Leadership paradoxes in a global world

Face contradictions and balance managerial tensions

THINK GLOBALLY, ACT LOCALLY, PANIC INTERNALLY
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
Program

• Introduction
  • What is paradox?
  • 3 levels of paradox
  • Paradox in own context I

What is paradox?

Understanding paradox?

• Working through paradox
  • Paradox in own context II

Paradox in own context II

Dealing with paradox?

• Ways of dealing with paradox
  • Paradox in own context III
Global leadership requires balancing contradictory needs and requirements

- Think long-term
- Innovate
- Think global
- Collaborate
- Individual performance
- Decentralize
- Directive
- Deliver short-term results
- Improve efficiency
- Act local
- Compete
- Team excellence
- Standardize
- Democratic
CASE STUDY

Global roll-out of corporate health and safety standards

John is the VP for Health and Safety of a globally operating technical equipment provider. He is in charge of rolling out corporate health and safety standards across the organization’s production facilities located in 10 different countries, incl. North and South America, Europe, and Asia.

Aligning processes and procedures across Europe and the USA has been challenging, but nothing compared to the implementation of standardized procedures in Asia and South America. Time and time again, John experiences tensions created between HQs corporate CSR strategy and its global commitment to high safety standards and its low-cost production focus in emerging market locations.

What is at stake here? What types of tensions can be identified?
Paradox – what is it?

Dilemma
• Competing choices, each with advantages and disadvantages

• an “either-or” situation where one alternative must be selected over other attractive alternatives

Paradox
• Contradictory yet interrelated elements (dualities) that exist simultaneously and persist over time

• a “both-and” situation between two or more contradictions where a synthesis or choice is not possible or necessarily desirable
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?
Three levels of paradox

**Organizational**
Nature of organizational life with competing organizational designs and processes

**Leadership role**
Competing demands/behaviors expected from managers in their leadership roles

**Individual**
Personal pressure experienced between individual and collective identity and/or values

1. Organizational paradox

2. Role paradox

3. Individual paradox

Individual paradox has a personal dimension

- Relates to relationship of individual managers with the organization, management, and peers as well as the task
- Often experienced as contradictory dynamics, e.g. disconnect between words and deeds
- Involves emotions, personal experiences, and values between the individual and the group
- Personal paradoxes include e.g.
  - trust vs. control
  - being popular vs. being unpopular
  - job security vs. new challenges
  - personal interests vs. company interests
  - optimism vs. problem focus
  - competing vs. collaborating

Program

- Introduction
  - What is paradox?
  - 3 levels of paradox
  - Paradox in own context I

Understanding paradox?

- Working through paradox
- Paradox in own context II

Dealing with paradox?

- Ways of dealing with paradox
- Paradox in own context III
Working through paradox

A process of helping to make sense of tenuous demands to reduce anxiety, escape paralysis, and enable action.

Identifying the mess and extracting the problem: A questioning strategy for analyzing the problem

Source: Attractor Model inspired by Karl Tomm’s Framework for distinguishing 4 groups of questioning (1988)
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"?
- 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”?

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

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.
Program

- Introduction
- What is paradox?
- 3-levels of paradox
- Paradox in own context I

Understanding paradox?

- Working through paradox
- Paradox in own context II

- Ways of dealing with paradox
- Paradox in own context III

Dealing with paradox?
Ways of dealing with paradox

… requires exploring rather than suppressing tensions

1. Acceptance
2. Integrative thinking
3. Positioning

In order to avoid paradox paralyses: Paradox must be solved through alternative ways of thinking
1. Acceptance

- Embrace and live with paradox
- Regard paradox as a persistent and unsolvable puzzle
- Engage anxiety and thereby face challenges surfaced by tensions
- Discuss tensions to foster more creative considerations

Paradox is a pre-condition of organizational life, especially in a global business world
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.
Critical skills  sense making and giving

- Reflection – consider multiple dynamics and perspectives for spotting and dealing with paradox
  - On the personal level
  - On the organizational level (maturity)
- Courage and resilience
- Communication (what, how, who)
- Behavior – ”walk the talk”
Paradox in own context III

Share in your group the reflections that you’ve had in terms of “how to deal with your own paradox”?

Can you see an opening for
1) integrative thinking and/or
2) positioning?
What are the consequences?

How will you communicate it:
1) to whom?
2) what is the key message?
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