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Individual Responses to Paradox: The Articulation Between Emotion and Cognition

Diana Santistevan[1]*, Anne-Sophie Thélisson[2], and Linh-Chi Vo[2]

[1]Métis Lab, EM Normandie Business School, Caen, France
[2]Institute of Sustainable Business and Organizations; Sciences & Humanities Confluence Research Center – UCLy, ESDES, Lyon, France

Abstract

This article examines how emotions and cognition work together to shape individual responses to paradox. While much-existing research focuses on organizational response or the effect that either emotions or cognitions have on individual responses, our work shows how emotion and cognition work together to create individual responses. Based on a qualitative study of a global organization with employees who regularly face paradoxes, we found two cognitive appraisals (perception regarding the difficulty of managing paradoxical tensions and self-perception of leadership role) that either generate emotion or regulate response. By examining the interlinking of appraisal – emotion – appraisal – response, we identify two mechanisms that demonstrate the articulation between emotion and cognition: the non-regulated response and the regulated response. We contribute to the existing literature by detailing each mechanism and explaining how emotions and cognition work together to shape individual responses.

Keywords: *Emotions; Cognition; Paradox; Individual responses; Active responses*

Organizational and individual responses to paradox represent an important part of the paradox literature (e.g., Miron-Spektor et al., 2018; Schad et al., 2016). Paradoxes, defined as simultaneous and contradictory demands that persist over time (Lewis, 2000; Smith & Lewis, 2011), are emotionally and cognitively challenging conundrums that individuals face regularly in complex organizations. Individual response to paradoxes is particularly important to understand why some individuals can harness paradoxes to navigate them, but others feel stuck (e.g., Schad et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2017). The link between individual response to paradox and organizational performance has broadened inquiries into the role played by emotions (Pradies, 2022; Vince & Broussine, 1996) and cognition (Knight & Paroutis, 2017; Pradies, 2022). While the burgeoning body of literature in this area provides important insights (e.g., Knight & Paroutis, 2017; Pradies, 2022; Vince & Broussine, 1996), there are ample opportunities for furthering that research.

First, although studies acknowledge the importance of emotion and cognition, they do not empirically explore the articulation between the two in shaping individual responses (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018; Schad et al., 2016). Deciphering the underlying mechanisms in the emotion–cognition relationship could provide additional insights into variations of individual response. Second, scholars have investigated the valence (positivity/negativity) of emotions (e.g., Jarrett & Vince, 2017; Vince & Broussine, 1996) but not the intensity of emotions (high/low), which, according to recent research in psychology, is an important aspect of understanding response (e.g., Ochsner & Gross, 2007). As emotional intensity shapes behavior (Filipowicz et al., 2011), it is surprising that it has not been more present in the study of individual responses to paradox.

Third, the existing literature tends to concentrate on organizational responses (e.g., Ashforth & Reingen, 2014; Chung & Beamish, 2010; Im & Rai, 2014; Klarner & Raisch, 2013; Miron-Spektor et al., 2011; Pamphile, 2022; Schmitt & Raisch, 2013). Although paradox scholars are starting to examine individual-level responses to paradox (Miron-Spektor et al., 2011, 2018; Pradies et al., 2021; Waldman et al., 2019), many tend to mix different levels of analysis (e.g., Andriopoulos & Lewis,

*Corresponding author: Diana Santistevan, Email: dsantistevan@em-normandie.fr

2009; Jarvenpaa & Wernick, 2011). This approach does not provide a fine-tuned understanding of the variation of individual responses.

We address those issues through a qualitative case study of a complex global organization, focusing on the following question: *How do cognition and emotion work together to shape individual responses to paradox?* Our field study is particularly adapted to paradox, as our respondents regularly experience interdependent yet contradictory demands between the organization's goals and/or agendas while trying to achieve organizational performance. Our data, collected over 2 years, represents interviews with 60 global account employees. By using an abductive approach based on thematic analysis (Guest et al., 2013) and relying on research in neuropsychology (e.g., Gross, 2013; Ochsner & Gross, 2007), we identify mechanisms in the emotion-cognition relationship that contribute to understanding differences in individual response. By studying both emotional valence (positive/negative) and intensity (high/low), we can tease out three emotions (frustration, self-confidence, and dissatisfaction). Leveraging the characteristics of emotion holistically together with cognition allows for a more nuanced understanding of individual responses.

We contribute to the paradox literature by demonstrating two mechanisms that explain the articulation between emotion and cognition in shaping individual response: the nonregulated response and the regulated response. These mechanisms include two cognitive appraisals (perception regarding the difficulty of managing paradoxical tensions and self-perception of leadership role) that either generate emotion or regulate response.

Theoretical framework

Responding to paradoxes

Paradoxes persist and evolve over time (Smith & Lewis, 2011), and *responding* to them is an inherent part of the process (Fairhurst et al., 2016; Schad et al., 2016). Researchers in the field tend to study responses aggregated to the group level, such as a team or business unit (e.g., Ashforth & Reingen, 2014; Drach-Zahavy & Freund, 2007; Gebert et al., 2010; Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004; Khazanchi et al., 2007; Miron-Spektor et al., 2011), or to the firm level (e.g., Adler et al., 1999; Klarner & Raisch, 2013; Schmitt & Raisch, 2013; Velu & Stiles, 2013), and their research has provided a variety of insights into how individuals navigate paradoxes.

Organizational responses can be defensive (e.g., Ashforth & Reingen, 2014; Vince & Broussine, 1996) or active (e.g., Lüscher & Lewis, 2008). Defensive organizational responses include avoiding, denying (Derksen et al., 2019), splitting (Poole & Van de Ven, 1989) and differentiating (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009; Jay, 2013). Defensive responses often do not consider

paradoxes holistically but focus on the interactions between their two opposing poles (Lewis, 2000). Active responses, also called integrating strategies, seek synergies that accommodate the two poles of the tension (Smith, 2014). They allow people not only to accept those tensions but also to work through them (Lewis, 2000; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008). For example, the active response of transcendence characterizes how people leverage the complexity of paradox to propose alternatives (Bednarek et al., 2017; Jarzabkowski et al., 2013). Given their more holistic nature, active organizational responses may be more likely to drive longer-term success (Smith & Lewis, 2011). Scholars are starting to overcome the active/defensive dichotomy by showing how the same response can be either more positive or negative depending on the specific situations in which they arise (Jarzabkowski & Lê, 2017).

Paradox scholars acknowledge the need to study individuals (Jarzabkowski & Lê, 2017; Waldman et al., 2019) to explain why certain individuals respond to paradox either more actively or more defensively (Lewis & Smith, 2022). Although research on organizational responses has provided some preliminary explanations by focusing on individual communication, such as using rhetorical skills (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009), irony (Gylfe et al., 2019), or humor (Jarzabkowski & Lê, 2017), it does not dig into the conditions that permit actors to develop active responses.

Research examining individual responses to paradox addresses some of those issues. For example, some individuals develop a paradox mindset (Pamphile, 2022) which enables them to address the paradox holistically by learning to live (Lewis, 2000) or work with that situation (Lüscher et al., 2006; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008). Some individuals recalibrate their thinking to explore the potential of the paradox (Lewis, 2000; Lewis & Smith, 2014). In contrast, individuals who do not have a paradox mindset may feel paralysis and adopt defensive mechanisms to avoid or deny tensions (Lewis, 2000; Vince & Broussine, 1996). Studies have therefore started to show the importance of cognition (e.g., the paradox mindset) and emotion (e.g., feelings of paralysis) (Lewis & Smith, 2022) in understanding why individuals respond to paradox in one way and not another. Nevertheless, to provide a more fine-tuned examination of variation in individual response, more investigation is needed (Schad et al., 2016).

The role of emotion in individual response to paradox

Emotions are essential for understanding individual responses to paradoxes (Calabretta et al., 2017; Pradies et al., 2021; Schad et al., 2016). Emotions can drive paradoxes to the surface (Pradies, 2022; Schad et al., 2016) and render them salient (Jarzabkowski & Lê, 2017; Miron-Spektor et al., 2018). Negative emotions such as emotional anxiety may fuel defensive responses, such as denial, repression, and paralysis, which lead to

unethical behaviors or organizational inertia (Smith & Lewis, 2011). In contrast, positive emotions such as emotional equanimity, which is defined as a state of emotional calm and evenness (Smith & Lewis, 2011), may minimise defensiveness and fear, thus reducing the potential for vicious cycles (Sundaramurthy & Lewis, 2003). Actors can sometimes feel mixed emotions (Vince & Broussine, 1996; Williams & Aaker, 2002), including simultaneously conflicting ones (Larsen et al., 2001), instead of experiencing either purely positive or negative emotions (Raza-Ullah, 2020).

Recent studies have started to respond to the call for more attention to emotional mechanisms that underlie individual responses to paradox (Cunha & Putnam, 2019; Fairhurst, 2019; Jarzabkowski & Lê, 2017; Pouthier & Vince, 2020; Pradies, 2022; Putnam et al., 2016; Schad et al., 2016). Researchers often focus on emotional valence (positive/negative). For example, in his research on coopetition, Raza-Ullah (2020) demonstrates how managers confronting paradoxical situations experience emotional ambivalence, a state in which positive emotions and negative emotions coexist simultaneously (Fong, 2006; Pratt & Doucet, 2000). Pradies et al. (2021) focus on emotional equanimity in driving virtuous cycles. Yet there is a need to go beyond the positive/negative dichotomy to examine the intensity of an emotion (e.g., from mild to intense anger). Indeed, Scherer (2005, p. 721) proposes that when studying emotions, researchers need to 'go beyond simple valence-arousal space' and to allow 'systematic assessment of the intensity of the feeling'.

The role of cognition in individual response to paradox

Cognition is the mental process that transforms, reduces, stores and recovers sensory information (Neisser, 1967). In the paradox literature, scholars mostly focus on cognition by referring to frames or cognitive schema to select and organize information to reduce complexity and ambiguity in the organizational context (Hahn et al., 2014). Through schemas (Calabretta et al., 2017), frames (Cornelissen & Werner, 2014; Lewis & Smith, 2022; Miron-Spektor et al., 2022), or rationality (e.g., Calabretta et al., 2017; Keller & Sadler-Smith, 2019), individuals make sense of a paradox and respond accordingly (Smith & Tushman, 2005). Cognition can influence whether individuals adopt an active or defensive response to paradox (Smith & Tushman, 2005), and certain polarizing cognitive styles create defensive responses (Smith, 2014). Cognitive confusion generated by change can paralyze actors and block their abilities to decipher meanings amid complex ongoing changes (Lüscher & Lewis, 2008; McKinley & Scherer, 2000; Smith & Tushman, 2005). On the other hand, cognitive complexity (Lewis & Smith, 2022), or the cognitive ability to adopt contradictory managerial behaviors (Lewis & Smith, 2014), leads to more active individual responses to paradox.

Paradox studies show that role identity (Smith, 2014) or professional identity (Ahuja et al., 2017) and an individual's perception of such identities influence individual response. Leadership, which is defined either as a role identity (e.g., Waldman et al., 2019) or a work identity (e.g., Nyberg & Sveningsson, 2014), is crucial in managing paradoxes (Smith, 2014). Individuals' self-perception (i.e., their mental representation of themselves) as potential leaders (Van Quaquebeke et al., 2011) shapes their behavior in coping with paradoxes. For example, Smith (2014) identifies how managers redefine the roles and work identities of senior leaders to manage paradoxical tensions linked to innovation. Indeed, the way senior leaders perceive their leadership roles influences whether they will adopt integrating strategies or differentiating ones. Denis et al. (2001) show that top-tier managers argue that their role is to embrace paradoxes between long-term strategies and short-term objectives and to ensure that both happen simultaneously. This is a more active response.

The articulation of emotion and cognition in shaping individual responses to paradox

As presented above, both cognition and emotion influence the way individuals respond to paradox. Paradox is not only an emotional experience (i.e., experiencing paradox in one's heart) (Lê & Bednarek, 2017; Lewis & Smith, 2022) but also a cognitive one (i.e., recognizing paradox in one's head) (Knight & Paroutis, 2017; Lewis & Smith, 2022). Paradox scholars (e.g., Lewis & Smith, 2022; Schad et al., 2016) have advocated for studying the combination of the two in shaping individual responses to paradox. In their dynamic equilibrium model, Smith and Lewis (2011) propose that individual emotional and cognitive responses to paradoxical tensions alternatively fuel vicious or virtuous cycles. Lewis and Smith (2022) also note the link between assumptions (associated with cognition) and comfort (associated with emotions) in driving individual responses to paradoxes, thus suggesting that a paradox mindset includes both cognitive processes and emotional experiences. To date, paradox scholars have grouped cognition and emotion as a whole (e.g., Smith & Lewis, 2011), or relied on an interdependent link between cognition and emotion (e.g., Lewis & Smith, 2022), without identifying how the two dimensions work together or influence one another. Consequently, the mechanisms that connect emotions and cognition leading to virtuous or vicious cycles of response (Fairhurst et al., 2016), or to active versus defensive responses (Schad et al., 2016), are not unclear.

Psychology and neuropsychology provide insights into the dynamics of emotion, cognition and behavioral response (e.g., Gross, 2013). According to this research, the response to stimuli or events is a result of cognitive appraisal systems that generate and regulate emotions and behavior. Specifically, cognitive

appraisals can guide, shape or alter the way individuals perceive an object, event or stimulus which generates a given emotion (Ochsner & Gross, 2007). For example, perceptions or beliefs may lead individuals to appraise an otherwise neural stimulus as emotionally evocative. Cognitive appraisals can also alter the way emotion influences experiential, physiological, or behavioral responses through regulation. In this case, the cognitive appraisal serves as a 'control process' to start, stop, or alter a response. These neurological architectures allow for a more nuanced approach to the study of individual responses to paradox by focusing on cognitive appraisals that generate emotions and regulate responses. To encompass these insights, this study addresses the broader question: *How do cognition and emotion work together to shape individual responses to paradox?*

Methodology

Empirical setting

Our empirical setting is a global sales organization (C-TECK) that includes hundreds of global account teams organized by geographical region. The global account teams serve important global clients by leveraging the products and services found in C-TECK's multiple business units. Each global account has a small core team that focuses on the account strategy and the client relationship. That small group spends most of its time on the account and reports directly to global account management. Each account has an extended team of 50 to 100 part-time contributors whose time is allocated to several accounts. The organization and structure of the global sales organization give rise to different paradoxes at various levels within the organization.

Data collection

As part of a larger exploratory project about global work, we collected data at multiple company sites in multiple countries (e.g., France, Sweden and Japan) over a period of 2 years. The primary data source was face-to-face (generally 1–1.5 h) and telephone interviews (generally 30–45 min) with 60 different actors in the global account organization. In accordance with nascent qualitative research, we used open-question techniques (Edmondson & McManus, 2007) to focus on how respondents dealt with any complexity found in their global organization. Over time, the questions became more refined. The data were supplemented with site visits and participation in account activities. Attending meetings, conference calls, and training sessions also allowed for insights into the dynamics and interactions between key stakeholders. Observations during group travel (e.g., 2-h car rides and flights lasting between 3 and 4 h), work lunches/dinners, and social events with respondents provided informal opportunities to discuss the various challenges respondents faced in their daily work. The observation data helped to add nuance to the interviews while also giving us the opportunity to ask additional questions and to clarify discrepancies and interpretations. Table 1 provides an overview of the data collected.

Data analysis

Our data analysis was iterative, meaning we moved back and forth between the data, literature, and analysis (Gioia et al., 2013), introducing concepts for meaning and theoretical relevance along the way. We relied on both Excel databases and NVivo software to ensure systematic analysis of our emerging analytical themes. The entirety of the data analysis occurred over three stages, which are detailed in this section.

Stage one: Open coding and initial analysis

First, we identified 143 tensions (a single interview might include many tensions) by extracting the specific occurrences (Trefalt, 2013; Wright et al., 2017) from transcribed interviews and observation data. In each occurrence, actors explained the tensions they experienced in the organization due to

Table 1. Data collection

Primary data	Face-to-face interviews	24 interviews (duration of 1–1.5 h)
	Telephone interviews	46 interviews (duration of 30–45 min)
	Observation	28 days
		30+ meetings
		5 sessions of team training
		34 work lunches/dinners with 46 respondents
		10+ informal interviews or written commentaries
Secondary data	C-TECK annual meeting minutes or slides	4 documents
	Emails	400+ emails with respondents

Source: Own elaboration.

differences such as the assessment of new sales deals, sales objectives, resource allocation, and sales processes. Two of the authors listened to each interview and coded the overarching reason for the tensions, the respondent characteristics (e.g., seniority, perception of identity, professional experience, and past performance), and other contextual factors such as regulated environments, virtual environments, and international environments.

Stage two: Fine-tuning emerging concepts

Paradoxes. When analyzing the occurrences of tensions, we found that many were directly related to contradictory agendas and objectives, thus compelling us to explore the paradox lens. Following a methodological approach like that of Jarzabkowski et al. (2013), we found five types of conflicting but interdependent tensions that met the definition of paradox (Smith & Lewis, 2011). Table 2 indicates each paradox and its definition according to Smith and Lewis (2011), with evidence of the paradox from the field. We removed 84 occurrences that did not meet the definition of paradox. That left a total of 60 paradoxical tensions. Table 3 outlines the positions of the respondents and the paradoxes they faced.

Emotions and cognitive appraisal of the difficulty of managing paradoxical tensions. In the open coding stage, we identified the emotions that actors experienced by coding multiple modes of emotional expression (Keltner & Ekman, 2003), such as spoken language (phrasing and words), prosody in spoken language (volume, intonation, articulation, juncture, and rate of speech) and signed language (facial expression and erratic body movement) (Reilly & Seibert, 2003). We created a dictionary of the prototypical patterns, with specific characteristics identified for each emotion to ensure consistency. Leveraging Scherer (2005) as a reference, we verified that the emotions we retained were coherent with those already represented in the literature, including their intensity and valence. We also realized that the way individuals appraised the tensions affected their emotions. In particular, the assessment of how difficult managing tensions would be was directly linked to the emotions they displayed. We regrouped the cognitive appraisal of generated emotions as the *perception about the difficulty of managing paradoxical tensions.* Table 4 summarizes the definitions, cognitive appraisals, and evidence for the three emotions found in our data.

Cognitive appraisal of leadership role. During our data analysis, we realized from their frequent explanations regarding how they considered themselves to be responsible for managing tensions that some respondents envisioned themselves as leaders. For example, in certain situations, they used phrases such as 'A big part of my job is to get the team together and make some good decisions' or 'I need to be really with the team, leading has to be really working with the people'. On the

other hand, some respondents thought that it was another person's responsibility to manage the team and/or the complexity of the organization, or they simply avoided doing it. For example, after explaining a paradoxical situation, one respondent said, 'The account manager should manage this. I'm a very strong believer that the global account management role is fundamental'. We grouped the totality of these reflections (or lack thereof) as the self-perception of leadership role indicating when the perceptions were present and when they were absent.

Individual responses. In our analysis of each paradox, we found that individuals sometimes tried educating, motivating, or aligning team members. We grouped those actions under the theme of *transcendence.* At other times, individuals escalated the paradoxes to higher levels in the organization or persuaded their managers to look at both sides of the paradoxes for a more holistic view. As these individuals actively try to convince their managers to see paradoxes at a higher level, we grouped those actions under the theme of *redirecting.* Finally, we used the theme of *passive acceptance* to encompass the individuals who were more passive and submitted to the situation when they felt they could do nothing about the paradox. Figure 1 below summarizes our data structure. Table 5 provides representative quotes for the structure.

Stage three: Iterative analysis and theoretical framework

Once the main concepts had been established, we asked ourselves how emotions and cognition were competing, complementing, or working together to shape individual responses to paradox. We looked for meaningful connections to 'surface concepts and relationships that might escape the awareness of the informants, and … formulate these concepts into theoretically relevant terms' (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 17). We were particularly inspired by insights from the psychology and neuropsychology literature on how cognition may regulate emotions and individual behavior. In that way, we developed the overall framework that provided a foundation for our contributions.

Findings

In C-TECK, the paradoxical natures of the structure and organization of global sales work create tensions. Such dynamics are interdependent and reinforce each other, as the goals of the two poles of the different paradoxes need to be met for the success of the company (see Table 2 for a summary of paradoxes found in C-TECK). In this environment, how individuals respond to paradox differs based on their cognition and emotion. Using the neural architecture of emotion and cognition as a foundation (e.g., Ochsner & Gross, 2007), we

Table 2. Paradoxical tensions found in the study

The number and type of paradoxes found	The definition of paradoxes proposed by Smith and Lewis (2011, pp. 383–384)	Explanations	Evidence from the field
29 Belonging and organizing paradoxes	'Tensions between the individual and the aggregate, individuality vs. collective action'	The commission pay structure pushed individuals to focus on their own interests, while the structure of the global account organization required managers to push collective work	'I think they [team members from other business units are more skilled than I am to move that business forward, but *sometimes it's contradictory, so they're destroying an opportunity*, a bigger opportunity of something like that for somebody else or for C-TECK by just doing a small deal. … *There's a conflict because that person wants to sell their small solution and get the revenue for that, and I need to tell him or her to back off.* There have been discussions like that. They come up quite regularly to be honest. *You have different conflicts between the different BUs and "I want to sell this because I get the commission on that." It's a level of conflicts within the account team where you need to manage as well.'* (Anders)
11 Performing/organizing paradoxes *(paradoxes directly due to resources)*	'Interplay between means and ends, employee vs. customer demands'	The client and global account team needed more resources to complete a project, and at the same time, the internal organization (top management or business unit) could not afford it or were cutting resources	Erika, global account manager, asks in a meeting how they will meet sales projections for the organization's new fiscal year: '*How? Where are the resources? Are we going to have more? I need a chief technology director, a sales specialist, developers …'.* The regional vice president responds: '*Everyone is tightening their belt; I don't know where to push back.'* (Business meeting observation)
3 Performing/organizing paradoxes *(paradoxes due to the instability provoked by resource cutting)*	'Interplay between means and ends, employee vs. customer demands'	The client and global account team needed a stable team to work effectively, while the internal organization created instability due to layoffs or moving people to cut costs	At a global accounts meeting, one account manager began to fight back: '*A major issue is continuity.* I have 50% new sales specialists this year, and so my customer has new people. *Having fewer and new sales specialists has a direct effect on the quality of the account. We have fewer people. We need to know what to expect. Please give feedback on specialists so they can plan for more stability. …* What can we trust or not trust? I don't feel that anyone is listening. …' (Business meeting observation)
12 Performing paradoxes *(paradoxes due to global vs. federated structures)*	'Performing paradoxes stem from the plurality of stakeholders and result in competing strategies and goals'	The organization offered global work solutions to clients while the organization was more federated, thus creating tensions in implementation at the country level due to structure or constraints at the country level (metrics, taxes, laws, currency, and product availability)	'If you look at the way that our sales guys are quoted and targeted, *it's all based on individual business units and individual regions* [countries]. As soon as he steps out of that, then you have a challenge that doesn't fit with the way the bank accounts work. Our *federated model doesn't fit with the wider bank model, which is a true global player. Look at the way they organize their teams,* for example procurement: for every piece of procurement within *technology, none of those people sit in the same country, they're all distributed across the globe, because they're selling the software contract or products across the globe.'* (Antonio)

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued) Paradoxical tensions found in the study

The number and type of paradoxes found	The definition of paradoxes proposed by Smith and Lewis (2011, pp. 383–384)	Explanations	Evidence from the field
5 Performing paradoxes *(paradoxes due to divergent priorities at strategic and team levels)*	'Performing paradoxes stem from the plurality of stakeholders and result in competing strategies and goals'	At the team level, sales solutions were pursued for organizational interests or gain, while at the organizational level, strategic decisions were made to focus on different products, projects or relationships	'There was an RFP [request for proposal] from the client locally, and they want to renew. One part was networking, which was done with [a specific third-party product] and the other was C-TECK equipment. *Initially those two environments were in one contract. Our conditions at that time for* [the third-party product] *were quite poor because management had made a choice not to support it. Because of this, the client made the choice to not carry out a renewal with C-TECK for the* [third-party product].' (Fabien)

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 3. Functions of respondents and the paradoxes they faced

Functions	Number of respondents	Paradoxes faced	Number of tensions showing the paradox
Global account manager	14	Belonging and organizing	12
		Performing/organizing 1: resources	10
		Performing/organizing 2: stability	2
		Performing 1: global vs. federated structures	5
		Performing 2: paradoxical priorities	2
Regional managers (regional sales directors and regional account manager)	6	Belonging and organizing	7
		Performing 1: global vs. federated structures	3
		Performing/organizing 2: stability	1
Technical directors	4	Belonging and organizing	4
		Performing/organizing 1: resources	1
		Performing 1: global vs. federated structures	1
		Performing 2: paradoxical priorities	1
Sales representatives and local account managers	3	Belonging and organizing	3
		Performing 1: global vs. federated structures	1
		Performing 2: paradoxical priorities	2
Corporate-level executives (vice president of global accounts, vice president of projects and strategic business development executive)	4	Belonging and organizing	3
		Performing 1: global vs. federated structures	2

Source: Own elaboration.

found that the way individuals cognitively appraise the difficulty of managing paradoxical tensions and their role in managing those tensions shape both their emotions and how they dealt with the paradox. The different combinations of these two cognitive appraisals, the emotions they generate, and the responses they regulate constitute two mechanisms that provide insights into the variation of responses to paradox. In this section, we focus on both mechanisms, which hereafter we call: (1) nonregulated response and (2) regulated response. Each provides an understanding about how cognition and emotion work together to shape individual responses to paradox.

Nonregulated individual response to the paradox

Nonregulated individual response to paradox occurs when cognitive appraisal of the difficulty of managing paradoxical tensions shapes emotional reaction, which leads to a natural

Table 4. Definition and evidence of emotional reactions and related cognitive appraisals

| Emotion	Intensity and valence of emotion	Spoken language usage	Prosody in spoken language	Signed language	Cognitive appraisal	Comments about the tension
Self-confidence	High-intensity positive emotion	Does not use negative words or superlatives Does not repeat words for emphasis, but may rephrase to explain	Volume and speed of language is calm Uses a monotone (expresses negative and positive statements with the same tone) or a positive tone Articulation and rhythm of speech do not change	None	The appraisal pattern that the situation does not seem like a problem and that the tension can be solved	Affirms knowledge and experience in handling tensions Provides other examples of the situation of tension Mentions solution with a neutral approach
Frustration	High-intensity negative emotion	Uses negative words (e.g, 'it's a nightmare') and superlatives (e.g., huge) Repeats words or phrases for emphasis May use swearing	Volume of voice is raised, and speech is faster Tone is negative or sarcastic Stresses certain phrases for emphasis, sighs ('Argh')	Pointing finger Shaking head Grimacing Knocking on table	The appraisal pattern that the situation of tension is a problem and difficult to manage	Complains about the situation of tension Provides examples of the difficulty of the situation with an intense negative approach
Dissatisfaction	Low-intensity negative emotion	Uses some mildly negative terms (e.g., 'it's difficult' or 'it's not easy') Does not use superlatives Does not repeat words for emphasis, but may rephrase to explain	Speech volume and speed are normal Tone is neutral or slightly negative May include sarcastic laughter or mocking tone Stresses certain phrases for emphasis	None	The appraisal pattern that the situation of tension is difficult or a struggle but can be managed	Shows concern about the tension Explains how to solve it with a neutral or negative approach

Source: Own elaboration.

individual response. In this mechanism, the perception of a leadership role is absent, thus it triggers a nonregulated natural response. Specifically, if individuals perceive that the tension is not a problem and can be managed, they tend to be self-confident and lead collaborators through the tensions. This can be linked to the individual response to transcendence. On the other hand, if individuals perceive that the tension is difficult to manage because control is outside their scope of influence, frustration is generated. This naturally leads to individuals trying to redirect the paradox to a higher level to manage it more easily. Finally, we found that when individuals appraise tensions as unmanageable or not worth managing, a low-intensity negative feeling of dissatisfaction is generated. This tends to lead to individuals giving up or passively accepting the situation. Figure 2 depicts this articulation between cognition, emotions, and natural individual response.

We provide here examples of how this mechanism works, by focusing on three types of emotions: a high-intensity negative emotion of frustration, a high-intensity positive emotion of self-confidence, and a low-intensity negative emotion of dissatisfaction (Note: we did not come across low-intensity positive emotions such as peaceful or relaxed in our dataset. We presume that this absence is due to the often-stressful nature of paradox).

Frustration to redirection

At C-TECK, the perception that the situation of tension is a problem and difficult to manage triggers intense negative emotions, such as frustration, which in turn tends to steer individuals toward a redirecting response to paradox. When there is no explicit acknowledgement of a leadership role, redirecting remains a natural response stemming from the feeling of frustration. This reaction occurs when individuals realize that others in the organization have made decisions prioritizing one pole of the paradox to the detriment of the other. Such decisions place them in a problematic situation, but they cannot do anything about it alone. One response to these unbalanced decisions is to push back and try to convince management to pay more attention to their perspective to ensure that the paradox is managed with greater parity. For example, Wes is frustrated about the paradox of reducing resources in one country at the local level to save money versus having resources to make money at the global account level. Wes' frustration shows in several ways: he speaks with an irritable and quick tone, using heavy sarcasm (bold), finger pointing (observations), and word repetition (italics). His appraisal of the situation as a problem and the difficulty of managing it alone can be seen in his use of terms and phrases such as 'suddenly' and 'I don't have my headcount for my other clients' and in his attempt to ask for people without any success:
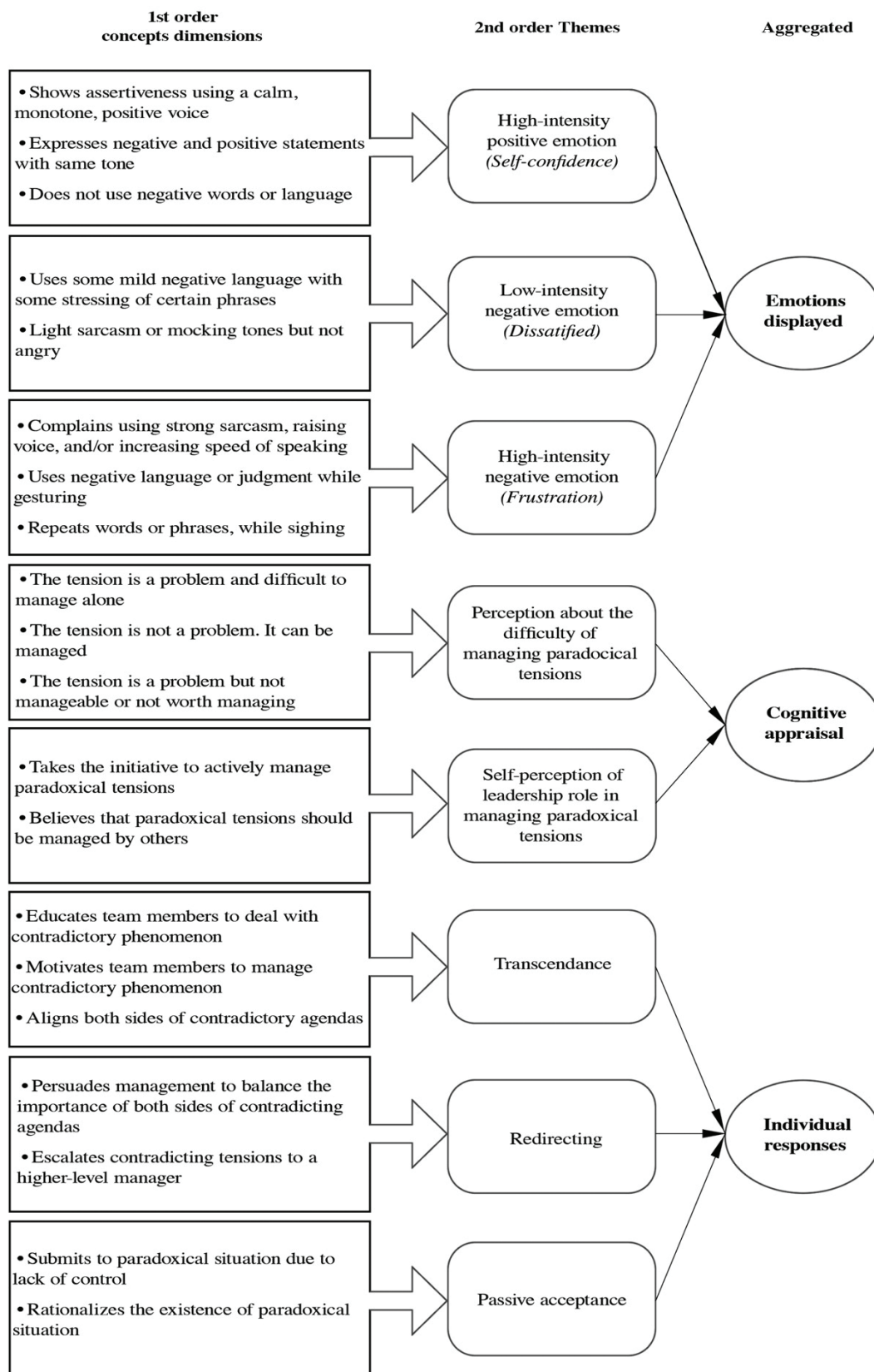
Figure 1. Data structure.
Source: Own elaboration.

Table 5. Illustrative quotes for the data structure

Emotion

Self-confident

Uses self-assured tone

Uses positive or neutral language

Cognitive appraisal: the situation does not seem like a problem and belief that the tension can be solved

Anders: 'All of these people work with other customers as well. Some of them will work maybe 50% on my account, some of them only 10%. I have a challenge when they're not engaged very much in my team, and it shows in the figures. I need to deal with that and see how we can overcome this. It takes a lot of communication'

Dissatisfied

Uses a calm tone

Uses mild sarcasm, mocking tones or the stressing of certain phrases

Uses mildly negative language

Cognitive appraisal: the situation of tension is difficult or a struggle but can be managed

Charles: 'We wanted a frame agreement for the servers, and it was almost more complicated to coordinate internally than to do the business, the actual business with the customer. I decided to do it my way [laughing with mocking overtones], taking into account the processes, but not involving everyone at the same time because the different teams, the legal teams together with the financial team, together with others, they might try to influence each other and disturb my process. They cannot worry about things they don't monitor themselves'

Frustrated

Uses raised voice and/or increases speed of speaking

Repeats words or phrases, may use sighing or gesturing

Uses heavy sarcasm or swearing

Uses negative language

Cognitive appraisal: the situation of tension is a problem and difficult to manage

Charles: 'The pertinent thing to do is act. Explain the situation as it is today. Tell them what is different from the [strategic account plan]: what strategic things we are thinking about and where are the opportunities. Everything is documented [on the account plan]. But when you push for the real thing, the opportunity … you push a little bit with, "Come on. This is a global account. You are expected to support it." … If [the business unit managers] don't have the account in their list, they can say, "I don't have that to do" [taps fingers on table]. Then I have to go to their bosses [sighs] and tell them, "This is crazy … we have this opportunity" and blah blah blah. Then I can get blamed because I don't have anything about it [the account plan]'

Cognitive appraisal of perception of leadership role

Self-perception of leadership role in managing paradoxical tensions is present

Acknowledges personal responsibility in managing organizational complexity

Laurent: 'That's part of my role, part of my role because of my communication with management of my customer. As soon as I see there is some opportunity, I ask for support from my team members. … It's very strategic'

Self-perception of leadership role in managing paradoxical tensions is absent

Believes management responsibilities belong to someone else

Walter: 'They [the sales representatives in different business units] don't talk to each other. There's a lot of confusion and definitely a very unprofessional perception that end users have. It's kind of endless. I do believe that the account manager should do the proactive long-term management'

Individual response

Transcendence

Educating team members to deal with paradoxical tensions

Motivating team members to manage paradoxical tensions

Aligning team members with each other to find commonalities beyond contradictory objectives

Wes: 'It is actually feedback. Trying to get a common understanding of why this is not working well and where is the reason. Now if it is content, like people don't know better, then you can try to educate them, train them and give them help to better understand. From my perspective, it's motivational. What I'm using most for myself is leading by example'

Redirecting

Persuading management to balance the importance of both sides of contradictory agendas

Escalating contradictory tensions to a higher-level manager

Anders: 'A big part of my job is to understand what the client is doing and sell that internally, so I get the resources I required. … I'm dependent on resources outside the central team, so I need to sell the account to management: "This is what we're doing, this is what we're trying to achieve." I think of our chances of these opportunities, the strategic importance of the account, and that's why we need these and these people or resources to do this'

Passive acceptance

Submitting to a paradoxical situation due to lack of control

Rationalizing the existence of a paradoxical situation

Henry: 'My targets are based on the yearly perspective. The sales letter defines where to make what. … The colleagues in my team, they don't have it on a yearly basis, they have it on a half-yearly basis. Some on a monthly basis, so you have to always watch this because they have a totally different agenda. … How do I manage? Sometimes, to be honest, I just let it run because it doesn't make any sense to try to change this. You won't succeed'

Source: Own elaboration.
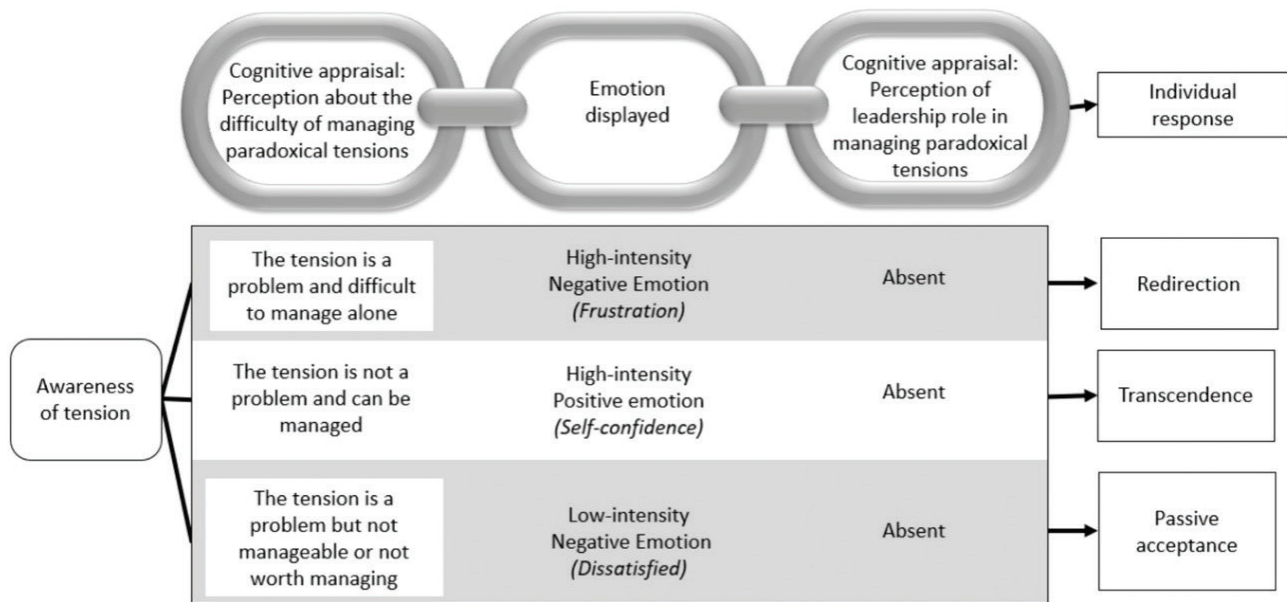
Figure 2. Underlying cognitive and emotional interaction in nonregulated individual responses.
Source: Own elaboration.

This company is big, and it is managed by numbers, and therefore some people come under pressure because they need fewer people in a certain area. So, suddenly they take decisions to *fire* people, and **therefore I'm suddenly standing there without an account manager** because he has just been *fired*. And then you say, 'But I need one because there is business there', and they say '*Ya ya ya*, I'll get you one. …' **Three months later you ask, 'Have you found someone?' 'No, not really, and I don't have my headcount for my other clients that I need to look after and they're bigger'.** So, it's me leading a charter to convince management chains in other regions to show how important my business is. Who wins? It's direct competition to get **warm bodies in front of warm customers.**

In the above situation, Wes does not discuss his role as being responsible for managing overall paradoxical tension. His perspective is not holistic. Wes convinces management of the importance of his account by trying to alter the way the paradox is understood by arguing that his objectives for the global team are as important for the company as cost savings in other regions. The active reframing action stems naturally from his frustration.

Another form of redirecting is to escalate the issue to get support from higher-level management who might be in a better position to treat the paradox holistically. In the following example, Antonio escalates to a higher manager to address a similar paradox. Global account managers like Antonio need resources from other business units to cover the needs of their clients, while the managers of the business units deny those resources because they must allocate diminishing resources to areas that they perceive to be more important. For Antonio, being denied is frustrating, and he shows this by knocking on the table (observations), stressing (bold) and repeating (italics) particular words:

They'll [business units] get a thousand requests a day saying '*I need this, I need that*', because we [account managers] will get quite **emotional** about our accounts and how important we are: **'My account** is the most important account'. So, if they get a call from me, and then I was backed by a VP, that's got more chance of making its way through. It's still about trying to *prioritize* … how to use these VPs to *prioritize* things, make the deals and then *prioritize* it through. She [the VP] has worked on different sides of the fence. She knows a lot of people on that side of the business as well. This is important, because then we start to make one true C-TECK portfolio rather than just keeping it tunnel-focused on each business unit.

During the discussion, Antonio does not explicitly state his role as leader of the team. Instead, he appraises the situation as a problem that he cannot handle on his own ('they get a thousand requests a day').

The above representative cases demonstrate how the appraisal of the tensions as a problem and difficult to manage can lead to frustration, which is a high-intensity negative emotion. When individuals are frustrated and do not perceive themselves as having a leadership role in managing the paradox, they tend to try to redirect it. In other words, they try to shift the paradox to a higher level so that they can manage it more easily.

Self-confidence to transcendence

This high-intensity positive emotion flows naturally toward responses that try to manage paradoxes holistically. Eric, for

example, is a business developer who works with individuals from a variety of business units with different, even competing, interests. To propose a business solution, however, these individuals must balance their own interests with the collective solution, which will eventually benefit everyone. Eric is self-confident in his ability to manage this paradox. He explains the situation assertively with a positive attitude:

> C-TECK is a company with many big divisions. Each division has its own business objectives, and it is held accountable to its own business objectives. It is not surprising that there will sometimes be strains between the people in each division, because their objectives are often different. When you see strains, it's often because people have just been driven to different objectives. Personally, my experience of working with the teams from two divisions is that generally people are very collaborative if you go out of your way to make sure you communicate well so that people understand what you are trying to do and why you're trying to do it.

Eric transcends the paradoxical tensions by educating people about the collective interest of the initiative. Eric is not a manager, nor does he speak of his responsibility for managing the paradox, yet his positive and self-confident stance flows naturally into a transcendent individual response.

A second example focuses on how the need for resources creates another paradoxical tension in this organization. Martin, as the global account manager advocating for his client, needs expertise in global coordination for an important client project, yet decision-makers in the business units do not want to provide those resources. When talking about this situation, Martin's attitude is confident:

> The business unit decided they couldn't afford the resource. My client operates in sixty countries around the world. Sixty per cent of my business is outside the UK, and global coordination of prices, currencies, product, escalation and delivery needs a global head to coordinate that to a tee, which the business unit no longer had. Not that it didn't want it; it didn't have the operating model to justify it.

For him, the tension is not problematic to manage because, while other accounts will eventually manage tensions, his account does something about it. He says, '[It's] not being arrogant, but I think we are quite a good team for driving and pushing people further, forward'. This quote shows that he can manage the tensions well. In response to this paradox, Martin focuses on *motivating* people to look more holistically at the situation by using 'different levers, different hooks with different people'. He explains, 'Essentially, it's about communicating as a team, working together as a team. Good communication, good direction, good support'. His individual response to the paradox is to get people to consider both sides or poles of the paradox and to work through the tensions. Like Eric, Martin's self-perception of leadership role for managing the paradox

holistically is absent. Yet he is self-confident about the situation, and this leads him to a natural response of transcendence.

Dissatisfaction with passive acceptance

When leadership perception is absent, low-intensity negative emotions generally lead to more passive responses. For example, Fabien is dissatisfied when top management makes the decision to stop supporting the external software applications that the customer needs. This choice jeopardizes the company-client relationship that he has created. His discomfort (italics), along with mildly negative language (bold) and his quiet tone, demonstrate the negative yet low intensity of his emotions:

> Three and a half years ago, the client wanted to renew their contract with C-TECK. C-TECK had made a choice not to support this system directly. So, our pricing and our skills didn't meet the basic requirements. *It was **quite a hard struggle** at that moment to renew the contract.* Our total contract for volume was **strongly reduced** at that moment. That was based on a strategic decision of C-TECK not to support system C equipment and to reduce the level of skilled engineers we had in the organization. So, from a pricing perspective and from a delivering perspective, *I wasn't able to meet the client's high requirements at that moment.*

Fabien's response is to passively accept the paradoxical tension because he has little control over the situation: 'That was based on a strategic decision by C-TECK not to support system C equipment and to reduce the level of skilled engineers we had in the organization'. In addition, there is no mention of his responsibility for the other members of his team. Unlike Wes and Antonio, who confront management, or Eric and Martin, who lead others through the tensions, Fabien submits to the situation.

Another example is that of Chris, who faces the same paradox as Antonio. He tries, without success, to organize collective work with individuals in different geographies and business units who tend to focus only on their own interests. As Chris explains the paradox, his negative language (italics) and sarcasm (bold) show his discomfort and dissatisfaction:

> We can't pin every person together in one room as a team. We need people working in Moscow. We have someone sitting in Palo Alto. You can't bring them into one place and make them care about the customers in Russia or in the US. It makes no sense. It's not possible to bring them together. Sharing of best practices? That is also difficult. **It might be possible be in another a big deal, but it also involves more lying, because nobody wants to be responsible for the fact that we have worked for something and we did not win.** Today, nobody cares about losses … you don't really have a good strategy to overcome this.

Chris accepts the situation without making any active response. Chris does not explicitly show responsibility for managing the

paradoxical tension, and his remarks – 'It's not possible to bring them together' and 'you don't really have a good strategy to overcome this' – show that he perceives the tension as unmanageable. When the self-perception of the leadership role is absent, the dissatisfied response leads to passive acceptance. It is important to note that the passive acceptance response is very different from the confrontational response stemming from frustration, even though both emotions are negative. The intensity of the emotions leads to different response types.

Overall, in the nonregulated individual response mechanism, those who show strong negative emotion regularly confront the paradox, while those who show mild negative emotion are more resigned and accept the situation. Individuals who are more self-confident are more likely to transcend the paradox.

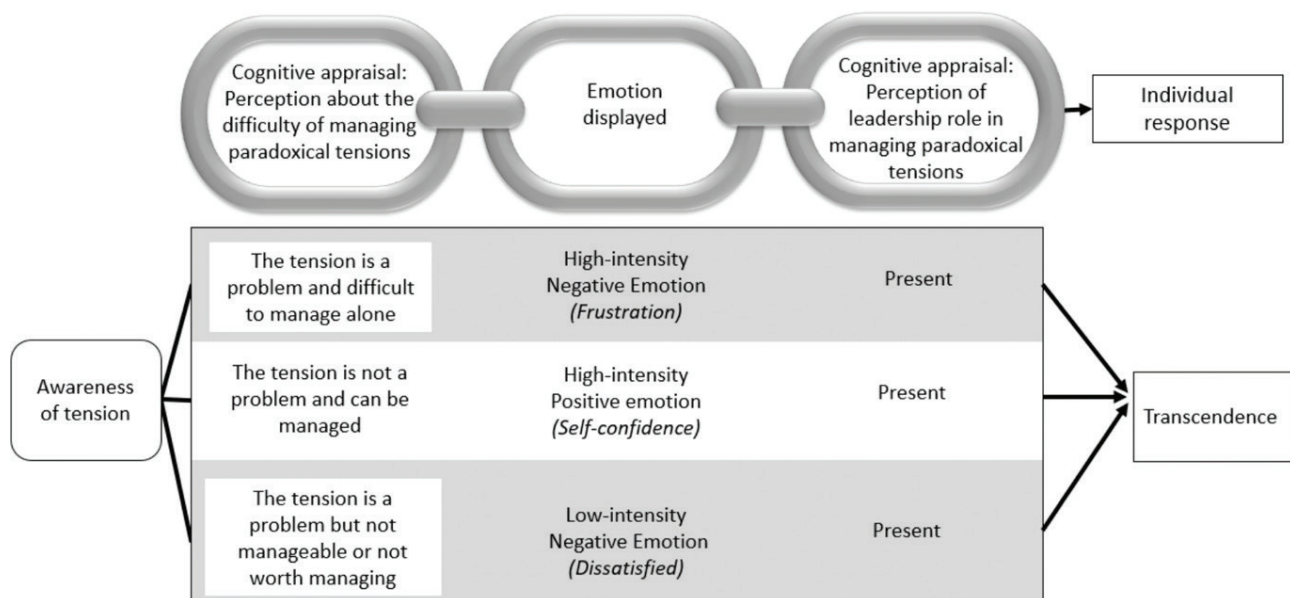### Regulated individual response to paradox

Regulated individual response to paradox occurs when the natural response stemming from the emotions is regulated because the self-perception of leadership role is present. Like the mechanism underlying the nonregulated individual response, cognitive appraisal of the paradoxical tensions shapes emotional reaction. However, when participants believe it is their responsibility to manage tensions, they systematically respond to situations of paradox by leading (educating, motivating, or aligning) to transcend it, regardless of their emotions. The cognitive appraisal of the leadership role seems to allow respondents to move past their emotions and regulate their behavior so that they focus more on managing the paradoxical tension in a more holistic manner, as seen in Figure 3.

Self-perception of leadership role

In certain situations, some individuals perceive themselves as being responsible for managing the people or the overall paradoxical tension. In the following example, a paradox exists between the individual level, where team members focus on their own interests, and the collective level, where the manager needs team members to work for the benefit of the group. In this case, Anders, a global account manager, specifically talks about his role as a manager (italics) when dealing with such paradoxes:

> Then there's a conflict, of course, because that person wants to sell their small solution and get the revenue for that, and I need to tell him or her to back off. *As a manager*, I must explain that as well. There have been discussions like that, of course. They come up quite regularly to be honest. You have different conflicts between the different BUs and 'I want to sell this because I get the commission on that'. 'I want to sell that because I get the commission on that'. It's a level of conflicts within the account team where *you need to manage*.

Anders is self-confident, and like the other examples of self-confident emotions, he can transcend the paradox through his appeal to accommodate both poles and work through them. He does so by educating the individual by explaining the reasons why looking more holistically at the paradox is beneficial. However, unlike the two previous examples, Anders is very clear about how his role as manager prompts him to action: '*As a manager*, I must explain that' and 'level of conflicts within the account team where *you need to manage*'. While the outcome

Figure 3. Underlying cognitive and emotional interaction in regulated individual responses.
Source: Own elaboration.

is the same, we begin to sense here the importance of the self-perception of a leadership role in shaping the individual response. Indeed, when dealing with negative emotions, this perception changes the individual response to one that is perceived as more effective, as can be seen in the next section.

Frustration to transcendence

Henry, a global account manager, must address the paradox created by the commission pay structure, in which managers must coordinate collective work for the global account while individuals in other business units focus on their own interests. He appraised the tension as a problem and difficult to manage alone because he does not have a direct hierarchy over these individuals. Henry is frustrated (sarcasm and negative words in bold) with team members who are meeting their targets on other teams but are 'lazy' on his team:

> My team members do not report to me. … I'm not their line of business manager, unfortunately, because there could be better business if I were. The three most important guys each have another client that is more important. I always have to motivate one guy to go to the client and he says, '**Hey, what do you want Henry? I have my targets. I already achieved everything'. That's the case, I'm not kidding**. … Other people say, 'Hey, I do perform, I give my numbers, I overperform. **Nobody can piss on my leg'.** That's what they say. How do I motivate them? They see that I can open doors to be more successful: '*It's fine if you have already reached 120% or 130% of your target, but what's wrong with reaching 200%?' You have to imagine the global account manager role as if you have your own company.*

As the excerpt shows, Henry is frustrated, yet he still tries to transcend the paradox by motivating his team. Henry could escalate the issue, like Antonio, but he does not. Instead, despite his frustration, he uses leadership techniques because he believes that it is his responsibility to do so. This perception is demonstrated by his belief that global account managers need to act like leaders in their own companies. In this case, the self-perception of the leadership role is a cognitive appraisal that regulates the individual response toward one perceived to be more in line with what is expected of a leader.

Another example is that of Tony, who also sees the difficulty of engaging team members as problematic because he is not their direct manager, so it is difficult to manage the situation alone:

> What I'm saying is … none of those guys has more than two accounts. You definitely see a **huge** gap in level to engage and interact. They're not *investing in the account*, but more importantly they're *not investing in their team*, *they're not investing in the rest of team*. The **challenge** is you're **fighting** against some pretty strong competition who will put in a lot of resources, and if you're just going in with a light touch, you're never going to make any progress. … You have to get people excited, create some opportunities. *My role really is with the relationship. It's for me to build the relationships, understand the organization and bring in people when needed.*

In the above situation, Tony is frustrated, which shows in the rapidity of his speech, repetition (italics) of words like 'investing' and the emphasis on negative words like 'challenging', 'huge,' and 'fighting' (in bold). Yet he too transcends the paradox because he sees it as his role and responsibility as a leader. In both cases, the cognitive appraisal acts as a regulator, channeling the individual response toward transcendence.

Dissatisfaction to transcendence

In much the same way, when the self-perception of a leadership role appears, individuals overcome their dissatisfaction and try to transcend paradoxical tensions. Theodore, for example, is dissatisfied, which shows in his repetition of words and his discomfort (in bold). He appraises the tension as barely being manageable: 'it's really, really, really difficult'. His tone is neutral and does not vary significantly from his normal speech. Still, he explains clearly why the following incident was unsatisfactory:

> I'm responsible for the success of the project and have to bring them together. At C-TECK, it's **difficult to do** this because all the business units have different objectives and targets and so on. It's sometimes **really, really, really difficult** to bring everyone together and work in the direction of the customer. *We have to streamline the team* […] mainly *I'm responsible for BU 1's objectives.* My quote and my target and objectives are BU 1-related. If the project needs to involve BU 2-related services, I don't have a problem discussing this *if it is my target or objective to include them.* I do it because I think the best solution for the customer will increase our chances to win this deal. *I include them* [BU 2]*, and they are part of the team.*

Although Theodore is not the team manager, he clearly takes personal responsibility as a leader in managing paradoxical tension (italics). That positioning compels him to lead others (transcendence) through the paradox by aligning the two sides.

Similarly, Charles is dissatisfied (nonverbal evidence and sarcasm in bold) about a paradox between management reducing resources for a project that decreased in size, but at the local level, the deal is still important for the team. The defeatist sighs and pessimistic comments, such as 'you won't be able to do that' or 'I'm losing weight here (meaning losing power or credibility)', seem to raise the question of whether the tension is worth managing:

> It began with a lot of money, but we took a chunk of the project because it was more accurate on what we can deliver. Because it is 75% less money, the interest from management here decreased. But it's still money. But management says [**sigh**] 'priorities'— they have other opportunities, other accounts that are more reliable. … So, I took it from the BU because they will go to the management and say, 'Okay. Now my prioritization for the project is different', but management will say, **'Oh come on (sarcastic tone), you won't be able to do that'. I'm losing weight here.**

When asked how he manages the tension, Charles explains that the situation needs to be seen more holistically: 'If you are not an entrepreneurial guy, you will die here. You have to do it (take responsibility) yourself. Consulting, you have to do that. Looking for things, not asking for them'. In this situation, Charles does not passively accept the situation. Instead, he perceives himself in a larger, more holistic role as an entrepreneur who has leadership responsibility for making things happen. He consults and asks questions, and consequently, his individual response is more transcendent.

The above examples demonstrate different emotional responses, but they all show how participants lead stakeholders to try to transcend paradoxical tensions. The respondents' emotions vary greatly in both intensity and valance, yet they all had the same response. The cognitive appraisal of having a leadership role in managing tensions is apparent (italics) in each incident. Theodore, Tony, Henry and Charles all take responsibility for managing the tensions, and this regulates their response toward transcendent approaches. Each leads the situations and their team members through the paradoxes, regardless of their emotions.

By studying both mechanisms (the nonregulated response and the regulated response), it is clear that cognitive appraisal and emotion work simultaneously together to shape individual responses. We suggest that as individuals become aware of the paradoxical tensions, they either consciously or subconsciously consider whether they are capable of solving the problem (cognitive appraisal of the difficulty of the paradoxical tensions), and this generates corresponding emotions. In addition, depending on whether individuals perceive themselves as being responsible for managing the paradox (cognitive appraisal of leadership role), they may or may not regulate their response. These mechanisms provide a better understanding of the variation in individual response to paradox.

Discussion

Our study examines how emotion and cognition work together to shape individual responses to paradox. We discuss below our contribution: the introduction of two mechanisms that explain the articulation of cognition and emotion. We then explain how a more nuanced understanding of cognitive appraisals and emotion-related analysis can provide new insights.

Mechanisms that underpin the articulation between emotion and cognition in shaping the individual response to paradox

Paradox scholars have emphasized the cognition/emotion dichotomy in their debate on the importance of cognition and rationality versus emotion, feelings and intuition (for a review,

see Lewis & Smith, 2022). Theoretical and empirical studies are just beginning to examine the two concepts jointly (Lewis & Smith, 2022; Schad et al., 2016). For example, Pradies et al. (2021) demonstrate that both emotions (experienced by actors) and cognition (shared meaning) are as important in shifting responses from vicious to virtuous cycles. Yet the authors do not detail how emotion and cognition shape individual responses. We address this issue by describing the articulation between emotion and cognition through two mechanisms – nonregulated response and regulated response – which explain why individual responses differ.

Our study examines the interlinking of appraisal – emotion – appraisal – response. We demonstrate how a first cognitive appraisal (regarding the difficulty of managing paradoxical tensions) generates a specific emotion. These emotions are then regulated or not by a second appraisal (the perception of a leadership role in managing the tensions). The presence or absence of this second appraisal alters the individual response. We demonstrate how the self-perception of leadership role channels emotions toward a more transcendent individual response. This finding echoes the importance of the cognitive perception of leadership (Van Quaquebeke et al., 2011). In doing so, we postulate that the self-perception of leadership role is an important aspect of creating a transcendent response.

Our findings add to the literature on the influence of leadership and reflexivity in understanding individual responses to paradoxical tensions (e.g., Knight & Paroutis, 2017; Van Neerijnen et al., 2022). Our study supports the findings on the influence of reflexivity and paradoxical cognitive processing on the ability of individuals to manage ambidexterity, which allows them to handle inconsistencies. Similar to those studies, our findings suggest that specific kinds of reflexivity not only enable an increase in the awareness and motivation to engage with the paradox but also change the direction of the individual response (from passive to transcendent, for example). Future studies could explore cognitive appraisals linked to motivation and leadership hindering the process of avoiding, reducing or coping with paradoxical tensions.

These findings are consistent with the growing recognition of the need to consider work engagement in the management of paradox (Francis & Keegan, 2020; Fürstenberg et al., 2021). We argue that the ability to perceive oneself as a leader requires some level of engagement. In their study investigating the enactment of an engagement strategy in a UK health charity, Francis and Keegan (2020) show how disengaged workers and managers facing paradoxical demands distance themselves (cognitively and emotionally) from organizational decisions and tend to have either-or responses. The authors also found that more active (and potentially more effective) responses occurred when individuals were engaged. The appraisals highlighted in our model may help to explain why engaged individuals tend to have more active responses.

To date, the literature has remained unclear regarding how individuals develop a paradox mindset. Past research advocates that individuals who feel competent and autonomous are more likely to develop a paradox mindset enabling them to embrace and 'work through' tensions (Liu et al., 2020; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008), but uncertainty remains as to why that is the case. Our model contributes to paradox mindset development by showing how certain emotional and cognitive experiences lead to active responses. In our model, the second appraisal triggers a regulated response, which brings out a paradoxical mindset in individuals. The appraisal of self-perception of leadership roles acts as a switch for turning on active responses to paradox. Future researchers may further investigate this connection and consider additional aspects that contribute to paradox mindset development. Previous research has also shown how third parties use cognitive reframing to render paradoxical cognitive processing routines (Knight & Paroutis, 2017). In this light, managers aware of this regulated mechanism can emphasize the importance of the leadership role to potentially guide middle and lower-level managers to handle routine paradoxes more actively.

The importance of cognitive appraisals in generating emotion and regulating response

The psychology and neuropsychology literatures provide insights into the emotion-cognition articulation by focusing on the cognitive levers or appraisals that make up a given response. This approach complements current studies that only focus on providing types of cognitive frames (paradox mindset) or styles (conformist or creative) (e.g., Miron-Spektor et al., 2018). For example, Calabretta et al. (2017) define intuition as a decision-making mechanism that may be influenced by emotions. We go beyond understanding cognition as shared meaning (Pradies et al., 2021) or paradox salience (Pradies, 2022) by empirically addressing the generating and regulating nature of cognitive appraisals. Our results provide insights that can help individuals to deal more effectively with paradoxes. For example, educating managers about the existence of paradoxes in an organization and the necessity of self-perception of leadership roles in managing them would not only prepare individuals for paradoxes but also potentially steer them toward more holistic responses.

Emotions, their intensity and valence

To date, the literature has relied on binary reasoning of purely positive or negative emotions (e.g., Lewis & Smith, 2022; Raza-Ullah, 2020; Vince & Broussine, 1996), but there is a need to incorporate a more fine-tuned understanding of emotion in paradox literature. Inspired by the works of Scherer (2005) and Filipowicz et al. (2011), we have mobilized this approach to

identify specific emotions that play a role in individual response to paradox: the negative and high-intensity emotion of frustration, the negative and low-intensity emotion of dissatisfaction, and the positive and high-intensity emotion of self-confidence. Our results demonstrate the importance of including both valence (positive/negative) and intensity (high/low) in emotion-related analysis, as they lead to divergent individual responses. For example, dissatisfaction and frustration are both negative emotions, but they lead to different responses due to their intensity. Likewise, self-confidence and frustration are both intense, but they lead to different individual responses due to their valence. Future studies could leverage both the valence and intensity of emotions to provide a more nuanced understanding of how different kinds of emotions shape active individual responses as well as defensive ones.

Much of the current literature on paradox proposes that positive emotions facilitate virtuous cycles and that negative emotions trigger vicious ones (e.g., Calabretta et al., 2017; Smith & Lewis, 2011). Our study demonstrates that negative emotions can also lead individuals to embrace paradoxes and adopt more active responses, thereby triggering virtuous cycles. Indeed, when frustrated, respondents in our study reframed paradoxes to manage them more holistically. This finding directly contradicts the recent research in paradox literature on emotion and individual response (e.g., Smith & Lewis, 2011, 2022).

Our work opens the black box of how emotion and cognition work together to create an individual response. By mobilizing the psychology and neuropsychology literature (e.g., Ochsner & Gross, 2007), we demonstrate that cognition is both a generator of emotion and a regulator of response. We hope this contribution advances understanding of the emotion-cognition paradigm in the paradox literature.

Conclusion

Overall, our study demonstrates that a keen understanding of how emotion and cognition work together provides a more nuanced analysis of how actors respond to paradoxical tensions. As all organizations face paradoxes (Jarzabkowski & Lê, 2013; Putnam et al., 2016), our results have important managerial implications, especially in organizations where managers face competing demands. We show that specific emotions and cognition can lead to more active responses and potentially virtuous cycles (Smith & Lewis, 2011). This suggests that managers must be aware that their attitude toward paradox and how they perceive their role in managing paradox have consequences. We thus argue that managers must understand the complexity of their environment and their responsibility for managing such complexity to channel, as Lewis (2000) asserts, the dynamism of paradoxes through their decision-making more effectively.

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