

EurOMA 2020 Special Track proposal: the exploration and management of paradoxes in OSCM research

1. Provide a short background to the topic and outline what you regard as main future directions and developments in both research and practice.

The pace of technological change and of the growing complexity of business environments are increasingly forcing organizations “to grapple with new or evolving tensions” and find new solutions (Smith et al. 2017, p. 304). As a consequence, several scholars have questioned traditional perspectives over problem framing and solving, which typically rely on mutually exclusive choices between conflicting goals (Smith and Lewis, 2011), and have proposed alternatives which draw on both/and types of approaches (Andriopoulos and Lewis, 2009, Smith and Lewis, 2011).

In this context, paradox has been defined as the “persistent contradiction between interdependent elements” (Schad et al., 2016, p. 10). Researchers have increasingly adopted a paradox lens to explore tensions in various areas in management research, including leadership (Smith and Tushman, 2005), innovation management (Andriopoulos and Lewis, 2009), sustainability (Jay et al., 2017) and to understand and reframe various tensions such as those between efficiency and innovation (Raisch and Birkinshaw, 2008, Papachroni et al., 2016), exploitation and exploration (Andriopoulos and Lewis, 2009), and alignment and adaptability (Gibson and Birkinshaw, 2004). In doing so, research examined paradox types (organizing, belonging, learning and performing), management (integration or differentiation) and relationships (Andriopoulos and Lewis, 2009, Smith and Lewis, 2011).

2. Why the topic is current and salient for EurOMA members

Compared to other management disciplines, relatively little research adopting a paradox lens has been conducted in the field of Operations and Supply Chain Management (OSCM). Traditionally, OSCM research has adopted “a trade-off, sequencing, or separation of opposing demands” approach (Smith et al., 2017, p. 304) to manage contradictory goals in organizations. A well-known example is the one of trade-offs among operations performance objectives (Skinner, 1969, Schroeder et al., 2011, Ferdows and Meyer, 1990, Nand et al., 2013). While this perspective is useful to understand that, at least in the short term, an organization “cannot simultaneously provide the highest levels among all competitors of the product quality, flexibility, and delivery, at the lowest manufactured cost” (Schmenner and Swink, 1998, p.106), authors have explored only to a limited extent the interplay (rather than the sequence) between performance objectives. For example, rather than asking which performance objectives should be prioritized over others (e.g., flexibility over cost), or what the best sequence for improving various performance objectives is, the adoption of a paradox lens would prompt questions such as: how can an organization perform well against various performance objectives simultaneously and what are the antecedents of doing so? What are the tools, systems, managerial practices, and strategies that can enable individuals within an organization to perform well against various priority areas?

Moreover, organization theorists have discussed different types of paradoxes in organizations; for example, Smith and Lewis (2011) have proposed four types: organizing,

belonging, performing and learning. OSCM researchers could identify and explore the types of paradoxes existing in their areas of interest, including supply chain management, product and service development, process management and improvement, and performance management.

3. Indicate specific sub-topics or research questions to delineate clearer boundaries of what would fit in this special track and what would not

This special track welcomes research that explore the paradoxes in OSCM phenomena and use the paradox lens to identify, explore and manage tensions in OSCM research. It welcomes research that employs various methods including case studies, survey and experiments. Following are some indicative topics:

- Articulating how a paradox perspective can inform and/ or alter the trade-off perspective of performance priorities in OSCM.
- Revisiting the dichotomy view (either/or) of various poles in management research (such as standardization and creativity, exploration and exploitation) from an OSCM perspective
- Identifying and managing paradoxes in various areas such as lean management, supply chain, product development, sustainability, and service operations
- The role of operations capability in embracing and achieving contradictory goals at a strategic level.

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