lacanian terms this means that the barred subject crosses the diamond of Lacan's formula and identifies with the lost *objet a* (Verhaeghe, 2017: 182). But the *objet a* is nothing, an absence. This encounter cannot succeed because there is no signifier (Verhaeghe, 2017: 171-2). But nor can it fail or, for that matter, mislead, and it is in these encounters that the subject can “discover” that the Other is not its only possible *point de repère*, guiding reference point. If the subject’s relation to the Other can change, then it has some room in which to redefine itself.

To break with TechCo’s norms Clare must learn a new modus operandi. In fact she has already been learning for some years how to relate differently to the firm. Unconscious subjectivation may begin when the actor discovers failures in the fantasy. This sets in motion an inquiry which may (or may not) lead to action (Driver, 2009: 63). The subject becomes alienated from the desire of the Other after the actor slowly realises that what she/he wants is uncannily similar to what the Other wants. In time the actor questions impulses she/he had assumed to be intimate and unique to herself/himself, and the subject begins to doubt that its desire is really its own (Fink, 1999: 55). While this may remain in the imaginary and only produce decaf resistance, it may also disrupt the normal rules of the symbolic order. The aim is that the subject may finally “see” itself as the creator or producer of its relation with the Other (Vanheule et al., 2003: 327) in ways that take a smaller personal toll.

## 5. Conclusion

I have explored the dataset through three paradoxes considered archetypal in the paradox literature: those of belonging, performing and learning (Lewis, 2000). I have drawn on the data to consider how each paradox plays out in psychoanalytic theory, proposing in each case what a Lacanian perspective adds to our understanding of the senior actor’s conscious operations. Chapter 6, Belonging, establishes the context by considering why and how the senior actor becomes bound to TechCo. It argues that the unconscious ties are more insidious than the ones the actor can readily understand in the imaginary. The chapter on the paradox

of Performing considers the actor's struggles with the contradictions which are imposed on her/him by the firm's performance management system. A Lacanian lens shows how it is possible to understand more than can be seen through the cognition-heavy lens of mainstream organisation and management studies. What we can see is an enduring unconscious pact between the subject and the Other within the unconscious fantasy that prevails at TechCo. The fantasy endures because it seduces but never quite satisfies, and the actor's repetitive rituals yield *jouissance* but fail to find what is always already missing: the *objet a.* In Chapter 8 I explore the data to understand the subject's struggle to learn new ways to relate to the Other. Here, too, the lure of the fantasy finds the senior managers using their focus group to defend TechCo much more often than they attack it. Decaf resistance is enjoyable but incurs no risk for the subject or cost for the Other (Contu, 2008: 374). Clare's defiant stand, however, does indicate elements of "real" resistance where the actor may gradually acquire new ways to relate to the Other - a new pact that will entail constraints, like the current one, but may allow the subject a desire which it can more justifiably call its own (Fink, 1999: 215).

# Chapter 9: Discussion

## 1. Introduction

The findings of this thesis confirm that a psychoanalytic lens has much to offer organisation and management research, and that those who want to understand paradox must grasp its unconscious as well as conscious dynamics. Yet the psychoanalytic approach has so far failed to inspire much curiosity in the paradox community which has conducted no empirical research to date on the unconscious, and prefers a psychologised view of the subject that draws on the crowded field of dual process theories (ie intuition). Although the literature uses some aspects of Freud (and other psychoanalytic writers including Klein) to theorise about defences against paradox, it has not explored the Freud who eventually wandered much further from the tarmacked path which is psychology.

At the same time the literature acknowledges that it needs to do more work on the individual's relationship with paradox (Schad et al., 2016). This is a significant weakness because the responses of senior managers constitute the "micro-foundations" of organisational paradoxes (Waldman et al., 2019). In other words, a thorough understanding of paradox at the organisational level is not possible unless one also understands how the actor deals with it. What senior managers do about paradox tends to be copied by their teams and become institutionalised. So scholars recognise that they need new approaches and more studies on individual responses, yet their recent reviews see promising ideas anywhere except in psychoanalytic theory (Bednarek et al., 2021; Schad et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2017; Waldman et al., 2019). It is as if they settled the argument against using that lens long ago. They did not.

And so I advocate a Lacanian perspective on paradox which concentrates on what senior managers always lack, what the organisation also lacks and how they depend on each other as a consequence. Their interaction is explored through three paradoxes that are

prominent in a global technology firm which I call TechCo. In this final chapter I first synthesise my findings in relation to the research question which is: How does the senior manager respond in the unconscious to the paradoxes of belonging, performing and learning? Then I set out the chief contributions to knowledge which I believe this thesis makes, and their implications. Finally, I suggest avenues for future research and make some final comments.

In outline, the contributions I claim are as follows. The first is to draw on Lacan's discourse of the university so as to shed light on an alliance between academic knowledge and managerialism which serves both parties. The second contribution is to show that TechCo's rationalist paraphernalia hides an unconscious fantasy on which its performance depends. The fantasy is powerful, enduring…and its impossibility is almost always hidden. For the senior manager, the consequences of confronting this impossibility are traumatic but also liberating. The third contribution is about paradox scholarship returning to its roots. Like any signifier, "paradox" is slippery, but its etymology is still instructive. It consists of two Greek words that come together to indicate what lies outside common sense. Doxa (δόξα) means what is taught/believed. Para (παρά) means contrary to or against. A paradox is therefore contrary to dogma, what is believed, or what is taught. And it is the opposite of orthodoxy, so the study of paradox is meaningful only if it is unorthodox and remains outside scientific management. I argue in this thesis that psychoanalytic theory would preserve the status of paradox as a useful disrupting agent - if that is what paradox scholarship still wishes.

## 2. Summary of findings

Here are the findings summarised for the three paradoxes investigated in this thesis: belonging, performing and learning.

### 2.1 Belonging

In the literature's interpretation of the paradox of belonging, the actor tries to reconcile the opposing tensions of her/his personal identity and the identity of a wider group. Paradox scholars advocate a both/and response with a view to catering equally for the needs of the self and of the team or organisation. Achieving this is predicated on the individual meeting certain emotional and cognitive standards now outlined in the paradox mindset scale (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018), but the challenge is seen primarily as a cognitive one.

What is not clear from this approach is how the senior manager responds in the unconscious to the paradox of belonging (if one chooses not to accept the paradox literature's psychologised understanding of the unconscious).

Lacan claims that these conscious efforts are always underpinned by unconscious forces which are themselves paradoxical. The identity of any object, including a human one, depends on its negative feature and so, for Lacan, the actor works towards an identity which she/he never owns. Its construction is built around an absence, the subject's lack, and is therefore always contingent on the Other. The consequence is that any identity achievement, such as a promotion or a bonus for reaching a target, never belongs entirely to the actor.

The actor's knowledge about her/his identity: Lacan draws from Freud and structural linguistics. The ungoverned unconscious that Lacan calls the real is known to the actor and simultaneously not known. The actors know or feel that they do not fully own their ambitions but the unconscious interactions are outside the domain of thoughts and words. The subject's separation in the unconscious is conveyed into the actor's conscious between signifiers and emerges into discourse in unpredictable fragments which take the form of stumbles, silences and errors such as when Emma asks "Did I say healthy tension?" (Chapter 6), revealing an unconscious "awareness" that the tension is neither healthy nor manageable or, to express it in more Lacanian terms, the subject's desire does not coincide exactly with that of the Other . Such kinks in the symbolic order (Fink 1995) alert the actor, the analyst and the psychoanalytically-inclined researcher to their existence, and their implications are significant for the subject's response to the paradox of belonging.

The words the actor deploys in the (conscious) imaginary are structured by the symbolic which, in turn, is structured by the real: a gap, a lack which the symbolic cannot resolve, and which accounts for all the talk. Actors make endless and futile attempts to articulate their lack. If their talk ever succeeded they would fall silent (Verhaeghe, 1995: 4) and there would be no data to collect. But their failure means data that are rich with examples of the barred subject trying every possible path to find the *objet a*[4]*.* They include Martin's celebration of colleagues who, he claims, can just be themselves (which is a precarious discourse given the widespread evidence of actors conforming to what they see as TechCo's norms). Another example is Tony's desire always to give 100%, as if quantifying

[4] as expressed in Lacan's formula: $ ◇ a

total commitment makes “enough” any clearer. (The Lacanian point is that the *objet a* is elusive because it does not exist. As Žižek puts it, when we look closely at the sublime object it takes the form of an everyday one - like giving 100%, or reaching a performance goal. It disappears “precisely because in itself it is nothing at all” (Žižek, 1989: 192). “100%” indicates mastery, or arrival, but is in fact a mirage. Enough escapes from the real and lodges between signifiers for actors to be aware of a lost paradise of complete fusion. But they never find it (Muller & Richardson, 1982).

The disciplining effect of the Other on the subject is a prominent feature of the paradox of belonging in Chapter 6. The subject’s infinite appetite for recognition can be seen in the performativity of actors when they talk. The Kudos system, regularly discussed in the focus groups, serves the unconscious need for recognition, as does successful progress towards incentives. The actor’s alignment with the demands of TechCo allows for a detailed exploration of the subject’s relation to the Other. Lacan argues that identity is necessarily social: it is determined by the position the subject takes up within a social exchange. The social attracts the subject because it promises to solve what it lacks. The Other likewise, because it too is constituted by a lack. This coincidence causes an unconscious pact between senior actor/subject and TechCo/the Other with far-reaching implications for the conscious operations of the senior manager at TechCo, and also for the firm itself. Where ego psychology shapes the researcher’s understanding of identity struggles, managing the paradox of belonging is plausible. In the Lacanian reading the ego’s struggle with its mutinous unconscious never succeeds. And this failure, not the ego’s supposed mastery, offers the best explanation for why TechCo’s senior actors keep trying to please the firm.

## 2.2 Performing

This paradox is embedded in TechCo’s performance management system, a scheme designed to realise the firm’s growth forecasts by making the most of its human resources. The firm resolves these imperatives into two incentives - to grow revenue and demonstrate “commitment” to the firm as a whole, including others who work there. TechCo devolves this paradoxical task to its managers; paradoxical because they are required to collaborate and simultaneously compete with their colleagues. One perspective is that the management of performance is primarily cognitive and conscious: the incentivised actor aligns the demands of the organisation with her/his ambitions. Reaching the annual targets brings job security, bonuses, even promotions. Behind or

below all this instrumentality Lacan sees a corresponding response in the unconscious to the paradox of performing. How does it work?

Unlike goal setting theory which promotes individual achievement and satisfaction, the motivation of the subject is expressed in interpersonal terms - in the pact between the subject and the Other. This is not enlightened self interest so much as the only route "identified" by the subject which may fix its lack. As with Freud's granddaughter's strawberry cake performance, the primary question for the subject is "What does the Other want of me?" One actor expresses the unconscious pact unintentionally when he says: "TechCo is very good at communicating *what we should be* and what we value." The actor's unconscious need to fix her/his lack causes the subject to depend on the Other. This is a happy coincidence for the Other which depends on the subject to fix *its* lack. Their interdependence is the driving force of an organisational dreamworld which shapes reality for both subject/the senior manager and Other/TechCo and, while other research approaches must study this relationship via two separate levels of analysis, individual and organisational, an important advantage of the Lacanian approach is that it amalgamates them into a single, interdependent bond within the unconscious of the senior manager and her/his employer.

Fantasy, to use the psychoanalytic term, sustains organisational practices (Glynos, 2008: 285). And it creates the conditions of possibility which the subject needs to sustain its desire. Looking at TechCo through fantasy could provide a rich Critical commentary, such as the fact that no sanctions are imposed on actors when they fail to meet their CBI (commitment based incentive) so long as their revenue performance is strong. But more interesting here is what a Lacanian reading can tell us about the senior manager's unconscious struggle with performance management, and I now propose two broad insights from the findings.

First, the unconscious fantasy at TechCo is both fragile and durable. Complaints about the performance management system emerge in every focus group, and yet actors accept the paradox which has been left in their hands (how to collaborate and compete with their colleagues): their talk shows that they still see the reconciling of contradictory goals as their responsibility, not TechCo's. The reason for their compliance, leaving aside the material benefits of meeting their targets, is that the demands of the Other are the pathway accepted by the subject to solve its lack. Lacan's conception of the subject-Other relationship is that it draws attention to the Other's lack which, I argue, is the impossibility of becoming a perfectly predictable machine. Each year this lack is

expressed through the new set of targets which are set for TechCo's actors. TechCo's compelling record of growth shows that the fantasy is productive. What Lacan contributes is a deeper understanding of its contingencies, each of which might cause its downfall if it were to fail. These include the proximity of the fantasy to the real such that actors occasionally glimpse a hideous reality at TechCo: a dystopian vision where there is only brutal competition between senior managers, and no human warmth. I invite one focus group to discuss it openly when I suggest that "radical and tyrannical" are suitable words to describe life at TechCo, a provocation which invokes the real of the unconscious fantasy. For a few minutes all the talk of Kudos, collaboration, "One TechCo" etc appears to be empty rhetoric, and the niceness that actors crave seems impossible. Margot asks: "will we lose this lovely nice way we talk to each other?…Scary." A second major contingency of the fantasy is underperformance. If left untreated it could prove the lack of the Other, and TechCo's annual purge of poor performers is necessary in the unconscious because it both posits underperformance as an existential threat and neutralises it. The ritual sacrifice of Rank and Yank causes the greatest amount of disquiet among focus group participants. Within the actor's conscious deliberations it is the sanction she/he must avoid. Equally it threatens the unconscious subject, though it may also change the subject's relationship with the Other - an idea explored in Chapter 8. Rank and Yank therefore helps to sustain the fantasy but it might undermine it fatally.

The second Lacanian insight about the paradox of performing is that it presents a solvable conundrum in the conscious mind but an impasse for the subject. For most paradox scholars the answer is paradoxical thinking - a both/and response to chasing revenue and at the same time collaborating. But the deep anxiety expressed by actors about the paradox of performing reflects a problem which is beyond the scope of paradoxical thinking. The subject will never fix its lack but its survival as a subject depends on the illusion that completeness is possible. TechCo's twin performance incentives are impossible in the unconscious because the subject necessarily fails to serve one of the Other's two desires (revenue or collaboration) when it dedicates itself to the other. This insight challenges the consensus that the both/and approach to paradox always leads to success (Fairhurst, 2019: 14). If one accepts the Lacanian perspective on the nature of the unconscious, then paradoxical thinking cannot help the subject and one must question the literature's confidence in it. Its trouble is that it covers the conscious only. The senior actor's unconscious processes lie outside the manageable domain and are therefore overlooked. In this worldview the subject's traumatic encounters are no

match for paradoxical thinking. For Lacan this is the imaginary speaking, which is at its most talkative when the real must be disavowed.

## 2.3 Learning

The paradox of learning is the tension created when new ways of thinking contest established ones. To think differently actors must both build on previous knowledge and also undermine it. A paradoxical lens helps organisations to consider not just the benefits of learning but also the discomfort and ambivalence it causes (Vince, 2018: 273). This is a useful antidote to the "relentless positivity" that often surrounds organisational learning and it can lead to better planning for learning & development strategies (ibid: 274).

What, then, of the senior manager's unconscious response to the paradox of learning, the third part of the research question? In Chapter 8 the context is Clare's stand against the threat which Rank & Yank poses to her team.  The data show her defiance of TechCo/the Other and her refusal to cooperate with the cull. Though it is not all-out rebellion (she says she will have to yield should "corporate" become involved), it is more substantial than "decaf" resistance (Contu, 2008) - the sort that allows actors to sound off about TechCo in the imaginary while their status in the symbolic is reinforced. Even if Clare's stand does alter the configuration of subject and Other, much will remain the same. Her imaginary constructions will continue, and no manoeuvre by her will ever overcome her fundamental lack in the unconscious. But some important details do change, and the start of her learning a new relation with the Other begins when she sees that her imaginary constructions keep failing (Driver, 2010: 563). The Rank and Yank incident is the ostensible catalyst for the shift in Clare, but there is a wider context: years during which the symbolic bond with TechCo/the Other seems to have weakened. As she puts it: "Em, I'm a lady of a certain age in I.T., so you know, that works for me as well. It's worked against me for many years [laughs], so you know, I don't have any trouble pushing back now." Clare's position develops over the years because the prevailing discourses do not serve her well, making it easier to destabilise the fantasmatic narrative and defy TechCo's desire - the unconscious cause of the Rank and Yank ritual.

Comparisons between learning in the normal, conscious sense, and learning in the unconscious are not straightforward. The underlying reason why ordinary training interventions do not shift the subject's status is the paradox of desire: unconscious desire is in the real, where there are no words. The senior manager's reflections on what needs

to be learned and changed are located in the symbolic and imaginary. Desire is paradoxical because the senior manager is separated from her/his unconscious desire and unable to grasp it. Traditional learning and development interventions assume a coach or trainer as expert, the subject supposed to know. This equates to the analyst guiding the analysand. According to Lacan, the analyst must do everything possible not to embody the Other (Fink, 1995: 89). Direction, coaching, mentoring, "how to" manuals, goal setting all serve to reinforce the subject's existing status and prevent a reconfiguration of its relationship with the Other. Evidence for the effectiveness of unconscious bias training, for example, is now almost universally discredited (Noon, 2018). Its methodology - claiming to trainees that their survey responses reveal their unconscious - harvests what is in the imaginary and does not begin to disassemble the symbolic register. Such approaches may shift conscious discourses, but the subject remains dedicated to what the Other desires. Small wonder nothing changes.

In the Lacanian conception of learning the task of the actor, whether or not in an analytic setting, is necessarily hit and miss. Finding a new positioning for the subject is possible only when discourses stumble on it or are interrupted (Lacan, 2006: 678). We have to speculate about the success of Clare's unconscious reconfiguration because the data are collected during a single focus group: we do not have the luxury of tracking changes over time, in other words. If Clare *is* to learn a new relationship within the symbolic, it will evolve unpredictably and become established only as evidence accumulates that the new, more independent discourse really is original to her.

Learning in the unconscious sense is risky. An important theme of Chapter 8 is the *failure* of senior managers to learn new ways of relating to TechCo/the Other. Questioning the Other's desire exposes the subject to the real; witness Margot's traumatic encounter with the possibility that TechCo's fantasy is about to disintegrate. It is for this reason that many senior managers in the data preserve the status quo so elaborately. Non-learning protects the fantasy, perpetuates the subject's desire, and saves it from encountering the real. The multiple examples of repetition - the discursive routines in praise of harmony, the obsessing about the scorecard - indicate the actor's compulsion to return ad infinitum to rituals that confirm the position of the subject relative to the Other. The great pay-off for the subject is that it may continue to imagine itself as non-lacking. In Chapter 7 I present some of the reasons why this strategy is toxic, which makes the actor's defence of the status quo all the more striking.

Though tentative and without guarantee of success, the senior manager's effort to learn new ways of being opens the possibility of a new relationship with the Other where the subject is less alienated from its own desire. There is also the potential for TechCo itself to learn about unconscious relations, though this would require three dramatic and unlikely shifts. First, a new interest in individual narratives; secondly the decision to understand senior managers not as instrumentalised units but frail resources; and thirdly a new perspective on the widely recognised fact that training programmes rarely achieve what they claim. This is not to deny that organisations want to improve performance, or that actors are motivated to learn. It is to emphasise the power of their desire *despite* the failure of their learning ambitions (Driver, 2010: 572). Such a shift depends on a readiness to take a curvy, meandering route, not the direct one required by instrumental thinking.

## 3. Contributions to knowledge and their implications

### 3.1 The thesis sheds light on the way rationality serves managerialism

Lacan borrowed from Marx to claim that the discourse of the university serves capitalism (Fink, 2017: 33), and my thesis finds a thriving alliance between rational knowledge and managerialism. For example, the unconscious remains outside rationality while it is unknown, but as soon as hot and cold cognition are assumed to explain everything that occurs in the mind (Kahneman, 2014; Keller & Sadler-Smith, 2019; Miron-Spektor et al., 2018), the unconscious becomes known and even subject to conscious learning and development. And although emotions are poorly understood by the paradox community, this has not mattered because it is assumed that they can be managed through cognition, which its scholars do understand well. Outside TechCo organisations have replaced unconscious with *implicit* bias on the basis that the latter can be surfaced, measured and altered more easily by researchers and practitioners. The motive is better training to enhance diversity, although the evidence supporting this is underwhelming (Noon, 2018), raising questions about what remains out of reach despite the repositioning of instinct as something manageable.

$$\frac{S2}{S1} \rightarrow \frac{a}{\$}$$

Lacan's discourse of the university

So, in the commercial setting, rationality works by making knowable everything that has potential value. This is the claim made forty years ago by Peters and Waterman: "All that stuff you have been dismissing for so long as the intractable, irrational, intuitive, informal organisation can be managed" (Peters & Waterman, 1982). What is known then

becomes valuable, an idea I discussed in Chapter 3. Lacan explains the relationship between management and knowledge through the discourse of the university which functions symbiotically with the discourse of the master. The former props up the latter, the latter underpins knowledge in the discourse of the university, and the bar between S2/S1 indicates that the alliance is covert and beyond scrutiny, so long as the alliance between S2 and S1 is not unpicked (Lacan, 2007: 148). I have set out to deconstruct it so as to see more clearly how science and managerialism serve each other. Knowledge, including academic knowledge, lends its authority to managerialism. And what legitimises knowledge? It is the 'scientific truth' kite mark which is bestowed on S2 by S1, the master signifier; in this case managerialism.

My thesis has illustrated across the findings that paradox nonetheless remains a useful window on the contingent nature of both knowledge and management. But paradox is frequently classed as a problem (Putnam et al., 2016) which makes it susceptible to management efforts to control it. Viewed through a Lacanian lens, paradox is primarily a signifier, and all signifiers are contingent and unstable. So the alternative reading is that paradox is the opposite of a problem waiting be solved. It is a symptom of what is *not* manageable. The "manageability" of TechCo's paradoxes is repeated across all the focus groups like the refrain of an endless song, indicating the subject's bittersweet quest for the *objet a*. Manageability stands simultaneously for the ideal of control and also for all that eludes the subject. No theme demonstrates the senior manager's *jouissance* better.

In Seminar XVII Lacan discusses resistance to the agent of the university discourse. The antidote to constraining knowledge must be new knowledge, he argues:

> "In a world in which there has emerged…science objectified in some way…in a world in which this emergence has taken place, know-how at the level of manual labour [can] carry enough weight to be a subversive factor" (Lacan, 2007: 149).

His comments are based on Marx's notion of surplus labour (Parker, 2001) in which the $, bottom right of the formula, is the labourer. In this conception all management is complicit with the S2/S1 pact. However, I insist that the senior manager is the outcome of the university discourse too. For the Marxist this will be a sacrilegious position to take up. Nevertheless, my focus is the senior manager as barred subject. Managerial knowledge certainly benefits her/him - I do not claim otherwise - but it also alienates and traps the subject of the senior manager. This thesis argues that senior manager resistance is desirable, *especially* as she/he benefits from additional discursive resources.

Clare's defiance (Chapter 8) is a fleeting and inconclusive illustration of the subversive potential of new knowledge with respect to the Other. It demonstrates the possibility - if not the certainty - of the senior manager learning to configure a new relation to TechCo.

### 3.2 This thesis explores the impossibility of the rationalist fantasy

The ego is not master of its own house but refuses to believe it (Freud, 1955: 5). Denial is central to Lacanian theorising as it is to Freud's thinking. Denial explains the elaborate architecture of the unconscious fantasy and its many complexities which I investigated in the findings, particularly in Chapter 7. The pact between subject and Other works because it is symbiotic. That is the rationalist story too, of course: a fair exchange whereby the organisation is rewarded with performance and the senior actor with remuneration. My thesis explores the psychical reality that overwrites this rational one. It reveals that the corporate pretence of a purely rational, conscious exchange is a sham. In fact TechCo could not function if it did not also use its managers in the unconscious. *Jouissance* consoles the subject but nothing can compensate for the moments when the fantasy is penetrated by its impossibility, for example when the subject is confronted by two contradictory demands which it must satisfy at the same time (as discussed in the impossible paradox, Chapter 7). The frequency of the claim by senior managers that paradoxes are manageable points to the opposite in the unconscious. What a Lacanian reading contributes is the insight that these two truths - manageable and impossible - coexist, but the contradiction is almost always repressed, disavowed, not least by the senior manager. Almost always, but occasionally, and unintentionally, the promises of TechCo's rationalist dream unravel, the subject glimpses something it can and must resist, and the senior actor briefly fails to stay on-message.

### 3.3 This thesis points to the role paradox scholarship forgot

Rationality promises to guard against the disarray of the informal (Townley, 2008). But disorder is not inevitably an aberration to be conquered by order (Cooper, 1986): it is also an opportunity to destabilise meaning long enough to make the familiar strange and unpick the assumptions we live by. Too often paradox studies reflect a bias for order (Putnam et al., 2016: 137). The managerialism present in paradox scholarship can be detected in the creative ambiguity of its scholars when they talk of embracing and then, in

the next sentence, managing paradox. The verb ‘manage’ is not like farmers farming or pipers piping - just a neutral signifier for what managers do. It is inevitably imbued with the fantasy of control.

Paradox scholarship increasingly resembles a project to temper rather than oppose scientific management. A hundred years ago the human relations movement went through the same experience (Petriglieri, 2020). Rationality has since proven many times that it has form (eg Edward & Tallontire, 2009; Wright & Nyberg, 2017). When it tames it also neuters. Paradox scholars are in good company: promoting the manageability of paradox is not so different from the tendency of other organisation and management scholars to dress up instrumentality as neutral, objective science (Khurana, 2007).

This thesis has claimed there is a harmful rationalist bias in paradox and other management/organisation scholarship. But its critique is not an attempt to mimic normal science where the antidote to a truth claim is a rival truth that displaces the dominant one. This thesis only claims that psychoanalytically-informed scholars could develop a much better riposte to rationality if they chose to. They could drop the fantasy that managers are rational instruments of rational organisations whose emotions need to be managed. They could put a frail human at the centre of management studies, rather a caricature of the rational manager in charge of her/his destiny. They could celebrate conflict much more, not moderate it. And they could defy the alliance of knowledge and capitalism by insisting that *every* truth claim is contingent and that, *para doxa*, contrary to what is widely believed, subjectivity is not a source of error (Petriglieri, 2020).

## 4. Coda

### 4.1 Personal reflection

I thought about paradoxes long before I started this thesis. Some Harvard professors were studying the management habits of a group of firms of which mine was one, and I got talking to one of them. He had spotted that the most effective organisations were run by people who were good at juggling contradictions like delivering good customer service while also looking after the needs of staff. I wanted him to tell me more about how they did it, but he was not convincing and I began to look into paradox myself. I subsequently turned to writing speeches for corporate leaders, an experience which showed me how, despite the paraphernalia of leadership, they were subject to their context. I soon became

aware of a complicated relationship between the day-to-day work of senior people and the norms of organisational rationality; for example the part of a paradox that is easiest for managers to overlook is usually the hardest to measure and justify - like long term priorities when they are coupled with short term ones whose value is assessed more easily. I wanted to understand how senior actors experienced all this and found a literature that was rich in some areas and impoverished in others. I first imagined I would discover the best way to juggle paradox which would then become the textbook method. Then I became interested in the various ways organisational context determines how paradoxes are handled. And this led me to explore paradigmatic norms in research and practice - in particular the fashion for stable truth claims about phenomena that are fluid, dynamic, ambiguous and contradictory. I had already started on this PhD when Andreas Liefooghe pricked my curiosity about Lacan. The more I looked, the more I felt that Lacan and Freud could make at least two valuable contributions to my research effort: insights into the subject's under-researched response to paradox; and a radical perspective on paradox scholarship itself, whose commitment to subversiveness I was finding patchy.

Paradox has fascinated since at least ancient Greek times. That things are often, even always, paradoxical has become a platitude. It is already thirty years since paradox was called "the management cliché of our time" (Handy, 1994). Yet it remains a popular lens because it is still useful. In this thesis I have aimed to reinforce the argument that paradox scholarship will be valuable so long as it continues to surprise, disconcert and irritate.

The Enlightenment promise of cumulative knowledge (Townley, 2008) has been extraordinarily productive in research and practice. That is a precept which Lacan accepts, but he subverts the assumption that progress can ever result in unqualified success, plenitude, perfection. Yet this Enlightenment promise is so seductive that the fantasy of (total) success, plenitude, perfection is rarely interrogated seriously. It is not enough to talk about the possibility or even the likelihood of failure: the TechCo example shows that that is already priced into the fantasy. The alternative is to be explicit about failure *and* its inevitability. Otherwise mastery is always assumed to be waiting round the corner, which obliges both manager and academic to relive past successes (and failures) over and over - based on the ideology that impossible is nothing.

I hope this thesis brings new insights about the individual's response to organisational paradoxes, and how a negative ontology can draw attention to our reliance on the operation of fantasy in organisations and academia, because fantasy charms us into thinking of ourselves as non-lacking. I hope the thesis also engenders a new curiosity

among paradox scholars for a psychoanalytic understanding of the unconscious and, consequently, more scepticism about their current psychologised view of the senior actor. Finally, I hope it helps to persuade the paradox community to stay on the fringes, resisting the lure of respectability.

## 4.2 Future research

This prompts the question what might constitute useful future research about two relationships: that of the senior manager with paradox and of the paradox community with organisation and management research. Here are some potential research directions.

*Paradox as impossibility*. A potentially useful counterpoint to the optimism of the both/and response, there is a case for a theoretical paper to pick up on the impasse outlined in chapter 7 (the paradox of performing) where the Other's two paradoxical desires pull the subject in opposite directions. This impasse contradicts Freudian/Kleinian ideas about defence mechanisms which deal with such tensions by splitting them. The question is whether this impasse has merit in psychoanalytic terms. If so what are the implications for further research and practice?

*Ego vs death drive*. The Keller and Sadler-Smith paper (2019) on instinct builds on dual process theories. They propose a paradoxical relationship between two kinds of mental operation, cold and hot cognition. An alternative investigation would contest the view that the unconscious can be reduced to a psychologised conception of instinct. It would then propose a paradoxical relationship between cognition and no cognition at all, based on Lacan's conception of the imaginary and the real. The paper could discuss two contrasting worldviews. One sees the ego as master, a conscious force that understands and ultimately manages the unconscious. The other sees an unruly class of children ignoring the ego/schoolmaster in spite of his threats. How might the second worldview change the way organisational paradox is understood by scholars and practitioners?

*Resistance by senior managers*. The paradox literature argues often that leaders must guide their organisation towards paradoxical thinking. But the TechCo case shows that the ideal of juggling paradox may compete with a prevailing culture which causes the organisation to reward one side of the paradox and just hope that staff will also attend to the other (Kerr, 1975). A better understanding of senior actor resistance could help us understand how the senior manager might negotiate this tension. It is a neglected area

because paradox research ignored power dynamics until recently (Berti & Simpson, 2021) and because of the assumption made by Critical scholars that senior actors are happy to comply with the organisation and therefore do not resist. Much Lacanian talk about resistance is pessimistic on the basis that it either unwittingly sustains domination or, in its revolutionary form, just swaps one master for another. But an interesting question remains unanswered: What would a *mature* resistance look like? (Fleming, 2010: 181). And how might a Lacanian perspective on resistance inform senior actors who face organisational paradoxes but are simultaneously expected to champion rationalist ideals?

*The real of paradox*. The shared foundations of lack and undecidability are only briefly developed in this thesis. But there is merit in the claim that paradoxes may be better understood if they are subjectified, not least because this would subvert the growing tendency to classify paradox as an objective problem that managers can manage if they have the right mindset, tools etc. What if paradox were conceived instead as a symptom that cannot be treated? This paper would discuss the theoretical overlap between lack and undecidability, and then develop an argument in favour of paradox management as deliberate failure in the sense that it emphasises acceptance and explicitly abandons all ambition to solve paradox or render it manageable. Is this a naïve capitulation to either/or thinking or could it lead to a better understanding of paradox in organisations?

## 4.3 Final thoughts

What might my own Other be? Of the many hours invested in this thesis, not one (or even part of one) did I spend as an analysand. I relied instead on my own conscious sense-making about my unconscious desire. The historical event that occurs to me is a maths lesson when I was eleven. The teacher asked me in front of the class what it felt like to be stupid. The question hurt because it said that my stupidity was beyond dispute and the best I could hope for was to be aware of it and, presumably, adjust my ambitions accordingly. It was humiliating and presumably traumatic also because it can still anger me. So I should acknowledge this teacher's contribution to my thesis because something in his careless remark rang true and the eleven year old in me still needs to disavow it. On the other hand there is a lot to be said for ignorance and stupidity. Not the kind that wilfully ignores evidence or embraces baseless conspiracies, but the sort one finds in the

space between mastery and one's pretensions to it. Here there is comic potential as well as the possibility of fresh ideas. False piety is reliably funny because it brings two incongruous things together: holiness and a hunger for prestige. The predicament of Captain Mainwaring[5] is that Sergeant Wilson is junior to him in military rank but unreachable socially. He has given joy to three generations because his insecurities are timeless. Hahn & Knight's 2019 paper demonstrates scholarship *and* a longing for the status of theoretical physics, or "physics envy" as it is sometimes called (Morrell, 2008: 621). The study of paradoxes does not need to take a sledgehammer to certainty; but it does need to understand the desire for it by academics as well as practitioners. Lacan's ideas do not aim or hope to overturn paradox scholarship. They could, however, help it and other forms of organisation and management scholarship to scrutinise its assumptions better. The comical examples above are relevant and useful because they expose a failure to achieve mastery. Perhaps this is all a liminal perspective like paradox scholarship should offer. That suggests only modest ambition - simply to disrupt the status quo - but I believe that has more potential than dreaming of either supporting rationality or overturning it.

Perhaps my Other is about playfulness rather than revolution. For some that will be a feeble response to the rationality and managerialism I have critiqued in this thesis, a 5 out of 10 for resistance and with all the caffeine removed (Contu, 2008). But what orthodoxy needs is to have its tail tweaked because it takes itself so seriously. Playfulness is always valuable, including when it seems pointless. As Škvorecký puts it in his essay on music as resistance in the Czech Republic during Nazi and then Soviet occupation:

> "*Das Spiel is ganz und gar verloren. Und dennoch wird es weiter gehen*. The game is totally lost. And yet it will go on" (Škvorecký, 1994).

If you write a thesis shaped by Lacanian thinking you are bound to reflect on your own failures. Of course it is tempting to do this now in the style of a job interview in which your greatest weaknesses secretly - not so secretly - advertise your virtues. Actually, my lack has been ever-present in the pages not yet written, the conviction until recently that I would never finish, and the feeling that I have teetered along a narrow path of workable certainties about paradox, psychoanalysis and particularly Lacan. On either side are the ideas I have overlooked or understood only superficially. One of my own paradoxes was the imperative to develop a richer of understanding of Lacan vs the desire to finish this

[5] From the BBC TV and radio series, Dad's Army

PhD. I finally began to write after I abandoned the fantasy of mastering him. My Lacanian knowledge felt tentative but the discomfort gave me room to interpret his theorising a little more for myself as I applied it to the paradox-juggling senior manager. In any case I was wary of Lacan's own warnings not to make him the Master. I was also anxious to avoid the very syndrome I observe in the paradox literature, where too much self-confidence can cause thinking to converge and stifle fresh ideas. Thirdly, I wanted to sell Lacan to paradox scholars so that he becomes accessible to a community which has so far mentioned his name once, in passing, in a single paper, and given only limited thought to Freud. I regularly imagine myself presenting Lacanian insights in the paradox track of an academic conference. In the front seats are the scholars who are already temperamentally close. They specialise in emotion, discourse and dialectics. The majority are in the middle rows: undecided but listening nonetheless. At the back are the advocates of cognition, both hot and cold, and the idea that all complexity will be codified. They stare into their laptops or at me, arms folded. My desire is to persuade them all to take me seriously, fuelled of course by its impossibility.

# Bibliography


Adorno, T. (1973). *Negative Dialectics* (E. B. Ashton, Trans.). New York: Continuum.

Adrian, T., & Shin, H. S. (2008). Liquidity and financial contagion. *Banque de France Financial Stability Review: Special Issue on Liquidity, 11*, 1-7.

Agarwal, D., Bersin, J., Lahiri, G., Schwartz, J., & Volini, E. (2018). *The rise of the social enterprise*. Retrieved from

Ainsworth, S., & Hardy, C. (2004). Discourse and Identities. In D. Grant, C. Hardy, C. Oswick, & P. L. (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of organizational discourse* (pp. 153-173). London: Sage Publications.

Alvesson, M. (1993). *Cultural Perspectives on Organizations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Alvesson, M., & Kärreman, D. (2000). Taking the linguistic turn in organizational research: Challenges, responses, consequences. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 36*(2), 136-158.

Alvesson, M., & Kärreman, D. (2000). Varieties of Discourse: On the Study of Organizations through Discourse Analysis. *Human Relations, 53*(9), 1125-1149. doi:10.1177/0018726700539002

Andriopoulos, C., & Gotsi, M. (2017). Methods of Paradox. In W. K. Smith, M. W. Lewis, P. Jarzabkowski, & A. Langley (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Organizational Paradox* (pp. 513-528). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Andriopoulos, C., & Lewis, M. W. (2009). Exploitation-Exploration Tensions and Organizational Ambidexterity: Managing Paradoxes of Innovation. *Organization Science, 20*(4), 696-717. doi:10.1287/orsc.1080.0406

Archer, M. (2000). Homo Economicus, Homo Sociologicus and Homo Sentiens. In M. Archer & J. Tritter (Eds.), *Rational Choice Theory* (pp. 36-56). London: Routledge.

Arnaud, G. (2012). The Contribution of Psychoanalysis to Organization Studies and Management: An Overview. *Organization Studies, 33*(9), 1121-1135. doi:10.1177/0170840612448153

Arnaud, G., & Vanheule, S. (2007). The division of the subject and the organization: a Lacanian approach to subjectivity at work. *Journal of Organizational Change Management, 20*(3), 359-369. doi:10.1108/09534810710740182

Arnaud, G., & Vanheule, S. (2013). Lacanian psychoanalysis and management research: On the possibilities and limits of convergence. *Management Decision, 51*(8), 1664-1677.

Bakhtin, M. (1981). *The Dialogical Imagination*. Austin, Texas: University Texas Press.

Barber, P. (1997). Money talks: The influence of the accountant on organisational discourse. *Journal of Applied Management Studies, 6*(1).

Barnard, C. (1938). *The Functions of the Executive*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Barsade, S. G., Ramarajan, L., & Westen, D. (2009). Implicit affect in organizations. *Research in organizational behavior, 29*, 135-162.

Bednarek, R., e Cunha, M. P., Schad, J., & Smith, W. (2021). The Value of Interdisciplinary Research to Advance Paradox in Organization Theory. In R. Bednarek, M. P. e Cunha, J. Schad, & W. K. Smith (Eds.), *Interdisciplinary Dialogues on Organizational Paradox: Learning from Belief and Science, Part A* (Vol. 73a, pp. 3-25): Emerald Publishing Limited.

Benson, J. K. (1977). Organizations: A dialectical view. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 22*, 1-21.

Berger, P., & Luckmann, T. (1966). The social construction of reality. *A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*.

Berti, M., & Simpson, A. V. (2021). The dark side of organizational paradoxes: The dynamics of disempowerment. *Academy of Management Review, 46*(2), 252-274.

Bicknell, M., & Liefooghe, A. (2010). Enjoy your Stress! Using Lacan to enrich transactional models of stress. *Organization, 17*(3), 317-330.

Boothby, R. (1991). *Death and Desire: Psychoanalytic Theory in Lacan's Return to Freud*. New York: Routledge.

Bordo, S. (1987). *The flight to objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism and culture*. Albany NY: Suny Press.

Brewer, M. B. (1991). The social self: On being the same and different at the same time. *Personality and social psychology bulletin, 17*(5), 475-482.

Brown, C., & Hao, C. (2012). Treating uncertainty as risk: The credit default swap and the paradox of derivatives. *Journal of Economic Issues, 46*(2), 303-312.

Brown, R. H. (1990). Rhetoric, Textuality, and the Postmodern Turn in Sociological Theory. *Sociological Theory, 8*(2), 188-197. doi:10.2307/202204

Brubaker, R. ([1984] 2013). *The limits of rationality*. London: Routledge.

Burr, V., & Dick, P. (2017). Social constructionism. In B. Gough (Ed.), *The Palgrave handbook of critical social psychology* (pp. 59-80). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Busch, N. (1949, September 17). Lord Keynes. *Life Magazine,* 118-130.

Calabretta, G., Gemser, G., & Wijnberg, N. M. (2017). The interplay between intuition and rationality in strategic decision making: A paradox perspective. *Organization Studies, 38*(3-4), 365-401.

Chandler, D. (2007). *Semiotics: the basics*. London: Routledge.

Charan, R. (2006). Conquering a Culture of Indecision. *Harvard Business Review, January*.

Chiesa, L. (2007). *Subjectivity and Otherness: A Philosophical Reading of Lacan*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Christensen, C. M. (1997). *The innovator's dilemma: when new technologies cause great firms to fail*. Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business School Press.

Clegg, S. (1989). *Frameworks of Power*. Newbury Park CA: Sage.

Clegg, S. R., Kornberger, M., & Rhodes, C. (2007). Organizational ethics, decision making and undecidability. *The Sociological Review, 55*(2), 393-409.

Collinson, D. (2012). Prozac leadership and the limits of positive thinking. *Leadership, 8*(2), 87-107.

Conlisk, J. (1996). Why bounded rationality? *Journal of economic literature, 34*(2), 669-700.

Contu, A. (2008). Decaf Resistance:On Misbehavior, Cynicism, and Desire in Liberal Workplaces. *Management Communication Quarterly, 21*(3), 364-379. doi:10.1177/0893318907310941

Cooper, R. (1986). Organization/disorganization. *Social Science Information, 25*(2), 299-335.

Cooper, R. (1989). Modernism, post modernism and organizational analysis 3: The contribution of Derrida, Jacques. *Organization Studies, 10*(4), 479-502. doi:10.1177/017084068901000402

Costas, J., & Fleming, P. (2009). Beyond dis-identification: A discursive approach to self-alienation in contemporary organizations. *Human Relations, 62*(3), 353-378.

Courpasson, D., Younes, D., & Reed, M. (2021). Durkheim in the neoliberal organization: Taking resistance and solidarity seriously. *Organization Theory, 2*(1).

Cunha, M. P. e., & Putnam, L. L. (2019). Paradox theory and the paradox of success. *Strategic Organization, 17*(1), 95-106.

Dane, E., & Pratt, M. G. (2007). Exploring intuition and its role in managerial decision making. *Academy of Management Review, 32*(1), 33-54.

Day, A., De Haan, E., Sills, C., Bertie, C., & Blass, E. (2008). Coaches' experience of critical moments in the coaching. *International Coaching Psychology Review, 3*(3), 207-218.

de Gaulejac, V., & Hanique, F. (2015). *Le Capitalisme Paradoxant: un système qui rend fou*. Paris: Éd itions du Seuil.

Deetz, S. (1996). Describing Differences in Approaches to Organization Science: Rethinking Burrell and Morgan and Their Legacy. *Organization Science, 7*(2), 191-207.

Deetz, S. (2003). Reclaiming the Legacy of the Linguistic Turn. *Organization, 10*(3), 421-429. doi:10.1177/13505084030103002

Denison, D. R., Hooijberg, R., & Quinn, R. E. (1995). Paradox and performance. Toward a theory of behavioral complexity in managerial leadership. *Organization Science, 6*(5), 524-540. doi:10.1287/orsc.6.5.524

Derrida, J. (1978). *Writing and Difference*. London: Routledge.

Driver, M. (2009). From Loss to Lack: Stories of Organizational Change as Encounters with Failed Fantasies of Self, Work and Organization. *Organization, 16*(3), 353-369. doi:10.1177/1350508409102300

Driver, M. (2009c). Encountering the arugula leaf: The failure of the imaginary and its implications for research on identity in organizations. *Organization, 16*(4), 487-504.

Driver, M. (2010). Learning as lack: Individual learning in organizations as an empowering encounter with failed imaginary constructions of the self. *Management Learning, 41*(5), 561-574.

Driver, M. (2017). Motivation and identity: A psychoanalytic perspective on the turn to identity in motivation research. *Human Relations, 70*(5), 617-637.

Drucker, P. (1954). *The Practice of Management*. New York: Harper Collins.

Dwyer, G., Hardy, C., & Tsoukas, H. (2021). Struggling to make sense of it all: The emotional process of sensemaking following an extreme incident. *Human Relations, 0*(0), 1-32. doi:10.1177/00187267211059464

Edward, E., & Olsen, W. (2006). Paradigms and reality in Micro-Finance: The Indian Case. *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology, 5*(1-2), 31-54.

Edward, E., & Tallontire, A. (2009). Business and Development - Towards re-politicization. *Journal of International Development, 21*, 819-833.

Edwards, L. (2017). Consistency and Inconsistency in Organizations: A Dialectical Perspective. *Management Communication Quarterly, 31*(3), 486-491.

Evans, D. (1996). *An introductory dictionary of Lacanian psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge.

Evans, D. (2017). From Kantian Ethics to Mystical Experience: an Exploration of Jouissance. In D. Nobus (Ed.), *Key concepts of Lacanian psychoanalysis* (pp. 1-28). London: Karnac Books.

Fairhurst G.T., Smith, W. K., Banghart S.G., Lewis, M. W., Putnam L.L., Raisch, S., & Schad, J. (2016). Diverging and Converging: Integrative Insights on a Paradox Meta-perspective. *The Academy of Management Annals, 10*(1), 173-182.

Fairhurst, G. T. (2019). Reflections: Return paradox to the wild? Paradox interventions and their implications. *Journal of Change Management, 19*(1), 6-22.

Fairhurst, G. T., & Collinson, D. (2023). Leadership Dialectics. In B. Carroll, K. Larsson, D. Lowe, D. Schedlitzki, & M. Bligh (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Leadership*. London: SAGE.

Fairhurst, G. T., & Putnam, L. L. (2014). Organizational discourse analysis. *The SAGE handbook of organizational communication: Advances in theory, research, and methods*, 271-296.

Fairhurst, G. T., Smith, W. K., Banghart S.G., Lewis, M. W., Putnam L.L., Raisch, S., & Schad, J. (2016). Diverging and Converging: Integrative Insights on a Paradox Meta-perspective. *The Academy of Management Annals, 10*(1), 173-182.

Farjoun, M. (2010). Beyond dualism: Stability and change as a duality. *Academy of Management Review, 35*(2), 202-225.

Fayol, H. ([1949] 1990). General and Industrial Management. In D. Pugh (Ed.), *Organization Theory: Selected Readings* (pp. 181-202). London: Penguin.

Ferreira, A., & Otley, D. (2009). The design and use of performance management systems: An extended framework for analysis. *Management accounting research, 20*(4), 263-282.

Fineman, S. (2001). *Managing emotions at work: Some political reflections.* Paper presented at the Presentation at the academy of management symposium.

Fineman, S. (2004). Getting the measure of emotion-and the cautionary tale of emotional intelligence. *Human Relations, 57*(6), 719-740.

Fineman, S. (2006). On being positive: Concerns and counterpoints. *Academy of Management Review, 31*(2), 270-291.

Fink, B. (1995). *The Lacanian Subject: Between language and jouissance*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Fink, B. (1995). The real cause of repetition. In R. Feldstein, B. Fink, & M. Jaanus (Eds.), *Reading seminar XI: Lacan's four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis* (pp. 223-229). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Fink, B. (1999). *A clinical introduction to Lacanian psychoanalysis: Theory and technique*: Harvard University Press.

Fink, B. (2017). The Master Signifier and the Four Discourses. In D. Nobus (Ed.), *Key concepts of Lacanian psychoanalysis* (pp. 29-47). London: Karnac Books.

Fiol, C. M. (2002). Capitalizing on Paradox: The Role of Language in Transforming Organizational Identities. *Organization Science, 13*(6), 653-666.

Fisher, V. E., & Hanna, J. V. (1931). *The dissatisfied worker*. New York: MacMillan.

Flaubert, G. (2010). *Dictionary of Received Ideas* (G. Norminton, Trans. G. Norminton Ed.). Richmond: Alma Classics.

Fleming, P. (2010). You are where you are not: Lacan and ideology in contemporary workplaces. *Lacan and organization*, 169.

Fleming, P. (2017). The human capital hoax: Work, debt and insecurity in the era of Uberization. *Organization Studies, 38*(5), 691-709.

Fleming, P., & Spicer, A. (2003). Working at a cynical distance: Implications for power, subjectivity and resistance. *Organization, 10*(1), 157-179.

Fleming, P., & Sturdy, A. (2011). 'Being yourself'in the electronic sweatshop: New forms of normative control. *Human Relations, 64*(2), 177-200.

Fotaki, M., & Hyde, P. (2015). Organizational blind spots: Splitting, blame and idealization in the National Health Service. *Human Relations, 68*(3), 441-462.

Foucault, M. (1979). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. London: Penguin.

Foucault, M. (1980). *Truth and power in Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977, Gordon, C (Ed).* New York: Pantheon.

Francis, H., & D'Annunzio-Green, N. (2005). HRM and the pursuit of a service culture: Managerial encounters with competing discourses. *Employee Relations, 27*(1), 71-85.

Francis, H., & Keegan, A. (2020). The ethics of engagement in an age of austerity: A paradox perspective. *Journal of Business Ethics, 162*(3), 593-607.

Fredberg, T. (2014). If I say it's complex, it bloody well will be: CEO strategies for managing paradox. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 50*(2), 171-188.

Freud, S. (1955). A difficulty in the path of psycho-analysis. In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII (1917-1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works* (pp. 135-144). London: Hogarth Press.

Freud, S. (1995). Beyond the Pleasure Principle. In P. Gay (Ed.), *The Freud Reader* (pp. 594-626). London: Vintage, Random House.

Freud, S. (1995). The Ego and the Id. In P. Gay (Ed.), *The Freud Reader* (pp. 528-658). London: Vintage, Random House.

Freud, S. (1995). Negation. In P. Gay (Ed.), *The Freud Reader* (pp. 666-669). London: Vintage, Random House.

Freud, S. (1995). Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality. In P. Gay (Ed.), *The Freud Reader* (pp. 239-293). London: Vintage, Random House.

Freud, S. (2009). Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence. In T. Bokanowski & S. Lewkowicz (Eds.), *On Freud's Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence*. London: Karnac.

Freud, S. (2010 [1955]). *The Interpretation of Dreams* (J. Strachey, Trans.). New York: Basic Books.

Freud, S. ([1933] 2001). Lecture XXIX: Revision of the Theory of Dreams. In *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: "New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis" and Other Works (1932-1936)* (Vol. 22). London: Vintage.

Friedman, A. (1977). *Industry and Labour: Class struggle at work and monopoly capitalism*. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press.

Frosh, S. (1997). Psychoanalytic challenges: A contribution to the new sexual agenda. *Human Relations, 50*(3), 229-239.

Gabriel, Y. (1995). The Unmanaged Organization: Stories, Fantasies and Subjectivity. *Organization Studies, 16*(3), 477-501. doi:10.1177/017084069501600305

Gabriel, Y. (2005). Glass cages and glass palaces: Images of organization in image-conscious times. *Organization, 12*(1), 9-27.

Gabriel, Y. (2008). Spectacles of Resistance and Resistance of Spectacles. *Management Communication Quarterly, 21*(3), 310-326.

Gaim, M., Clegg, S., & Cunha, M. P. e. (2021). Managing impressions rather than emissions: Volkswagen and the false mastery of paradox. *Organization Studies*, 949-970.

Georgaca, E., & Gordo-López, A. (1995). Psychotic discourse: Language and subject positions. *Recent trends in theoretical psychology, 4*, 310-315.

Ghoshal, S. (2005). Bad management theories are destroying good management practices. *Academy of Management Learning & Education, 4*(1), 75-91.

Giddens, A. (1984). *The Constitution of Society*. Berkeley CA: University of California Press.

Giraldo, M. (2010). The Unconscious in the Group: A Lacanian Perspective. *Group, 34*(2), 99-111. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.lib.bbk.ac.uk/stable/41719270

Glynos, J. (2008). Ideological fantasy at work. *Journal of political Ideologies, 13*(3), 275-296.

Glynos, J. (2010). *in Cederström, C. and Hoedemaekers, C. (eds). Lacan and Organization*. London: Mayfly Books.

Gotsi, M., Andriopoulos, C., Lewis, M. W., & Ingram, A. E. (2010). Managing creatives: Paradoxical approaches to identity regulation. *Human Relations, 63*(6), 781-805. doi:10.1177/0018726709342929

Grant, D., & Hardy, C. (2003). Introduction: Struggles with Organizational Discourse. *Organization Studies, 25*(1), 5-13. doi:10.1177/0170840604038173

Gray, D. E. (2014). *Doing research in the real world*. London: Sage.

Greenspan, A. (2008). [Transcript of testimony to Government Committee for Oversight and Reform].

Grint, K. (2005). Problems, problems, problems: The social construction of 'leadership'. *Human Relations, 58*(11), 1467-1494. doi:10.1177/0018726705061314

Haas, P. M. (1989). Do regimes matter? Epistemic communities and Mediterranean pollution control. *International Organization, 43*(3), 377-403.

Hacking, I. (2004). *Historical Ontology*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Hacking, I. (2012). Introductory Essay to The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. In: Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

Hacking, I. (2014). *Why is there philosophy of mathematics at all?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hahn, T., & Knight, E. (2019). The Ontology of Organizational Paradox: A Quantum Approach. *The Academy of Management Review, 44*(4), 1-61.

Hahn, T., & Knight, E. (2021). A Quantum Approach to Paradox Entails neither Preexisting Tensions nor Asymmetry: Response to Xin Li. *Academy of Management Review, 46*(2), 415-419. doi:10.5465/amr.2020.0279

Hahn, T., Preuss, L., Pinkse, J., & Figge, F. (2014). Cognitive Frames in Corporate Sustainability: Managerial Sensemaking with Paradoxical and Business Case Frames. *Academy of Management Review, 39*(4), 463-487. doi:10.5465/amr.2012.0341

Halpern, J. J., & Stern, R. C. (2018). *Debating rationality: Nonrational aspects of organizational decision making*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Handy, C. (1994). *The Age of Paradox*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Hardy, C., & Phillips, N. (1999). No joking matter: Discursive struggle in the Canadian refugee system. *Organization Studies, 20*(1), 1-24.

Hargrave, T. J., & Van de Ven, A. H. (2017). Integrating dialectical and paradox perspectives on managing contradictions in organizations. *Organization Studies, 38*(3-4), 319-339.

Harvey, D. (2005). *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hassid, J., & Watson, B. C. (2014). State of mind: Power, time zones and symbolic state centralization. *Time & Society, 23*(2), 167-194. doi:10.1177/0961463x14521489

Hatcher, C. (2008). Becoming a successful corporate character and the role of emotional management. *The emotional organization: Passions and power*, 153-166.

Heidegger, M. (1934). Origin of the Work of Art (A. Hofstadter, Trans.). In *Poetry, Language, Thought*. New York: Harper & Row.

Heskett, J. L., Sasser, W. E., & Schlesinger, L. A. (1997). *Service profit chain*: Simon and Schuster.

Hochschild, A. (1990). Ideology and Emotion Management: A perspective and path for future research. In T. D. Kemper (Ed.), *Research agendas in the sociology of emotions*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Hoedemaekers, C. (2010). *in Cederström, C. and Hoedemaekers, C. (eds). Lacan and Organization*. London: Mayfly Books.

Hoedemaekers, C. (2019). The fantasy of control: Behaviourist transgressions of neoliberal subjectivity. *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society, 24*(3), 303-322.

Holmer-Nadesan, M. (1996). Organizational identity and space of action. *Organization Studies, 17*(1), 49-81.

Holt, R., & Cornelissen, J. (2013). Sensemaking revisited. *Management Learning, 45*(5), 525-539. doi:10.1177/1350507613486422

Holtzhausen, D. R. (2002). The effects of workplace democracy on employee communication behavior: implications for competitive advantage. *Competitiveness Review: An International Business Journal, 12*(2), 30-48. doi:10.1108/eb046440

Hook, D. (2017). The subject of psychology: A Lacanian critique. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 11*(5), 1-10.

Hook, D. (2018). *Six Moments in Lacan: Communication and identification in psychology and psychoanalysis*. New York: Routledge.

Huber, G. (1999). *Le Sujet et la Loi*. Paris: Michalon.

Iedema, R., Degeling, P., Braithwaite, J., & White, L. (2004). 'It's an interesting conversation I'm hearing': the doctor as manager. *Organization Studies, 25*(1), 15-33.

Ivanova, M., & von Scheve, C. (2019). Power through empowerment? The managerial discourse on employee empowerment. *Organization*, 1350508419855709.

Jameson, F. (1972). *The Prison-House of Language*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Jameson, F. (1986). *Foreword by Fredric Jameson*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Jarrett, M., & Vince, R. (2017). Psychoanalytic theory, emotion and organizational paradox. In *The Handbook of Organizational Paradox: Approaches to Plurality, Tensions and Contradictions* (pp. 48-65). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jarzabkowski, P., & Fenton, E. (2006). Strategizing and organizing in pluralistic contexts. *Long Range Planning, 39*(6), 631-648.

Jarzabkowski, P., & Lê, J. (2017). We have to do this and that? You must be joking: Constructing and responding to paradox through humour. *Organization Studies*.

Johnston, A. (2004). The cynic's fetish: Slavoj Žižek and the dynamics of belief. *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society, 9*(3), 259-283.

Kahn, W. A. (1990). Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work. *Academy of Management Journal, 33*(4), 692-724.

Kahneman, D. (2012). Thinking, fast and slow. In. London: Penguin.

Kahneman, D. (2014). Interview with Daniel Kahneman: Rediscovering the Unconscious. *Harvard Magazine, March*.

Kallinikos, J., & Cooper, R. (1996). Writing, rationality and organization: An introduction. *Scandinavian Journal of Management, 12*(1), 1-6.

Kant, I. (1998). *Critique of Pure Reason* (P. Guyer & A. W. Wood, Trans.). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Kant, I. (2012). *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (M. Gregor & J. Timmermann, Trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kantor, J., & Sundaramn, A. (2022). The rise of the worker productivity score. *The New York Times*.

Kaplan, R. S. (2009). Conceptual foundations of the balanced scorecard. *Handbooks of management accounting research, 3*, 1253-1269.

Kaplan, R. S., & Norton, D. P. (1992). The balanced scorecard: measures that drive performance. *Harvard Business Review, 83*(7), 172.

Keller, J., Loewenstein, J., & Yan, J. (2017). Culture, conditions and paradoxical frames. *Organization Studies, 38*(3-4), 539-560.

Keller, J., & Sadler-Smith, E. (2019). Paradoxes and dual processes: A review and synthesis. *International journal of management reviews, 21*(2), 162-184.

Keller, J., & Wen Chen, E. (2017). *A Road Map of the Paradoxical Mind: Expanding Cognitive Theories on Organizational Paradox* (W. K. Smith, L. M., P. Jarzabkowski, & A. Langley Eds. The Oxford Handbook of Organizational Paradox ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kelly, S. (2014). Towards a negative ontology of leadership. *Human Relations, 67*(8), 905-922.

Kelvin, W. T. (1883). *Electrical Units of Measurement: Being One of the Series of Lectures Delivered at The Institution of Civil Engineers, Session 1882-83*: Institution of Civil Engineers.

Kerr, J., & Slocum, J. W. (2005). Managing corporate culture through reward systems. *Academy of Management Perspectives, 19*(4), 130-138.

Kerr, S. (1975). On the folly of rewarding A, while hoping for B. *Academy of Management Journal, 18*(4), 769-783.

Kessler, T., & Mummendey, A. (2001). Is there any scapegoat around? Determinants of intergroup conflicts at different categorization levels. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 81*(6), 1090.

Khanna, T. (2014). Contextual Intelligence. *Harvard Business Review, 92*(9), 58-68.

Khurana, R. (2007). *From higher aims to hired hands: The social transformation of American Organization Theory business schools and the unfulfilled promise of management as a profession*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Klein, M. (1975). Notes on some schizoid mechanisms. In *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works, 1946–1963: The writings of Melanie Klein* (pp. 1-24). London: Virago.

Klikauer, T. (2019). A preliminary theory of managerialism as an ideology. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour, 49*(4), 421-442.

Knight, E., & Cuganesan, S. (2019). Enabling organizational ambidexterity: Valuation practices and the senior-leadership team. *Human Relations*, 0018726718823247. doi:10.1177/0018726718823247

Knight, E., & Hahn, T. (2021). Paradox and quantum mechanics: Implications for the management of organizational paradox from a quantum approach. In *Interdisciplinary dialogues on organizational paradox: Learning from belief and science, part A* (pp. 129-150): Emerald Publishing Limited.

Knight, E., & Paroutis, S. (2017). Becoming salient: The TMT leader's role in shaping the interpretive context of paradoxical tensions. *Organization Studies, 38*(3-4), 403-432.

Knights, D. (1992). Changing spaces: The disruptive impact of a new epistemological location for the study of management. *Academy of Management Review, 17*(3), 514-536.

Knights, D., & Morgan, G. (1991). Corporate strategy, organizations, and subjectivity: A critique. *Organization Studies, 12*(2), 251-273.

Kotsko, A. (2008). *Žižek and theology*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Kotter, J. P., & Schlesinger, L. A. (2008). Choosing Strategies for Change. *Harvard Business Review, 86*(7/8), 130-139.

Kuhn, T. S. ([1962] 2012). The Structure of Scientific Revolutions: 50th Anniversary Edition. *The University of Chicago Press*.

Kunda, G. (2006). *Engineering culture: Culture and control in a high-tech organization.* Temple University Press, Philadelphia.

Lacan, J. (1998). *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book XI. The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (A. Sheridan, Trans. J.-A. Miller Ed.). New York: Norton.

Lacan, J. (1999). *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book XX. Encore 1972-1973. On Feminine Sexuality. The Limits of Love and Knowledge* (B. Fink, Trans.). New York: Norton.

Lacan, J. (2002). *The Seminar. Book XV. The Psychoanalytic Act* (C. Gallagher, Trans.). London: Karnac Books.

Lacan, J. (2006). Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis (B. Fink, Trans.). In *Écrits: The first complete edition in English* (pp. 82-101). New York: Norton.

Lacan, J. (2006). The Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of Its Power (B. Fink, Trans.). In *Écrits: The first complete edition in English* (pp. 489-542). New York: Norton.

Lacan, J. (2006). The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis (B. Fink, Trans.). In *Écrits: The first complete edition in English* (pp. 197-268). New York: Norton.

Lacan, J. (2006). The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious. Or: Reason since Freud (B. Fink, Trans.). In *Écrits: The first complete edition in English* (pp. 412-441). New York: Norton.

Lacan, J. (2006). Psychoanalyis and its Teaching (B. Fink, Trans.). In *Écrits: The first complete edition in English* (pp. 364-383). New York: Norton.

Lacan, J. (2006). Science and Truth (B. Fink, Trans.). In *Écrits: The first complete edition in English* (pp. 726-745). New York: Norton.

Lacan, J. (2006). Seminar on “the Purloined Letter” (B. Fink, Trans.). In *Écrits: The first complete edition in English* (pp. 6-57). New York: Norton.

Lacan, J. (2006). The Signification of the Phallus (B. Fink, Trans.). In *Écrits: The first complete edition in English* (pp. 575-584). New York: Norton.

Lacan, J. (2006). The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious (B. Fink, Trans.). In *Écrits: The first complete edition in English* (pp. 671-702). New York: Norton.

Lacan, J. (2006). Variations on the Standard Treatment (B. Fink, Trans.). In *Écrits: The first complete edition in English*. New York: Norton.

Lacan, J. (2007). *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book XVII – The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* (R. Grigg, Trans.). New York: Norton.

Lacan, J. (2008). *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book VII. The Ethics of Psychoanalysis.* (D. Porter, Trans.). Abingdon: Routledge.

Lacan, J. (2016). *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book X. Anxiety* (A. R. Price, Trans.). Cambridge: Polity Press.

Laclau, E., & Mouffe, C. (2014). *Hegemony and socialist strategy: Towards a radical democratic politics. Second edition*. London: Verso Books.

Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Lanchester, J. (2010). *Whoops!: Why everyone owes everyone and no one can pay*. London: Penguin UK.

Langley, A. (2007). Process thinking in strategic organization. *Strategic Organization, 5*(3), 271-282.

Laplanche, J., & Pontalis, J., B. (1968). Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis, 49*, 1-18.

Laplanche, J., & Pontalis, J. B. (1978). *The language of psychoanalysis*. London: Norton.

LaPorte, T. R. (1975). *Organized social complexity: Challenge to politics and policy*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.

Latham, G. P. (2007). *Work motivation: History, theory, research, and practice*: Sage.

Leonard-Barton, D. (1992). Core capabilities and core rigidities: A paradox in managing new product development. *Strategic management journal, 13*(S1), 111-125.

Levy, D., Reinecke, J., & Manning, S. (2016). The political dynamics of sustainable coffee: Contested value regimes and the transformation of sustainability. *Journal of Management Studies, 53*(3), 364-401.

Lewis, M. (2008). *Derrida and Lacan: Another Writing*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Lewis, M. (2010). *The big short : inside the doomsday machine*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Lewis, M. W. (2000). Exploring paradox: Towards a more comprehensive guide. *The Academy of Management Review, 25*(4), 760-776.

Lewis, M. W., Andriopoulos, C., & Smith, W. K. (2014). Paradoxical leadership to enable strategic agility. *California management review, 56*(3), 58-77.

Lewis, M. W., & Smith, W. K. (2014). Paradox as a Metatheoretical Perspective: Sharpening the Focus and Widening the Scope. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 50*(2), 127-149. doi:10.1177/0021886314522322

Libbrecht, K. (2017). The original sin of psychoanalysis: On the desire of the analyst. In D. Nobus (Ed.), *Key concepts of Lacanian psychoanalysis* (pp. 75-100). London: Karnac Books.

Lunenburg, F. C. (2011). Goal-setting theory of motivation. *International journal of management, business, and administration, 15*(1), 1-6.

Lüscher, L. S., & Lewis, M. W. (2008). Organizational Change and Managerial Sensemaking: Working Through Paradox. *Academy of Management Journal, 51*(2), 221-240.

MacIntyre, A. (1981). *After virtue : a study in moral theory*. London: Duckworth.

Maguire, S., & Hardy, C. (2006). The Emergence of New Global Institutions: A Discursive Perspective. *Organization Studies, 27*(1), 7-29. doi:10.1177/0170840606061807

Maguire, S., & Hardy, C. (2009). Discourse and Deinstitutionalization: The decline of DDT. *Academy of Management Journal, 52*(1), 148-178.

Maister, D. H. (1985). The one-firm firm: What makes it successful. *Sloan Management Review, 27*(1), 35-39.

Maitlis, S., & Christianson, M. (2014). Sensemaking in Organizations: Taking Stock and Moving Forward. *The Academy of Management Annals, 8*(1), 57-125. doi:10.1080/19416520.2014.873177

Malone, K. R., & Friedlander, S. R. (2000). Introduction. In K. R. Malone & S. R. Friedlander (Eds.), *The subject of Lacan: A Lacanian reader for psychologists* (pp. 1-18). New York: SUNY Press.

Marion, R., & Uhl-Bien, M. (2001). Leadership in complex organizations. *Leadership Quarterly, 12*, 389-418.

McFarland, L. A., & Ployhart, R. E. (2017). Strategic Training and Development and Their Role in Shaping Competitive Advantage. In K. G. Brown (Ed.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Workplace Training and Employee Development* (pp. 545-565). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Meyer, J. W. (1983). On the celebration of rationality: some comments on Boland and Pondy. *Accounting, Organizations and Society, 8*(2-3), 235-240.

Micale, M. S. (2008). *Hysterical men : the hidden history of male nervous illness*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Mikkelsen, E. N., Gray, B., & Petersen, A. (2020). Unconscious processes of organizing: Intergroup conflict in mental health care. *Journal of Management Studies, 57*(7), 1355-1383.

Mikkelsen, E. N., & Wåhlin, R. (2019). Dominant, hidden and forbidden sensemaking: The politics of ideology and emotions in diversity management. *Organization, 0*(0), 1350508419830620. doi:10.1177/1350508419830620

Miller, J.-A. (1994). Extimité (F. Massardier-Kenney, Trans.). In M. Bracher, M. Alcorn, R. Corthell, & F. Massardier-Kenney (Eds.), *Lacanian Theory of Discourse: Subject, Structure and Society* (pp. 74-87). New York: New York University Press.

Millward, L. (2012). Focus Groups. In G. M. Breakwell, J. A. Smith, & D. B. Wright (Eds.), *Research Methods in Psychology, Fourth Edition* (pp. 411-438). London: Sage.

Miron-Spektor, E., Erez, M., & Naveh, E. (2011). The effect of conformist and attentive-to-detail members on team innovation: Reconciling the innovation paradox. *Academy of Management Journal, 54*(4), 740-760.

Miron-Spektor, E., Ingram, A., Keller, J., Smith, W. K., & Lewis, M. W. (2018). Microfoundations of organizational paradox: the problem is how we think about the problem. *Academy of Management Journal, 61*(1), 26-45. doi:10.5465/amj.2016.0594

Moi, T. (1989). Patriarchal Thought and the Drive for Knowledge. In T. Brennan (Ed.), *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (pp. 189-205). London: Routledge.

Morgan, D. L. (2010). Reconsidering the role of interaction in analyzing and reporting focus groups. *Qualitative health research, 20*(5), 718-722.

Morrell, K. (2008). The Narrative of ‘Evidence Based’ Management: A Polemic. *Journal of Management Studies, 45*(3), 613-635. doi:10.1111/j.1467-6486.2007.00755.x

Morrell, K., & Learmonth, M. (2015). Against evidence-based management, for management learning. *Academy of Management Learning & Education, 14*(4), 520-533.

Muller, J. P., & Richardson, W. J. (1982). *Lacan and language*. Madison CT: International Universities Press.

Müller, M. (2012). Lack and jouissance in hegemonic discourse of identification with the state. *Organization, 20*(2), 279-298.

Mumby, D. K. (2005). Theorizing resistance in organization studies: A dialectical approach. *Management Communication Quarterly, 19*(1), 19-44.

Mumby, D. K. (2011). What's cooking in organizational discourse studies? A response to Alvesson and Karreman. *Human Relations, 64*(9), 1147-1161. doi:10.1177/0018726711408367

Mumby, D. K. (2016). Organizing beyond organization: Branding, discourse, and communicative capitalism. *Organization, 23*(6), 884-907.

Mumby, D. K., & Putnam, L. L. (1992). The politics of emotion - a feminist reading of bounded rationality. *Academy of Management Review, 17*(3), 465-486. doi:10.5465/amr.1992.4281983

Munday, J. (2006). Identity in focus: The use of focus groups to study the construction of collective identity. *Sociology, 40*(1), 89-105.

Murnighan, J. K., & Conlon, D. E. (1991). The dynamics of intense work groups: A study of British string quartets. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 165-186.

Murray, M. (2016). *Lacan: A critical introduction*. London: Pluto Press.

Nahavandi, A. (2006). The art and science of leadership, Ltd. In: Pearson Education.

Neill, C. (2013). Breaking the text: An introduction to Lacanian discourse analysis. *Theory & Psychology, 23*(3), 334-350.

Newton, I. ([1686] 1999). *The Principia: mathematical principles of natural philosophy*. Berkeley: Univ of California Press.

Nkomo, S. M., & Cox, T. (1996). Diverse identities in organizations. In S. Clegg, C. Hardy, & W. Nord (Eds.), *Handbook of Organization Studies* (pp. 338-356). London: Sage.

Nobus, D. (2002). A matter of cause: reflections on Lacan's "Science and truth". In *Lacan & Science* (pp. 89-118). Abingdon: Routledge.

Noon, M. (2018). Pointless diversity training: Unconscious bias, new racism and agency. *Work, employment and society, 32*(1), 198-209.

O'Neill, O. (2010). *The Two Cultures 50 Years On*. Paper presented at the Why Humanities?, Birkbeck, University of London. http://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2010/11/onora-oneill-the-two-cultures-fifty-years-on/

Oswick, C., Keenoy, T., & Grant, D. (2002). Metaphor and analogical reasoning in organization theory: Beyond orthodoxy. *Academy of Management Review, 27*(2), 294-303.

Parker, I. (2001). Lacan, psychology and the discourse of the university. *Psychoanalytic Studies, 3*(1), 67-77.

Parker, I. (2002). *Against Management*. Cambridge: Polity.

Parker, I. (2005). Lacanian Discourse Analysis in Psychology: Seven Theoretical Elements. *Theory & Psychology, 15*(2), 163-182. doi:10.1177/0959354305051361

Parker, I. (2015). *Psychology after Lacan*. London: Pluto Press.

Pavón-Cuéllar, D. (2014). From the word to the event. Limits, posibilities and challenges of lacanian discourse analysis. *Lacan, discourse, event: New psychoanalytic approaches to textual indeterminacy*, 325-337.

Peters, T. J., & Waterman, R. H. (1982). *In Search of Excellence; lessons from America's best run companies*. New York: Harper & Row.

Petriglieri, G. (2020). F** k science!? An invitation to humanize organization theory. *Organization Theory, 1*(1), 2631787719897663.

Petriglieri, G., & Stein, M. (2012). The unwanted self: Projective identification in leaders' identity work. *Organization Studies, 33*, 1217-1235.

Poole, M. S., & Van de Ven, A. H. (1989). Using paradox to build management and organization theories. *Academy of Management Review, 14*(4), 562-578.

Pradies, C., Tunarosa, A., Lewis, M. W., & Courtois, J. (2021). From vicious to virtuous paradox dynamics: The social-symbolic work of supporting actors. *Organization Studies, 42*(8), 1241-1263.

Pratt, M. G., & Crosina, E. (2016). The Nonconscious at Work. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior, 3*(1), 321-347. doi:10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-041015-062517

Putnam, L. L. (2015). *Moving beyond 'both-and' approaches: Alternative strategies for managing paradoxical tensions.* Paper presented at the 31st colloquium of the European Group on organization studies, Athens, Greece.

Putnam, L. L., Fairhurst, G. T., & Banghart, S. G. (2016). Contradictions, Dialectics, and Paradoxes in Organizations: A Constitutive Approach. *The Academy of Management Annals, 10*(1), 65-171.

Quinn, R. E., & Rohrbaugh, J. (1983). A spatial model of effectiveness criteria: Towards a competing values approach to organizational analysis. *Management Science, 29*(3), 363-377.

Ringeisen-Biardeaud, J. (2017). "Let's take back control": Brexit and the Debate on Sovereignty. *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique. French Journal of British Studies, 22*(XXII-2).

Roberts, J. (2005). The power of the 'imaginary'in disciplinary processes. *Organization, 12*(5), 619-642.

Roberts, J., & Jones, M. (2009). Accounting for self interest in the credit crisis. *Accounting, Organizations and Society, 34*(6-7), 856-867.

Rorty, R. (1992). *The linguistic turn: Essays in philosophical method*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Ross, A. (2004). *No-Collar: The Humane Workplace and its Hidden Costs*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Rothenberg, A. (1979). *The Emerging Goddess: The Creative Process in Science and Other Fields*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Sackett, D. L., Rosenberg, W. M., Gray, J. A. M., Haynes, R. B., & Richardson, W. S. (1996). Evidence based medicine: what it is and what it isn't. *British Medical Journal, 312*, 71-72.

Saïd Business School. (2015). The CEO Report. Embracing the Paradoxes of Leadership and the Power of Doubt. Research on the roles of 150 global CEOs by Saïd Business School and Heidrick & Struggles. In. Oxford, Chicago.

Sandberg, J., & Tsoukas, H. (2014). Making sense of the sensemaking perspective: Its constituents, limitations, and opportunities for further development. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 36*(1), 6-32.

Saussure, F. ([1916] 2011). *Course in General Linguistics* (W. Baskin, Trans. P. Meisel & H. Saussy Eds. 1959 ed.). London: Fontana/Collins.

Schad, J. (2017). Ad Fontes: Philosophical Foundations of Paradox Research. In W. K. Smith, M. W. Lewis, P. Jarzabkowski, & A. Langley (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of organizational paradox* (pp. 27-47). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Schad, J., Lewis, M. W., Raisch, S., & Smith, W. K. (2016). Paradox Research in Management Science: Looking Back to Move Forward. *Academy of Management Annals, 10*(1), 5-64.

Schad, J., Lewis, M. W., & Smith, W. K. (2019). Quo vadis, paradox? Centripetal and centrifugal forces in theory development. *Strategic Organization, 17*(1), 107-119.

Schaufeli, W., & Enzmann, D. (1998). *The burnout companion to study and practice: A critical analysis*. Boca Raton: CRC press.

Schaufeli, W. B., Bakker, A. B., & Salanova, M. (2006). The measurement of work engagement with a short questionnaire: A cross-national study. *Educational and psychological measurement, 66*(4), 701-716.

Schildt, H., Mantere, S., & Cornelissen, J. (2019). Power in sensemaking processes. *Organization Studies*, 1-25.

Sciortino, L. (2021). The emergence of objectivity: Fleck, Foucault, Kuhn and Hacking. *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part A, 88*, 128-137.

Sheep, M. L., Fairhurst, G. T., & Khazanchi, S. (2017). Knots in the discourse of innovation: Investigating multiple tensions in a reacquired spin-off. *Organization Studies, 38*(3-4), 463-488.

Shenhav, Y. (1999). *Manufacturing rationality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Shenhav, Y. (2005). The Historical and Epistemological Foundations of Organization Theory: Fusing Sociological Theory with Engineering Discourse. In C. Knudsen & H. Tsoukas (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Organization Theory* (pp. 183-209). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Shipp, A. J., & Jansen, K. J. (2021). The “other” time: A review of the subjective experience of time in organizations. *Academy of Management Annals, 15*(1), 299-334.

Shoukry, H., & Cox, E. (2018). Coaching as a social process. *Management Learning, 49*(4), 413-428.

Simon, H. ([1957] 1997). *Administrative Behavior*. New York: Free Press.

Simon, H. ([1959] 2002). Theories of Decision-Making in Economics and Behavioral Science. *The American Economic Review, 49*(3), 253-283.

Simon, H. A. (1989). Making management decisions: The role of intuition and emotion. *Academy of Management Perspectives, 1*(1), 57-64.

Sjoberg, G. (1967). Contradictory Functional Requirements and Social Systems. In N. J. Demerath & A. Peterson (Eds.), *System, Change and Conflict*. New York: The Free Press.

Škvorecký, J. (1994). *Red Music*. Hopewell, New Jersey: The Ecco Press.

Smith, K. K., & Berg, D. N. (1987). *Paradoxes of group life: Understanding conflict, paralysis, and movement in group dynamics*: Jossey-Bass.

Smith, W., Erez, M., Jarvenpaa, S., Lewis, M. W., & Tracey, P. (2017). Adding Complexity to Theories of Paradox, Tensions, and Dualities of Innovation and Change: Introduction to Organization Studies Special Issue on Paradox, Tensions, and Dualities of Innovation and Change. *Organization Studies, 38*(3-4), 303-317. doi:10.1177/0170840617693560

Smith, W. K. (2014). Dynamic Decision Making: A Model of Senior Leaders Managing Strategic Paradoxes. *Academy of Management Journal, 57*(6), 1592-1623. doi:10.5465/amj.2011.0932

Smith, W. K., & Besharov, M. L. (2017). Bowing before Dual Gods: How Structured Flexibility Sustains Organizational Hybridity. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 1-44.

Smith, W. K., Besharov, M. L., Wessels, A. K., & Chertok, M. (2012). A Paradoxical Leadership Model for Social Entrepreneurs: Challenges, Leadership Skills, and Pedagogical Tools for Managing Social and Commercial Demands. *Academy of Management Learning & Education, 11*(3), 463-478. doi:10.5465/amle.2011.0021

Smith, W. K., Binns, A., & Tushman, M. L. (2010). Complex Business Models: Managing Strategic Paradoxes Simultaneously. *Long Range Planning, 43*(2-3), 448-461. doi:10.1016/j.lrp.2009.12.003

Smith, W. K., & Lewis, M. W. (2011). Toward a theory of paradox: A dynamic equilibrium model of organizing. *Academy of Management Review, 36*(2), 381-403.

Smith, W. K., & Lewis, M. W. (2012). Leadership Skills for Managing Paradoxes. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology, 5*(2), 227-231.

Smith, W. K., & Lewis, M. W. (2022). *Both/and thinking: Embracing creative tensions to solve your toughest problems*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press.

Smith, W. K., Lewis, M. W., & Tushman, M. L. (2016). 'Both/And' Leadership. *Harvard Business Review, May*, 62-72.

Smith, W. K., & Tushman, M. L. (2005). Managing strategic contradictions: A top management model for managing innovation streams. *Organization Science, 16*(5), 522-536. doi:10.1287/orsc.1050.0134

Smithson, J. (2008). Focus Groups. In P. Alasuutari, J. Brannen, & L. Bickman (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of social research methods* (pp. 357-370). London: Sage.

Sonenshein, S. (2007). The role of construction, intuition and justification in responding to ethical issues at work: The sensemaking-intuition model. *Academy of Management Review, 32*(4), 1022-1040.

Spicer, A., Alvesson, M., & Karreman, D. (2016). Extending critical performativity. *Human Relations, 69*(2), 225-249. doi:10.1177/0018726715614073

Spillane, R., & Joullié, J.-E. (2021). The decline of authority and the rise of managerialism. *Organization, 0*(0), 13505084211061242. doi:10.1177/13505084211061242

Steingard, D. S., & Fitzgibbons, D. E. (1993). A postmodern deconstruction of total quality management (TQM). *Journal of Organizational Change Management, 6*(5), 27-42.

Sundaramurthy, C., & Lewis, M. (2003). Control and collaboration: Paradoxes of governance. *Academy of Management Review, 28*(3), 397-415.

Sutcliffe, K. M. (2013). Sensemaking. In M. Augier & D. Teece (Eds.), *The Palgrave encyclopedia of strategic management*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Taylor, F. ([1911] 1982). Principles of Scientific Management. In D. Pugh (Ed.), *Organization Theory* (pp. 124-146). Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Taylor, P., Loretto, W., Marshall, V., Earl, C., & Phillipson, C. (2016). The older worker: Identifying a critical research agenda. *Social Policy and Society, 15*(4), 675-689.

Torfing, J. (1999). *New Theories of Discourse: Laclau, Mouffe and Žižek*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Townley, B. (2008). *Reason's neglect : rationality and organizing*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press.

Townley, B. (2008). *Reason's Neglect: rationality and organizing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tsoukas, H., & Chia, R. (2002). On organizational becoming: Rethinking organizational change. *Organization Science, 13*(5), 567-582. doi:10.1287/orsc.13.5.567.7810

Tursunbayeva, A., Di Lauro, S., & Pagliari, C. (2018). People analytics—A scoping review of conceptual boundaries and value propositions. *International Journal of Information Management, 43*, 224-247.

Uhl-Bien, M., & Arena, M. (2017). Complexity leadership: Enabling people and organizations for adaptability. *Organizational Dynamics, 46*(1), 9-20.

Valentin, C. (2014). The extra mile deconstructed: A critical and discourse perspective on employee engagement and HRD. *Human Resource Development International, 17*(4), 475-490.

Vanheule, S., Lievrouw, A., & Verhaeghe, P. (2003). Burnout and intersubjectivity: A psychoanalytical study from a Lacanian perspective. *Human Relations, 56*(3), 321-338.

Vanheule, S., & Verhaeghe, P. (2005). Professional Burnout in the Mirror: A Qualitative Study From a Lacanian Perspective. *Psychoanalytic Psychology, 22*(2), 285-305. doi:10.1037/0736-9735.22.2.285

Verhaeghe, P. (1995). From impossibility to inability: Lacan's theory on the four discourses. *The Letter: Lacanian Perspectives on Psychoanalysis, 3. Spring*, 91-108.

Verhaeghe, P. (1995). From impossibility to inability: Lacan's theory on the four discourses'. *The letter: Lacanian perspectives on psychoanalysis, 3*(Spring), 91-108.

Verhaeghe, P. (2017). Causation and Destitution of a Pre-ontological Non-entity: On the Lacanian Subject. Chapter. In D. Nobus (Ed.), *Key Concepts of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*. London: Karnac Books.

Vidaillet, B., & Gamot, G. (2015). Working and Resisting when One's Workplace is Under Threat of Being Shut Down: A Lacanian Perspective. *Organization Studies, 36*(8), 987-1011. doi:10.1177/0170840615580013

Vince, R. (2006). Being taken over: Managers' emotions and rationalizations during a company takeover. *Journal of Management Studies, 43*(2), 343-365.

Vince, R. (2018). The learning organization as paradox: Being for the learning organization also means being against it. *The Learning Organization*.

Vince, R. (2019). Institutional Illogics: The Unconscious and Institutional Analysis. *Organization Studies, 40*(7), 953-973.

Vince, R., & Broussine, M. (1996). Paradox, defence and attachment: Accessing and working with emotions and relations underlying organizational change. *Organization Studies, 17*(1), 1-21.

Viteles, M. S. (1932). *Industrial Psychology*. New York: Norton.

Waldman, D. A., & Bowen, D. E. (2016). Learning to be a paradox-savvy leader. *Academy of Management Perspectives, 30*(3), 316-327.

Waldman, D. A., Putnam, L. L., Miron-Spektor, E., & Siegel, D. (2019). The role of paradox theory in decision making and management research. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*.

Waldman, D. A., Ward, M., & Becker, W. J. (2017). Neuroscience in organizational behavior. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior, 4*, 425-444.

Walker, B. W., & Caprar, D. V. (2020). When performance gets personal: Towards a theory of performance-based identity. *Human Relations, 73*(8), 1077-1105.

Watson, J. B. (1913). Psychology as the behaviorist views it. *Psychological review, 20*(2), 158.

Weick, K. E. (1979). *The Social Psychology of Organizing*. Boston MA: Addison-Wesley.

Woźniak, A. (2010). The dream that caused reality: The place of the Lacanian subject of science in the field of organization theory. *Organization, 17*(3), 395-411.

Wright, C., & Nyberg, D. (2017). An inconvenient truth: how organizations translate climate change into business as usual. *Academy of Management Journal, 60*(5), 1633-1661. doi:10.5465/amj.2015.0718

Ybema, S. (1996). *A duck-billed platypus in the theory and analysis of organizations: Combinations of consensus and dissensus. In W. Koot, I. Sabelis, & S. Ybema (Eds.), Contradictions in context: Puzzling over paradoxes in contemporary organizations.* Amsterdam:: VU Uni- versity Press.

Yigitbasioglu, O. M., & Velcu, O. (2012). A review of dashboards in performance management: Implications for design and research. *International Journal of Accounting Information Systems, 13*(1), 41-59.

Yukl, G. (2010). *Leadership in organizations* (7th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

Žižek, S. (1989). *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso.

Žižek, S. (1997). *The plague of fantasies*. London: Verso.

Žižek, S. (2006). *How to read Lacan*. London: Granta.

Žižek, S. (2006). *Interrogating the real*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Žižek, S. (2009). *In defense of lost causes*. London: Verso.

Žižek, S. (2014). *Absolute recoil: Towards a New Foundation of Dialectical Materialism*. London: Verso.

Žižek, S. (2017). The seven veils of fantasy. In D. Nobus (Ed.), *Key concepts of Lacanian psychoanalysis* (pp. 190-218). London: Karnac.

Žižek, S. (2017) *Freud Lives! Slavoj Žižek and Stephen Grosz/Interviewer: S. Grosz*. How to Academy Mindset, Youtube, Emmanuel Centre, London.