

# “Dilemmas and Tensions and Binds, Oh My!”

(Using NLP to Understand Paradoxes in Organisations)

By Joe Cheal

*“Toto, I’ve got a feeling we’re not in Kansas anymore.”*

*(Wizard of Oz 1939 - film)*

*This article is based on research carried out by the author during an MSc dissertation. The main focus was to establish the nature of paradox within organisations and to begin to look at how paradox can be managed in the organisational context.*

*The scope of the research was beyond just NLP interventions, however, there were a number of interesting ideas that manifested which link with NLP.*

*This article is in three parts. The introduction sets a context for organisational paradox and why it needs to be addressed. Part one gives a brief overview of paradox itself, with reference to organisational examples. This should give the reader a top level understanding of what organisational paradox looks like. Part two explores some of the links between paradox and NLP, generating some new concepts and understandings.*

## **Introduction**

Dilemmas, tensions, double binds, conflict and vicious circles: each a potential cost to business, manifesting in the forms of stress, indecision and dissatisfaction in the workplace. In an environment where the pace and amount of work increases, there is likely to be increased pressure, conflicting priorities and dilemmas that need to be resolved quickly. Today’s management “find themselves pulled in more directions than ever before” (Stroh & Miller, 1994, p28), “spend much of their time living in the fields of perceived tensions” (Quinn, 1990, p3) and need to “make decisions in a fraction of the time previously devoted to similar decisions” (Harvey et al, 2004, p218). Added to this is the increased amount of information available, leading to information overload and heightened levels of ambiguity (eg. Schwartz 2005). In order to cope with ambiguity, managers and staff are forced to take some kind of position. As soon as there are positions, there will logically be counter-positions and hence polarities are created leading to potential conflict and argument. These polarities and vicious circles can be summed up in one word: ‘paradox’.

The challenges facing organisations and their management appear to be changing. McKenzie (1996, p39) links these changes to paradox: “The more turbulent the times, the more complex the world and the more paradoxes there are”.

In order to survive now, organisations (including their leaders and staff) need to be able to understand and work with paradox. Cameron (1986, p545) suggests that: “To be effective, an organisation must possess attributes that are simultaneously contradictory, even mutually exclusive”. According to Price Waterhouse (1996,p7) “Those achieving the highest levels of performance do so through deftly *balancing* the conflicting demands or ‘tensions’ created by the paradoxes inherent in developing, operating, and continuously transforming any large enterprise”. Both Hampden Turner (1990) and Dodd & Favaro (2007) link financial performance with the management of tensions. After a fifteen year study, Martin (2007, p62) concluded that most of the organisational leaders with the most exemplary records “share a somewhat unusual trait: They have the predisposition and the capacity to hold in their heads two opposing ideas at once.”

Allen & Cherrey (2000, p115) argue that “embracing paradox is an antidote for either-or thinking. Paradoxes invite us to live with polar opposites in peaceful co-existence.” If more people within organisations understood the nature of paradox, how to recognise it and how to manage it, perhaps there would be a reduced level of stress and dissatisfaction and hence a reduced cost to the organisation. In addition, paradoxical thinking may lead to new and creative solutions to previously unresolved problems (eg. Fletcher & Olwyler 1997).

Paradox management is a new and exciting field in organisational development. According to Van de Ven & Poole (1988, p25): “Addressing organisational paradoxes... is an issue on the edge of organization and management theory, and one that will spawn new ideas and creative theory. Looking at paradoxes forces us to ask very different questions and to come up with answers that stretch the boundaries of current theories.”

Aside from the notion of ‘conflict management’, there is an apparent gap in the management ‘toolkit’ to help handle the growing trend of polarities, tensions and vicious circles. This research is intended to fill that gap with what the author calls ‘paradox management’, which as a discipline would sit alongside such activities as change, project, knowledge and performance management.

‘Paradox management’ would not replace traditional, rational approaches to organisational research and development; indeed, its role would be to complement it. In agreement with Bobko (1985, p107), both the ‘bipolar’ (either/or logic) and ‘nonbipolar’ (beyond either/or) perspectives “need to be embraced by organisational science”.

## Part One: Defining Paradox

There is stark disagreement in terms and definitions of paradox, ranging from the simple: “an apparent contradiction” (Quinn and Cameron, 1988, p290) to a more hard-line approach where paradox necessarily contains self reference, contradiction and vicious circularity (Hughes and Brecht, 1978). This hard-line approach is known as a ‘logical paradox’, for example: “This statement is untrue”. As a statement, this is (a) self referential, (b) contradictory and (c) goes round in circles because if it is true, it is false, which means it is true etc. Logical paradox is usually linguistic - the philosopher’s plaything.

Poole and Van de Ven (1989) suggest that “the paradoxes in management are not, strictly speaking, logical paradoxes... Organisational and management theories involve a special type of paradox – social paradoxes” which “tend to be looser: the opposing terms are often somewhat vague, and instead of logical contradictions, tensions and oppositions between incompatible positions must be considered... This opens the possibility of dealing with social paradoxes not only through logical resolutions, but through taking into account the spatial and temporal nature of the social world.” (p564-5)

### Components of Paradox

From the varying definitions and conditions of paradox given in the literature, the author has extrapolated the following components of paradox:

- |        |   |
|--------|---|
| Poles  | <i>Poles are the underlying contradiction of a paradox and are conceptual and inert. They can appear as ‘digital’ (i.e. mutually exclusive) or ‘analogue’ (i.e. a continuum)</i>        |
| Splits | <i>Splits are active and cause the ‘paradoxee’ to feel pulled in two or more directions or decisions. It can also feel that whichever option they take, they lose.</i>                  |
| Loops  | <i>Loops are active and cause the ‘paradoxee’ to feel like they are going round in circles, either ending up where they started or perhaps having lost a little or gained a little.</i> |
| Flips  | <i>Flips are active and cause the ‘paradoxee’ to feel like they ended up with the opposite to or negation of what they actually wanted or intended.</i>                                 |

Splits, loops and flips are the active expression of the underlying pole and are how the paradox plays out or is experienced by the ‘paradoxee’. In this sense, splits, loops and flips are perceptual as opposed to conceptual. It is also possible that the components will combine, the most common perhaps being a flip-loop, where the ‘paradoxee’ goes round in circles but keeps getting flipped each time. An organisational example of a flip-loop might be where the leadership is driven by the short-termism of the shareholders to initiate ‘profit enhancing’ change. The change takes place but needs time for the staff to adapt. Because this doesn’t happen quickly enough, the business is driven to change again. This loop

continues, but with each change the performance (and hence profits) are inadvertently driven down.

### Types of Paradox

Building on these components, table 1 (below) shows some key types of paradox gathered from examples presented by the literature reviewed.

*Table 1: Basic typology of paradox*

<b>Type of Paradox</b>	<b>Components</b>	<b>What is this?</b>
Polarity	Poles	The conceptual aspect of a paradox, the underlying opposition or contradiction.
Double Bind	Splits	No win situations where you are wrong if you do and wrong if you don't (or right if you do and right if you don't).
Dilemma	Splits	A difficult decision caused by a tension between two positions or options.
Self Reference	Loops	Circularity caused by something referring to itself. For example, a tautology, or defining something by using itself.
Vicious or Virtuous Circle	Loops	Circularity driven by a series of cause-effect events that loop back to the original cause.
Self Fulfilling Prophecy	Loops	Circularity caused by the 'paradoxee' expecting a certain outcome and hence looking for the evidence of it. Usually contains a hidden double bind where the paradoxee accepts evidence that agrees with expectations and rejects all evidence that does not. The term 'self fulfilling prophecy' was coined by Robert Merton.
Knots	Flips	Creating the opposite to what was intended. For example, the 'Peter Principle' where people get promoted to their level of incompetence. Or where technology often increases pressure rather than relieving it.
Unintended Consequences	Flips	Taking action brings about unforeseen (usually negative) result.
Logical Paradox	Flip-loops	A statement or event that contains apparently simultaneous contradictory concepts. For example, "I am lying" or "be spontaneous". In order for them to be true they need to be false and in order to be false they need to be true.

### Qualities of Paradox

It should also be noted that paradoxes also appear to have *qualities* as well as components and types. Although these are perhaps less essential to managing paradox, they may add further understanding.

- One quality is in the evaluation of the paradox as to whether it is positive (eg. win-win in negotiation), ironic (eg. today's innovation is tomorrow's expectation) or destructive (eg. self-perpetuating long hours culture).
- Another quality is whether the paradox is a one-off (eg. to promote Fred or Daphne?) or ongoing (eg. to empower or not to empower the staff?).
- A further quality might be in what the author calls 'tight' (involving one or two variables, eg. workload increases so people stay later so workload increases) and 'loose' (involving a larger number of variables, eg. a staff member writes a letter, which is then checked and altered by their manager and is then passed to the next manager above to be 'double-checked' and it is then altered back to what the member of staff originally wrote). Loose paradoxes, although sometimes more complex tend to be easier to resolve (once identified) as there are more places to intervene.

### Perspectives on a Paradox

To add another layer of complexity, the way a paradox is experienced may depend on the perspective taken. A paradox can be perceived at an individual level (1<sup>st</sup> perceptual position) or at a system level (3<sup>rd</sup> perceptual position). Using the examples of 'groupthink' (Janis 1982) and the Abilene Paradox (Harvey 1996), where groups make poor decisions because no-one will disagree, we can take the system perspective or the individual perspective.

**System perspective:** A group of people come together to make a decision. An ineffective proposal is made but no-one disagrees or argues and so the proposal is accepted and passed, to negative effect. This appears as an 'unintended consequences' (flip) type paradox.

**Individual perspective:** A person is in a group where an ineffective proposal is made. The individual does not agree but notices that no-one else is disagreeing. And so to maintain the harmony of the group, the individual does not speak up. This appears as a double bind (split) type paradox, where the individual risks alienation if he/she speaks up, but becomes party to a bad decision if they do not speak up.

The notion of a system perspective and individual perspective might also help us understand the Peter Principle (Peter & Hull, 1969) where an organisation promotes people to their level of incompetence. At the individual level, there appears to be no paradox because the people get promoted to a point and then stay there. However, from a system perspective, an unintended (flip) paradox occurs, because the organisation needs to perform effectively and yet by promoting effective people, it loses the effectiveness!

## Part Two: Findings of Relevance to NLP

### 1) *An additional set of presuppositions about problems and problem resolution*

- An 'unresolvable' problem will have at least one paradox underlying it.
- A problem is only a problem when it is perceived as a problem.
- Identifying and blowing out a component of a paradox will remove (or change) the problem.
- Solutions are context specific therefore paradox management must be about the process of creating solutions and not about the solutions themselves.
- A nominalization is a pole on a potential polarity paradox

### 2) *TOTE and the strategies of paradox*

When a paradox is in action, it could be said to be running a strategy or process. If this is the case, it could be mapped out using Miller, Galanter and Pribram's TOTE model (Dilts et al 1980). NLP uses the TOTE model (Test-Operate-Test-Exit) to explain the nature of an internal strategy. With paradox, particularly the looping kind (eg. self fulfilling prophecy), the TOTE has no Exit, so the paradox strategy runs TOTOTO etc. A looping TOTE could be called a TOTO, or as O'Connor (1997) calls it, a TOT.

Paradoxes can also be mapped out using system diagrams. Interestingly, in NLP terms, Senge's (1993) systems diagrams (or "feedback circle diagrams" p76) are like the TOTE model where no exit exists which is [potentially problematic. Perhaps the exit point is assumed but in visual terms, the circle never ends. Ironically, despite referring to the problem of TOTs, O'Connor and McDermott (1997) still borrow Senge's systems diagrams without creating any exit point. The fundamental rule of any strategy is having an exit point (Dilts et al 1980). As presented, the system diagrams leave us caught in a perpetual loop.

### 3) *Aristotelian logic, negation and the 'inverse complex equivalence'*

The notion of paradox appears to trace back to Aristotelian logic which, in turn, has influenced Western thinking to the present day. This has become known as 'either/or' thinking (Johnson, 1996) and it creates polarities, for example either right or wrong, either win or lose. In formal logic, this is expressed as either X or not X.

This suggests a form of thinking to add to the meta-model violations: an 'inverse complex equivalent' where  $X \leftrightarrow Y$ . For example, "I am not clever" or "cats are not friendly".

Negation is the process of ‘not’ing. The concept of not, or negation may be at the heart of paradox. Andreas (2006) suggests that “negation is an easy way to create an oversimplified world of ‘either/or’ categorical opposites, limiting choice to one of the two.” (p58). In formal logic, as soon as a position is taken on something, there will be a negation, an opposite, a contradiction and hence a paradox.

The negation of X (i.e. not X) can mean an apparently mutually exclusive, specific, logical opposite (eg. on/off), a notional opposite (eg. autocratic/ democratic, manager/leader, option a/option b) or a general opposite which could be *anything* other than X.

4) *The connection between nominalisations and paradox... and how might we denominalise paradox?*

From an NLP perspective, paradox could be considered a nominalisation. Not just the word ‘paradox’, but possibly any nominalisation will be one side of a polarity paradox. When examining a list of polarities in organisations, all of the examples appear to be nominalisations (as in Stroh & Miller 1994, p31, Marsh & Macalpine 1999, p645, Pascale 1990, p53, Peters 1992, p473 and Quinn & Kimberly 1984, p301). A sample list appears below in table 2. Perhaps one thing that distinguishes a nominalisation from a ‘non-nominalisation’ is that it has a meaningful polar opposite. For example, ‘desk’ (a ‘non-nominalisation’) has no meaningful polar opposite, whereas ‘empowerment’ (a nominalisation) does. A list of values is also a list of nominalisations and “nearly all values have a polar opposite value that is also positive” (Quinn & Cameron, 1988, p292), for example: spontaneity and predictability.

Table 2: Example list of organisational polarities

Empowerment	-----	Control
Autonomy	-----	Partnership
Internal	-----	External
Decentralisation	-----	Centralisation
Short term	-----	Long term
Stability	-----	Change
Competition	-----	Collaboration

An awareness of nominalisations may be useful although perhaps not essential. Considering the amount of potential nominalisations in the English language, it would be a case of picking up on those that are troublesome in a particular context, for example the word ‘empowerment’ or ‘leadership’ where tensions might arise due to lack of an agreed/shared definition.

5) Possible linguistic indicators of paradox

Potential linguistic indicators of paradox that were expressed by interviewees (in the MSc research) are highlighted in table 3 (below). They have been split into explicit and implied. The explicit indicators give a strong suggestion that there is a paradox being discussed. The implied indicators suggest a possibility that a paradox is being discussed, depending on the context.

Table 3: Linguistic Indicators of polarity, tension and paradox

Explicit Polarity/Tension	Example/Notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Between               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Balance</li> <li>• Compromise</li> <li>• Dichotomy</li> <li>• Difference</li> <li>• Divide/Division</li> <li>• Happy medium</li> </ul> </li> <li>* Contrary</li> <li>* Counter</li> <li>* Either/or</li> <li>* Versus</li> <li>* Win/lose</li> </ul>	<p>"it's between x and y"</p> <p>"strike a balance between x and y"</p> <p>"compromise between x and y"</p> <p>"dichotomy between x and y"</p> <p>"difference between x and y"</p> <p>"divide between x and y"</p> <p>"happy medium between x and y "</p> <p>"what you have to do might be contrary to your values"</p> <p>"counter productive", "counter balance"</p> <p>"either x or y"</p> <p>"x versus y"</p> <p>"I win, you lose"</p>
Implied Polarity/Tension	Example/Notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* But</li> <li>* Don't</li> <li>* However</li> <li>* Instead</li> <li>* Nevertheless</li> <li>* Not x</li> <li>* On the other hand</li> <li>* Otherwise</li> <li>* Ought/Should</li> <li>* Rather than</li> <li>* Right</li> <li>* So</li> <li>* Though</li> <li>* Too</li> <li>* Whereas</li> <li>* Whilst</li> <li>* Without</li> </ul>	<p>"they will get skills but other people will have to wait"</p> <p>"I don't see it as x"</p> <p>"x however y"</p> <p>"instead of x, y" (or "if not x, y instead")</p> <p>"x nevertheless y" (acts like 'but')</p> <p>implies polarity between x and not x</p> <p>"x, on the other hand, y"</p> <p>"x, otherwise y"</p> <p>implies a mismatch between expectation and reality</p> <p>"x rather than y"</p> <p>Implies there's a wrong (works for any truth value)</p> <p>"x so y" (problem so need/solution)</p> <p>"x though y" (acts like 'but')</p> <p>Implies being at the end of one polarity</p> <p>"x whereas y"</p> <p>"whilst x, y"</p> <p>"talk a lot without any action"</p>

It is interesting to note how many words act like the word 'but' (eg. however, nevertheless, on the other hand, though, whereas, whilst) in that they change the 'emotional' direction (positive to negative and negative to positive) of the speaker's content. It is possible using these language patterns to follow the string of reframes from positive to negative to



positive etc. Some words, like ‘between’ and ‘or’ act as a splitter, marking out two different sides, whereas other words like ‘not’ and ‘too’ act as indicators of polarity, in the sense that they imply that there is an opposing factor. Indeed, it could be argued that any time a position is taken on an issue (eg. “I’m right, you’re wrong”) this would imply there is an opposing position and hence a tension or paradox.

6) *The use of metaphor in the identification and possible resolution of organisational paradoxes*

The use of metaphor might be an indicator of problems and possibly paradox. Table 4 shows the metaphors used by the interviewees when talking about problems (usually paradoxical) throughout the interviews. Perhaps metaphor may be used as a way of expressing difficult or emotive concepts by disassociating.

Table 4: *Metaphors used to describe problematic/paradoxical issues*

* Actions speak louder than words	* Grass is greener	* Scrambled egg (head felt like)
* Balloon out of control	* Grey areas	* Round in circles and end up at square one
* Big gamble	* Grinding your teeth	* Sailing too close to the wind
* Blue flashing light	* Halos and horns	* Same flavour but with less meat on the bones
* Blow up	* Hands are tied	* Set of hurdles and we may fall at one
* Blow with the wind	* Heart trying to do the stomach’s job	* Shifting a big rock
* Bone of contention	* Herd of elephants coming towards you	* Silk glove with the iron fist
* Borderline cases	* Juggling	* Silo mentality
* Brush it under the carpet	* Knotty problem	* Split the pot
* Can of worms	* Many balls in the air at the same time	* Spoon feeding
* Chaos on the streets	* Mix it up like a deck of cards	* Stabbed in the back
* Chase off in different directions	* Move the goalposts	* Sticking ones head above the parapet
* Clash of Egos	* Nightmare	* Sweating blood
* Comparing apples and pears	* Old Boys club	* Thin end of the wedge
* Court of the sun king	* Old hat on	* Turn a blind eye
* Creaky system	* On different wavelengths	* Unhappy bunnies
* Cut any ice	* Open the stable door and let the horse bolt	* War (it’s a war out there)
* Devil & deep blue sea	* Out of its box (an old issue)	* Wrestling with a difficulty
* Different angles	* Put it on the backburner	* Woolly priorities
* Double edged sword	* Queer the pitch	
* Eggs in one basket	* Resources are tight	
* Empire building	* Rock and a hard place	
* Fingers in ears		
* Frying pan into fire		

Positive, solution focussed metaphors...

* Button it down	* Flag it up	* Put a ring fence up
* Clear the air	* Get it off your chest	* Show them the ropes
* Draw a line in the sand	* Play by the book	* Squaring the triangle

Although not exclusively NLP related, the use and exploration of metaphor may be another promising area for paradox management. If metaphor is a way of expressing paradox, perhaps metaphor might also be useful in its management. Dilts (1999, p69) reports that: "According to Bateson... metaphorical thinking leads to more creativity and may actually lead us to discover deeper truths about reality." If a client uses a metaphor as a problem, a practitioner might use a further metaphor for a solution. For example "I keep hitting my head against a brick wall" leads to "If there was a door in the wall, where would it take you?" Matching metaphors with a client/organisation not only builds rapport (Lawley & Tompkins 2003), but can also help to work with the emotional/affective (Wagner 1978) side of the organisation in which paradox and tensions appear to sit. Another area for exploration here would be in the study of 'cognitive linguistics' which works with the prepositions of metaphor (eg. working *on* a problem, stuck *in* a hole, *between* the devil and the deep blue sea, *out* of the frying pan and *into* the fire).

#### 7) *The connection between reframing and its use in resolving paradox*

Reframing may be challenging at the organisational level. In Dilts and DeLozier's (2000b, p1071) definition, to reframe something means "to transform its meaning by putting it into a different framework or context than it has previously been perceived". Bartunek (1988, p151) suggests that reframing in organisations means a change in perception at an organisational level, i.e. "shared meaning or culture". This means organisational reframing is more complex due to interaction between different groups with different perspectives and sub-cultures. There is also a confusion in the concept of reframing which is perhaps more crucial when applied to an organisation – does reframing mean a change of perception, a change of the perceiver, a change of the thing being perceived or a combination? Bartunek (1988) appears to use reframing as a way of changing the organisation from one form to another but this then becomes indistinguishable from classic organisational change management. Perhaps it might be useful to distinguish between reframing an organisation (ie. change management) and reframing an organisational issue (ie. seeing that issue from another perspective perhaps in seeking how the issue could actually be a strength). Although it might ultimately lead to some change management intervention, the reframing approaches highlighted in table L9 apply to reframing organisational issues as opposed to reframing the organisation itself. The question of who or what is actually changing in reframing is an interesting one, but beyond the scope of this review.

More useful is the concept of reframing and in particular the 'sleight of mouth' model. Where reframing might be useful is in the redefining particular problems to see them from other angles. It could be argued that a problem is only a problem if it is perceived as a problem. Hoebeke (2004, p151) suggests "in organisations there are no problems, only

people with problems,” and Ford & Ford (1994, p760) consider that: “Boundaries reside in the observer(s), not the observed. A boundary between an organisation (A) and its environment (not-A), for example, belongs neither to the organisation nor the environment, but to the observer.” Horn (1983, p21) adds that “opposition is only ‘apparent.’... Only in our human conceptions do opposites exist at all.” If this is the case, then when perception changes, the paradox ceases to be ‘manifest’ and returns back to the realm of potential.

For further information about the use of Dilts’ (1999) Sleight of Mouth Patterns as a reframing tool for paradox management, see our article entitled “The Three Logics, Reframing and Sleight of Mouth”.

8) *Using a logical level and category framework as a potential approach to paradox management*

Logical level (or logical type) frameworks can help to separate out the layers of a paradox which in itself can help to resolve a dilemma by shifting away from ‘either/or’ by allowing ‘both/and’ to be true.

Ford and Backoff (1988) postulate that combining the spatial (hierarchical) and the temporal (categorical) aspects of a situation creates four forms of paradox:

		<b>Directional Dualities</b>	
		Horizontal	Vertical
<b>Time Dualities</b>	Synchronic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• same level, same time <i>(eg. two managers ask a staff member to do two equally important tasks now)</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• different level, same time <i>(eg. a manager asks a member of staff to do something that contradicts company policy)</i></li> </ul>
	Diachronic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• same level, different time <i>(eg. a manager changes their mind and says ‘no’ when they said ‘yes’ earlier)</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• different level, different time <i>(eg. a director asks a member of staff to do something that conflicts with what their own manager told them to do earlier)</i></li> </ul>

It would be expected that a problem that has a different level and/or different time duality should be easier to resolve than a problem that sits at the same level and at the same time. The directional and time dualities model is a useful distinction in that it may help to understand the dynamics of a paradox.

In the above quadrant, ‘directional dualities’ could represent different levels of a functional hierarchy or of a ‘logical type’ hierarchy. An example of a functional hierarchy would be an organisation where the levels are those of grade and there are mixed messages coming

from different managerial levels. Models of 'logical type' hierarchies are: Bateson's logical types - based on Russell and Whitehead's theory of types (Bateson 2000), Keostler's 'Holarchy' (Keostler 1978), Dilt's (neuro)logical levels (Dilts & DeLozier 2000a) and 'hierarchy of ideas' (James & Woodsmall 1988). Other examples of 'logical type' distinctions might be: 'object vs relationship' (Watzlawick 1993), 'strategy/process vs content' (Dilts et al 1980), 'content vs context' (Bandler & Grinder 1982), 'espoused theories (what I say I would do) vs theories-in-use (what I would actually do)' (Argyris 1988), and 'individual vs system' (discussed earlier).

In addition to time and levels, we could also add another quadrant. This would use the same vs different polarity (as in Ford & Backoff 1988) and then scope (what and how much we focus on) vs category (the order we put on experience) (Andreas 2006). An example of a 'scope' related paradox might be a conflict caused by one person focusing on big picture and another on the detail. An example of a 'category' related paradox might utilise the McKinsey 7S model (Waterman & Peters 1980), where a system within the organisation prevents a strategy from being carried out.

Aside from the scope and category distinction, the McKinsey 7S model (Waterman & Peters 1980) as an existing OD tool (see fig. L1) may be useful in diagnosing where paradoxes exist within an organisation. A paradox might exist within a category (eg. conflicting strategies) or between categories (eg. management style is at odds with the shared values and staff morale). The model may also help to determine where the cause(s) and the effect(s) of the paradoxes are. An example might be that an organisation's IT **system** has so many issues, that it leads to stress in the **staff** and a culture (**shared values**) of cynicism about IT **systems**. The organisation introduces a new IT **system** but it is resisted by the **staff**. The effect of this is a change in management **style** to being more directive which in turn conflicts with the company **strategy** of empowerment and **staff** turnover increases. Paradox within any system or organisation suggests that something may need to be resolved, improved or changed and using the 7S model to explore paradox may make it easier to understand and map the conflicting issues. This in turn may make it easier for management and staff to resolve those issues and hence integrate 'paradox management' into an intervention. For more information on the 7S model, see our article: "The Logical Level 7S Matrix.

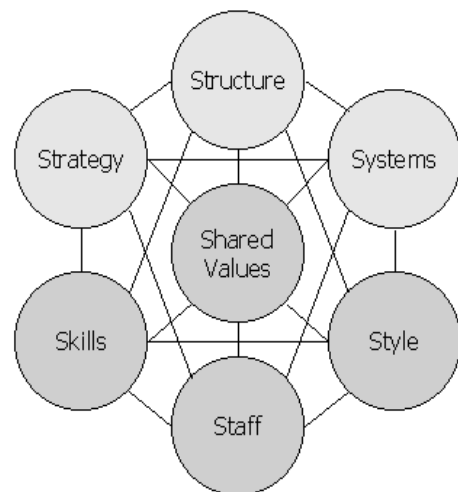


Figure L1: The McKinsey 7S model

## About the Author

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*For methods and techniques for managing paradox, look out for Joe's forthcoming book: "Solving Impossible Problems"*

*Related articles (found at [www.gwiztraining.com/ArticlesNLP](http://www.gwiztraining.com/ArticlesNLP)):*

- *The Three Logics, Reframing and Sleight of Mouth*
- *Logical Levels 7S Matrix*
- *Organisational Logical Levels*
- *What's the Meta?*

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