Introduction to 3-hour workshop:

Setting the scene:
- Dealing with complexity and thus paradoxes is a pre-condition for managing globally
- Effectively handling organizational paradoxes is a core competency in the global leadership role
- However, paradoxes can easily make us panic as the complexity of organizational life makes it increasingly difficult to navigate between contradictory perspectives and demands
- The bad news: Paradoxes can paralyze; the good news: Paradoxes can be managed
Workshop objectives and goals

Objectives:

- Introduce paradox thinking as a framework for exploring and understanding organizational and managerial tensions
- Expand managers' tool box to deal more constructively with increasing complexity

Goals:

- Aid understanding of and ability to deal with divergent perspectives and disruptive experiences created by the complexity of organizational life
- Provide a mindset and tools for identifying, making sense of, and managing paradoxes
- Discuss leadership paradoxes in own context and gain new perspectives

OBJECTIVES:
- Paradoxes are often experienced as organizational tensions and this workshop provides a different perspective/framework for dealing with organizational tensions in order to enable participants to identify and act more constructively on managerial paradoxes
- Thinking paradoxes instead of problems can help us to reflect differently on our own leadership practice and thus broaden possibilities for action
- In fact there is a quality in thinking about organizational problems as paradoxes!

GOALS:
- Provide participants with a paradox framework, which enables them to spot and analyze managerial paradoxes surrounding them
- Provide tools for identifying paradoxes, making sense of them, and managing them
- Case work and reflections on paradoxes in own leadership context
The program consists of three parts:
1. An introduction to paradox thinking
2. Tools and perspectives to understand and analyze paradoxes in organizations
3. Methods for dealing with paradoxes

Throughout the program and in all three parts, participants will have the opportunity to reflect and work on their own paradoxes
The complexity surrounding managers in global leadership positions is on the rise and with it the amount of paradoxes they have to deal with. Environments become more global, fast paced, and competitive (remember VUCA—volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous), and internal organizational processes become more complex, which means that contradictory demands become increasingly salient and persistent.

The paradoxes are often experienced as tensions and if not dealt with adequately can lead to paralyzing, uncertainty, confusion, and frustration amongst managers and employees. (Lego example: Search for scape goats and blame top management for not clearly communicating the messages. “We can not do anything before they have found out what they want”. Result: Managers remained “passive” and “hesitant”).

The paradoxes are often experienced as tensions and can range from:

- Think long-term AND deliver short-term results
- Be creative and increase creativity
- Collaborate and control
- Individual and collective
- Flexibility and efficiency
- Exploitation and exploration (scale and scope)
- Profit and social responsibility
- Invest in new business initiatives or maximize profits from existing businesses
- Centralize operations or decentralize them
- Hold individuals accountable for results or teams

Paradoxical tensions result from:

1. **Self-referential loops**
   Contradictions embedded in a cohesive statement, concept, or process

2. **Mixed messages**
   Inconsistencies between statements or between verbal and nonverbal responses

3. **System contradictions**
   Contradictions entrenched within the goals, reward systems, resource demands, and division of labor in an organization
Introducing a practitioner paradox example.

First introduce paradox in detail, then discuss the effects of the paradox in the organization and on the manager.
Key words: transitions – becoming increasingly more competent in dealing with complexity

Expectations towards managers (own plus surroundings’) require that they decide/choose/act/execute fast; and as a consequence, managerial paradoxes are often reduced to dilemmas in the hope of being able to better manage and control the environment. As actors make sense of an increasingly complex, ambiguous and ever changing world, they often simplify reality into polarized either/or distinctions that conceal complex interrelationships.

Thus, there is a need for a language that makes it possible to avoid this reduction with the goal to match the complex reality and act upon it more productively.
Paradox in own context I

Group activity:
Discuss briefly what type of tensions or divergent pressures you experience in your organization right now.
How does that affect you?

Do group exercise and debrief by selecting 1-2 groups to present a case and their reflections.
Paradoxes are experienced on three levels:

1. **The organizational level**: concerned with “organizing”
   - Organizational Tensions surface as complex systems create competing designs and processes. E.g. centralization vs. decentralization, routine vs. change, empowerment vs. direction. Challenges that are always part of “organizing” — but become especially apparent in organizational change processes. E.g.:
     - Paradox between central and decentralized control
     - Paradox between change and stability
     - Paradox between focusing on results and people

2. **The leadership role**: concerned with competing demands and expectations (cross-dynamics)
   - Leadership role Tensions arise due to the competing demands/behaviors that leaders are expected to display. E.g. lead the pack vs. keeping in the background. It is about the leadership behavior that managers need to display in order for the strategy to be successful. It includes for instance:
     - Shall I go first or keep in the background
     - Shall I involve people in the process in order to increase effectiveness or just inform people around me and make demands

3. **The individual level**: concerned with a person’s belonging to the group/the organization
   - Individual Tensions arise due to emotional pressure on own identity and values, often experienced as ambivalence between the individual and the collective. E.g. opposing yet coexisting memberships and values. The individual level is about knowing and acting on own emotional ambivalence in terms of identity and interpersonal processes, e.g.:
     - being an individual contributor and team player
     - being controlling and trusting
     - leadership and self-leadership
     - independence and dependence

The important thing is not to identify the type of paradox, but to know that they co-exist and come to light as
- opposing tensions due to the nature of organizational life (e.g. results vs. relationships, innovation vs. stability)
- ambiguities in relation to the roles a manager has to take in leading the organization in a particular direction (e.g. being supportive, challenging, visionary, practical)
- ambivalence in terms of conflicting emotions and ways of belonging to the organization (e.g. control, team affiliation, individualism)
Organizational paradoxes are related to the basic business conditions – e.g. is the company in a situation which calls for renewal and innovation or stabilization and integration. The focus on one direction tends to lead to a loss of attention of the opposite direction. In an ideal world, both sides need attention. Balancing these competing demands calls for some form of “organizational intelligence”.

Source: Model based on Competing Values Framework, L. Lüschler (2012) "Ledelse gennem Paradokset"
Following the “competing values framework”, role paradoxes come to light through the implementation of organizational paradoxes into daily practice. Managers can experience pressure on their role due to the cross-dynamics that play out in the organization and the different and competing demands that rest on them from a) management, b) their direct reports, and c) their peers.

Role conflicts and role ambiguity often stem from the interpersonal communication between managers and their employees. Paradoxes can appear as part of the information given at the different levels in the organization.
Individual paradoxes have an emotional dimension and are typically experienced when our identity or values are under pressure, i.e. when there is a conflict between our own values and the values of the organization, or there is a disconnect between our own identity and the identity of the organization.

How to deal with personal paradoxes?
- Understand, contain, and confront own ambivalent feelings
- Communicate complexity rather than one-dimensionality
- Support employees by sense-giving of contradictory demands
Part II of the workshop focuses on understanding paradox and introduces a model for working through paradox; and as part hereof some techniques for discovering the nature of the paradox, those constituencies involved and their different perspectives, as well as the best possible outcomes, etc.
Working through paradox is a model introduced by Lewis and Lüscher in order to properly identify the problem and discover new arrays for dealing with it.

Working through paradox is a process that helps to
a) make sense of tenuous demands
b) reduce anxiety
c) escape paralysis
d) enable action

Attractor’s model for identifying the mess and extracting the problem is based on Karl Tomm’s (1988) framework for distinguishing four major groups of questioning (Interventive Interviewing: Part III. Intending to ask lineal, circular, strategic or reflexive questions).

Managers are constantly required to act and often decisions are based on immediate facts only. By unpacking the facts in more detail through a detour via discovering the behaviors and vision of stakeholders involved, the model can provide a rich tool in analyzing the nature of the problem in greater detail – thereby discovering unknown but vital facets and perspectives. This is achieved by applying lineal, circular, strategic, and reflexive questions to the problem, thus leading in a U-shape through the model from facts, via behavior, the vision, and finally the action that needs to be taken. See next slides for examples of questions.
Discovering the FACTS

- What was the situation about?
- Who was involved?
- For how long?
- What did it mean to you?
- What did you do to deal with it?
- What worked out well?
- What was the hardest lesson learned?
- What was the prize?
- What did you win?

Source: Attractor Model inspired by Karl Tomm's Framework for distinguishing 4 groups of questioning (1988)
Discovering the BEHAVIOR

- How did your stakeholders play their part in the dilemma/paradox?
- Who had risked the most?
- Where in the process did you feel the strongest need to choose between the competing values?
- What did you learn about the "either/or"s"?
- What did you learn about the possibility of "both/and"?

Source: Attractor Model inspired by Karl Tomm’s Framework for distinguishing 4 groups of questioning (1988)
Discovering the **VISION**

- Let us imagine that you are most capable of managing this kind of situation in the future, what would be most characteristic for the situation?
- If you should see this situation from a totally different point of view, what will you see that you could not see before?
- What does the vision look like which could encourage you to do more of "both-and" and less of "either-or"?

**Discovering the ACTION**

- What needs to be challenged in the way of dealing with competing values in the future?
- What needs to be directed in a more decisive manner by you? By your manager?
- If your stakeholders and you were to achieve even better results the next time, what would be the most important thing to do a little different?
- What kind of positive difference would that make to you? To others?
- If you should take one small step towards an improved pay-off-balance ("both-and") what would that be?
- When will you do it?

*Source: Attractor Model inspired by Karl Tomm’s Framework for distinguishing 4 groups of questioning (1988)*
Paradox in own context II

Group activity:
Discuss the new insights that you have gained in relation to handling the tensions that you experience in your organization right now.

Do group exercise and debrief by selecting 1-2 groups to present their new insights.
Part III of the program focuses on different strategies for dealing with paradox in a more constructive way.
There are three strategies for coping and dealing with paradox:

1. Acceptance: A basic acceptance of complexity as a characteristic of organizations - particularly organizations in change - is a prerequisite for its members to act in paradoxes.

2. Integrative thinking: An attempt to uncover the win-win situation for all parties involved in a both-and situation – finding the 3rd way

3. Positioning: Conscious positioning at one pole and actively distancing from another based on strategic, human, or organizational considerations
Paradoxical thinking is a proactive strategy to reduce defensiveness and unleash enhanced performance, but this requires an acceptance of paradox as a basic condition of organizational life.
2. Integrative thinking

- Consider divergent ideas and/or alternative poles simultaneously
- How can apparently opposing views be brought together and combined in new ways?

3rd solution through innovation and creative thinking
3. Positioning

Conscious positioning at one pole and actively distancing from another based on strategic, human or organizational considerations.

Turning your back on one alternative and accepting the consequences.
Global leaders are paradox navigators and the critical skills involved are sense making of paradoxes and their contradictory demands and sense giving to surrounding employees.

This involves:
- Reflection: The ability to see things from several perspectives
- Courage and Resilience: Dare to actively engage in the paradox by using tensions constructively and proactively to develop the organization. Use tensions to challenge the organization and underlying assumptions – this takes courage to do things differently from what is expected (by self and others)
- Communication: The task is to address the multiple sides of the paradox and create balance in your communication without favoring one side over the other - unless of course it is intentional (positioning)
- Behavior: Avoid mixed messages and provide clear and timely communication
Final debrief by eliciting new insights and learnings from participants.
Closing reflections
What does it take from …?

Individual leader

- Ability to recognize and accept interrelated relationships of underlying tensions
- Emotional stability, courage, maturity, and integrity
- Communication skills in order to reduce anxiety in others
- Ability to self-reflect and embrace conflicting demands

Organization

- Collective tools that allow members of the organization to seek and integrate new information through distinct structures, cultures, learning processes, and managerial capabilities
- Maturity => Ability to make room for, balance, live with, and capitalize on conflicting and competing elements
Global leader = paradox navigator

"... is an influential actor capable of thinking paradoxically, guiding social reflection, helping others examine tensions, and accommodate complexity rather than suppressing it."
Further readings


More information about GLA
www.globalleadershipacademy.dk

EVENTS
- Open workshop: Paradoxes in a global world
- Open seminar: Globalization & Group Mindset
- Study tour: Innovation “over there”

NEWS
Latest news from Global Leadership INSIGHTS
The world’s largest companies have traditionally been rooted in the developed economies. According to a recent McKinsey report this is about to change and by 2023 they expect that more than 45% of the Fortune Global 500 companies will be placed in the emerging economies. What does that mean for doing business in and with China?

In this month’s issue of Global Leadership INSIGHTS you can read about managing the “Chinese Way” and why you need to be present in China if you want to sell in China.

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