Six perspectives of process studies on researching paradoxes in organizations

(This is a work in progress and will be adapted for the presentation)

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Abstract: In this paper we explore the potential of process perspective to study organizational paradoxes. While paradox scholarship has employed mainly variations of a weak process view, paradox studies could benefit more strongly from a strong process view. we synthesize methodological insights from working with process data and apply them to the study of organizational paradoxes. This leads to distinguish six types of process studies, which describe different ways to investigate the dynamics of paradox. The paper offers to enrich paradox research practice, and contributes to the understanding of paradox dynamics in paradox theory.

Keywords: paradox, process studies, research practice

Introduction

In this paper, we address the following observation in the research on organizational paradoxes: One the one hand, paradox literature is attentive to time and temporal developments, focusing on the dynamic, time-sensitive nature of organizing that is shaped by paradoxical tensions as organizing unfolds. References to temporal developments range from different definitions (Putnam, Fairhurst, & Banghart, 2016; Schad, Lewis, Raisch, & Smith, 2016; Smith & Lewis, 2011), to empirical analyses of unfolding events of learning to live with opposing demands (Pradies, Tunarosa, Lewis, & Courtois, 2020), their fluctuations over time (Smith & Besharov, 2019), the emergence of virtuous (Smith & Lewis, 2011) and vicious cycles (Es-Sajjade, Pandza, & Volberda, 2021), up to studying specific moments (Jarzabkowski & Lê, 2017; Tuckermann, 2019).

On the other hand, paradox research appears to lack a systematic exploration of the various approaches to theorizing from process data. Neither recent methodological studies (Jarzabkowski, Bednarek, Chalkias, & Cacciatori, 2019; Le & Bednarek, 2017; Tsoukas & Cunha, 2017) nor reviews (Putnam et al., 2016; Schad et al., 2016) provide an overview that helps scholars to distinguish between approaches and harness different opportunities of investigating paradox from a process perspective

Doing so would establish a foundation to deepen our understanding of how to characterize the temporal dynamics of paradoxes, including responses to paradoxes and their outcomes. A nuanced focus on various approaches to explaining dynamics over time could also help paradox theorizing to illuminate the dynamic nature of paradox, which remains seemingly paradoxical in that paradox remains the same despite the attempts to address it (Cunha & Putnam, 2017). and systematically address the question of *how do paradoxes unfold in time and over time?*

To leverage a process perspective for paradox research, we synthesize methodological insights from working with process data and apply them to the study of organizational paradoxes. In particular, we draw on literature by Ann Langley and colleagues (Abdallah, Lusiana, & langley, 2019; Cloutier & Langley, 2020; De Villa & Langley, 2024; Fachin & Langley, 2017; Langley, 1999, 2021). These works describe different ways of conducting empirical studies to empirical paradox research. Their comparison resulted in six types of process studies on paradox that are applied and combined in empirical paradox research: process as logical sequence, as event sequence, as enactment, as synthesizing, as narrative, and as relation. Their comparison illumines

various understandings of process, in correspondence with the explanatory approach or mechanism (Langley & Tsoukas, 2010). Given the ontological and epistemological differences between the types and our goal of informing empirical paradox studies, we specifically highlight what each exemplified type considers as fix and what as dynamic when researching paradox. This distinction helps to clarify whether a certain type of process study considers a stable paradox and aims to explain dynamics actors or researchers observe; whether paradox is dynamically evolving due to factors that a study considers stable; or, as with strong process approaches stability is to explained in a world of becoming (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002).

We contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics of paradox. We ask: *how do paradoxes unfold in time and over time?* Contrasting process approaches enables to delineate their strengths and weaknesses and helps researchers to adopt an appropriate process approach to study their research interests and questions, assist them in their methodological choices as well as explicating the scope and boundary conditions of their work. Three major insights result from the discussion: (1) underexplored dynamics of paradoxes associated with the limited use of process approaches, (2) unearthing dominant assumptions about what is fixed and what is not, and, related to that, (3) considering missing but possible assumptions that constitute an extremely strong process view and could be applied in future research. Overall, we contribute to practice by helping to "sharpening the focus on time" (Putnam, Fairhurst, & Banghart, 2016: 72).

We structure the paper as follows. First, we briefly introduce the distinction between weak and strong process view, elaborate on how we selected and synthesized the above-mentioned process studies, and identified examples of corresponding paradox studies. Second, we classify six types of process views of paradox, organized in a continuum from weaker to stronger views. Next, we elaborate on the six different approaches to process studies. After that, we discuss the results, before concluding the paper.

Background section: different ways of process studies

Before presenting the six types of process studies with empirical exemplars, this section introduces the distinction between weak and strong process views. It helps to position the types along a continuum. Along this continuum, we describe our selection and synthesis of different ways of conducting process studies using the works of Langley and colleagues. Finally, we elaborate on how we selected exemplar studies in paradox literature.

Paradox: Weaker and stronger views

A process perspective on organization studies draws on a variety of philosophical and theoretical foundations that provide a robust and varying foundation to study organizational phenomena. Tsoukas and Chia (2002) argue for a becoming world that renders stability or stable entities like organizations worth explaining. Similarly, Hernes and Weik (2007: 253) elaborate an endogenous view on process that emphasizes that "stable entities are both constituted by process and at the same time are constitutive of process". Organizations are therefore temporal stabilizations which are accomplished through ongoing actions, communications, and decisions. By emphasizing stability as worth explaining, a process view is promising for the study of the dynamics of paradox (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2024).

Within process studies, the distinction between weak and strong process views has gained traction (van de Ven & Poole, 2005). Langley and Tsoukas (2016), who elaborate this distinction and other authors who draw on it, associate a weak process view with the assumption of organization as entities, whereas a strong process view assumes organizations as flow. Process within a weak view considers entities that change (van de Ven, 1992). Process in the strong view means that reality is flow of entangled situations, actions, communications of ongoing processes (Hernes, 2008). A weak process view considers entities that change from time to time, thereby taking stability as a starting point. In contrast, a strong process view foregrounds the becoming of reality (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002) in which stability is an active accomplishment and entities are always in the making (Hernes & Weik, 2007). It is "the belief that the world is made of processes (activities, events, experiences, interactions, discourses) through which things are reified. These processes in social and organizational life perform observable "things" (strategies, values, routines, meanings, identities, etc.) that are viewed as temporary instantiations of an ongoing flow of becoming." (Abdallah et al., 2019: 99f). We build on this this distinction between "fixed" entities that change over time and entities understood as temporary stabilizations resulting from ongoing processes by using it to distinguish between different ways of conducting process studies.

Synthesizing ways of conducting process studies

For conducting empirical process studies, draw on works by Langley and colleagues particularly (Abdallah et al., 2019; Cloutier & Langley, 2020; De Villa & Langley, 2024; Fachin & Langley, 2017; Langley, 1999, 2021) as well as others (Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2016;

Hernes & Weik, 2007). These works distinguish different ways of studying process in and of organizations, that correspond to the distinctions of weak and strong process views. The above mentioned publications by Langley and colleagues as well as others differ in labelling but comparing their similarities allowed us identifying six ways of conducting process studies:

The understanding of process as tool promotes an instrumental approach in which a sequence of activities leads to an outcome (Abdallah et al., 2019), which these authors call "evolution". Others call this approach process as program (Hernes & Weik, 2007) that "consist of bits and pieces of actions logically connected around an idea" (Hernes & Weik, 2007: 256), so that process serves the "purpose of solving problems" (Abdallah et al., 2019). Inherent to this approach is the idea of linear causality of causes and effects which is why we label this approach process as logical sequence.

The second way of conducting process studies emphasizes events in a time period, for example by visual mapping or temporal bracketing episodes over a period of time (Langley, 1999). Accordingly, process is understood as a events unfolding over time (van de Ven, 1992). This understanding allows studying process as flows in a context of relatively stable entities (Hernes & Weik, 2007) based on "the belief that the world is made of things that have qualities that change over time" (Abdallah et al., 2019: 94). This approach and the first both exemplify a weak process view.

We call the third understanding process as enactment in line with (Abdallah et al., 2019), which has also been described as process as activity and highlights "how people negotiate understandings in situated interactions" (Fachin & Langley, 2017: 6). In this approach, specific instances of interaction, or particular events, are the unit of analysis (Abdallah et al., 2019). Ingrained in this understanding is the understanding that instances or events enact process and recursively relate to prior events and future ones. These recursive relations form structures, "whereby both parties engage in their mutual production (Hernes & Weik, 2007: 260). Integral to this understanding is the notion of duality, in which event and structure mutually constitute each other (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011).

A fourth understanding of process emphasizes how actors makes sense of process in which they are embedded. It relates to related to how individuals "narrate" phenomena and it is sometimes more implied than made explicit." (Abdallah et al., 2019: 105). Focusing on narratives and narration, this approach traces the becoming understanding and aims to emphasize

meanings given to experiencing phenomena (Langley & Tsoukas, 2010: 17) that also enable an alternate template approach when studying different narratives (Langley, 1999).

A fifth approach – process as synthesizing- is embedded in a dialectic tradition (Farjoun, 2017) that has gained importance in the so-called constitutive approach to paradox (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2024). The dialectical view assumes "the world as manifold of nested and interrelated processes" (Farjoun, 2017: 135). Farjoun (2017: 325) states that "dialectical analysis involves a search for fundamental principles which account for the emergence and dissolution of specific social orders". The flowing forces generate theses, and antithesis, that become transformed into a synthesis (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2024) which is why we chose the label synthesizing.

The fifth way of studying process we label as process as relation. Relations and connectivity between actors, actions, events etc. is what this approach places at the center to understanding process in general and the becoming of entities. Hernes and Weik (2007: 259) state that connecting is central to organizing activity, or that organizing means combining heterogeneous factors to accomplish stabilizing activities in time-space. A special way of process as relation the way of conducting process studies, which we call process as withness. Whereas process as relation remains silent about the researcher, process as withness highlights this relationship between researcher and researched (Fachin & Langley, 2017: 24), drawing on the works of Shotter (2006). He promotes research as "situated dialogic action research" (Shotter, 2009) in order to generate socially useful knowledge. "The inquiry dialogues and material artifacts give rise to collective sensemaking and the generation of alternate ways of approaching the practical issues raised. "Withness thinking" translates here into a form of collaborative action research." (Fachin & Langley, 2017: 25).

These six ways of conducting process studies provide a nuanced range of possibilities on how to study the dynamics of paradox and their consideration of time. Process as a logical sequence displays time implicitly by assuming that causes precede effects. Process as events explicitly help analyze flows over time period and so does process as relation but with the focus on in the in-between of events and actions. In difference, process as enactment attunes to moments in the presence that allows investigating how past, future and thereby periods of time become or not become referenced. Process as narrative, process as relation, and process as withness enable to consider both a present moment as well as a period of time, depending on the particular interest of study. Whereas the first of the three aims for reconstructing meaning, the other emphasize either relation between factors to explain the becoming of the

phenomenon of interest, whereas the latter includes the researcher-researched relationship on generating insight.

Selecting exemplar studies in literature on organizational paradox

In the next step, we searched for exemplar studies in paradox literature to illustrate and to compare these ways of conducting process research. This step in our analysis does not provide a comprehensive review of paradox literature over the past decades for the following reasons: First, research of the web of science data base resulted in numerous paradox organization studies that appear processual in general. But neither titles, nor keywords, or abstracts provided consistent and unambiguous cues to help organize the result list. Second, and while a comprehensive literature review would have revealed more common and less common process approaches to paradox, many empirical studies we analyzed contain elements of several process approaches. This observation is not surprising in so far, as paradox literature thus far lacks a systematization of the possibilities for process studies on paradox. For these reasons, we found it sufficient for the aim of this paper to use papers as examples for each of the types we identified in the previous step of our analysis.

Six ideal types

In this section, we present six ideal types of process studies on paradox, summarized in the Figure 1. It results from comparing the types and their illustrative examples in paradox studies. The comparison began with the presented understanding of the process, in correspondence with the explanatory approach or mechanism (Langley & Tsoukas, 2010). Given the ontological and epistemological differences between the types and our goal of informing empirical paradox studies, we building on the distinction between weak and strong process view. This distinction helps to clarify what each example and type considered as fix and what as dynamic in their research on paradox. These categories – understanding of process, what is fix, what is dynamic, exemplar papers of paradox, the explanatory approach, and the positioning of the researcher guide our comparison. In a final part we elaborate on what one can learn from each approach and suggest possible future research. We position each approach along the distinction of weak and strong process view as displayed on the bottom of figure 1. It summarizes our analysis:

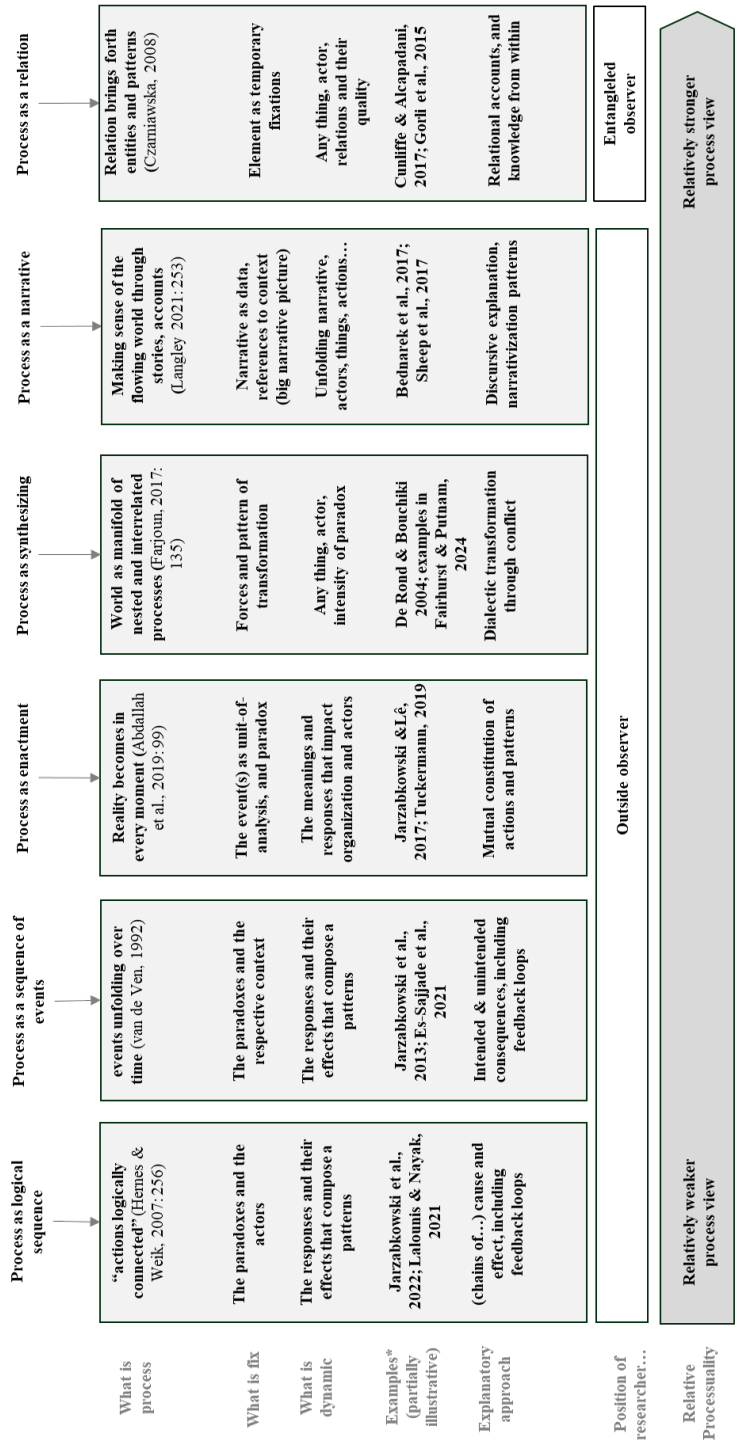


Figure 1: Six ideal types of process approaches to studying paradox

Process as logical sequence

Explanatory approach. In this approach of process as a "logical sequence", processes "consist of bits and pieces of actions logically connected around an idea how organizations should stabilize or change" (Hernes & Weik, 2007: 256). Often used in combination with grounded theory and a data structure of first-order themes, second-order concepts and aggregate dimensions,

studies within logical sequence "tend[s] to drive the analysis toward a focus on factors interacting in much the same way as variables" (Abdallah et al., 2019: 106). This approach highlights cause and effect relations and logical coherence (Hernes & Weik, 2007: 257) while temporal dynamics remain implicit due to the assumption that causes precede effects (van de Ven, 1992).

What is fixed. In paradox research applying a process as logical sequence approach, the focal entity, i.e., the paradox, is fixed. Relationships between poles can be changed through ongoing efforts. For example, tensions between exploration and exploitation (Lalounis & Nayak, 2021), social mission and profit orientation (Smith & Besharov, 2019), and collaboration and control (Sundaramurthy & Lewis, 2003) can be transformed into a mutually supportive relationship. Yet, the paradox (e.g., of exploration and exploitation) stays the same. Therefore, paradoxical poles are often understood as demands that raise tensions and need to be addressed. As pointed out by others (Cunha & Putnam, 2017), when studies build on and refer to pre-defined types of paradoxes and levels of their manifestation like those in the dynamic equilibrium model (Smith & Lewis, 2011), these references tend to reify paradox which underscores their manageability (Fairhurst, 2018). Accordingly, investigation "identifies" paradox (Lalounis & Nayak, 2021: 144) followed by an investigation of how actors respond and with what effects.

What is dynamic. In other words, the responses, and their effects on the relationship between paradoxical poles are the dynamic component of the approach of process as logical sequence. The response can lead to desired and undesired results often described as virtuous and vicious cycles fueled by a repetitive action pattern or practices (Tsoukas & Cunha, 2017)

***Examples*.** For example, Lalounis & Nayak (2021) investigate the reproduction of a vicious cycle drawing on circular causality and feedback loops. The analysis draws on longitudinal data generated through an ethnography as well as references to the chronological occurrence of events. Based on a data structure as above, the resulting model consists of causal connections of the different elements, which illustrates a process as logical sequence. A similar path becomes visible in the process study that carves out "knotting" to explain how inter-organizational actors respond to paradoxes as they address crises (Jarzabkowski, Bednarek, Chalkias, & Cacciatori, 2022). Their longitudinal data and the unfolding events provide a rich context to present a model of combining different elements to explain how "knotting responses" – "running different scenarios… agreeing to develop new elements to the solutions… and expanding the solution's appeal to new interorganizational ac-tors…" (Jarzabkowski et al., 2022: 1493) –

help the interorganizational network to return to equilibrium as crises pushes them to disequilibrium thereby "iterating between equilibrium and disequilibrium strengthens the solution" (Jarzabkowski et al., 2022: 1497).

What we learn. The approach of process as a logical sequence helps to identify causal factors and forces that come into play as actors respond to paradox. Studies that draw on longitudinal data like the ones mentioned here, thereby help to work through the messiness of processes as they occur. The downside of revealing logical sequences of key factors is the strong reduction of complexity or messiness, which sometimes can be understood as an oversimplification. Nevertheless, we learn to consider feedback loops and the importance of social practices, as in the above two examples, respectively, that both leverage more of a circular than a linear understanding of cause and effect.

What lies in the future. Regarding temporal dynamics, process as logical sequence leads to a focus on the responses and their effects over time, while keeping paradox fixed. In addition, the examples above evoke an image of a punctuated equilibrium model that assumes equilibrium as a starting point that is interrupted so that the trajectory aims for restoration. An interesting variation of this approach could be turning it upside down and assuming paradoxes not as fixed but as temporary stabilizations resulting not from logical sequences but contradictory dynamics.

Process as sequence of events

Explanatory approach: Like the previous approach, process as a sequence of events assumes "that the world is made of things that have qualities that change over time," and studies aim to understand how and why this entity changes over time (Abdallah et al., 2019: 94). Instead of focusing on logically connected actions and factors, this approach focuses on events unfolding over time empirically (van de Ven, 1992). Analysis looks at the chronology of the events, e.g. of a change initiative (Jarzabkowski, Lê, & van de Ven, 2013), at times mapped visually or bracketed into episodes for cross-comparisons (Langley, 1999). Presentations of the analysis often either provide a descriptive event history followed by an interpretive analysis, or by presenting findings along-side phases that correspond with the "theoretical interpretive categories in each phase" (Abdallah et al., 2019: 99). As the approach of a sequence of events focuses on their unfolding over time, temporal dynamics are explicitly reconstructed from empirical data and a central tenet of this approach. Dynamics are depicted in the form of processual patterns such as life-cycles, teleology, cyclical change and spiral, or tensions (van de Ven & Poole,

1995). Dynamics like these are explanatory mechanisms identified in "temporal patterns among activities and events" (Langley & Tsoukas, 2010: 14).

What is fixed. Applying an approach of process as sequence of events, researchers assume the context to be fix. More specifically, explanations interpret the flow of events vis-à-vis its context, which is composed of relatively stable entities (Hernes & Weik, 2007: 256). For, example, Pettigrew's contextualist framework (Pettigrew, Woodman, & Cameron, 2001) situates the unfolding events (flow) of an unfolding change process (topic) within its internal (organizational) and external (environmental) context that is subject to occasional disruptions. As in the approach of process as logical sequence, paradox studies applying this approach regard the contradictory demands as stable that form the paradox under study, like the service paradox (Jay, 2013), social and business demands (Abdallah, Denis, & Langley, 2011), or demands for exploration and exploitation in venture growth (Es-Sajjade, Pandza, & Volberda, 2021). As before, a stable paradox corresponds to the prevalent understanding of its persistence.

What is dynamic. Studies investigate the dynamic unfolding of events of how actors manage paradox and with what effect. These are the dynamic components that allow identifying response practices and patterns, as well as how these impact the organization, the team, or the actors over time.

***Examples*.** The application of the process as sequence of events approach in its pure form is rare in paradox research. One study that applies elements of this approach is Jarzabkowski et al.(2013) investigating a restructuring process by first identifying the specific paradoxes building on pre-defined types, and examining the relationship between these paradoxes (ibid., 249), followed by their focus on how managing these paradoxes unfolds over the course of the initiative. Closely following the responses over time reveals how different types of paradoxes interact, in combination with defensive responses first, and active ones later. The latter helps to shift initially increasing confrontation between the actors due to defensive responses towards collaboration resulting from embracing the paradoxical tensions with active approaches and their embedding in procedures and structures of the organization. The study of managing paradoxical tensions of exploration and exploitation in business ventures is similar and complementary, by showing how defensive responses, like structural separation, increasing confrontation and avoiding re-produce an exacerbating vicious cycle over time (Es-Sajjade et al., 2021).

What we learn. The approach of process as a sequence of events helps to identify patterns of actions and communication that drive the dynamic of unfolding events over time. The above mentioned-motors of change are but one example (van de Ven & Poole, 1995). Another example of what drives the process of unfolding events can be the insights of actors into negative consequences of defensive responses that leads them to engage with active responses (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013), or the role of supportive actors (Pradies, Tunarosa, Lewis, & Courtois, 2020). These and other insights result from empirical studies that observe the events unfolding over time, that allow to discern effects – intended or unintended – on the actors and the organization under study, providing valuable insights into insufficient and sufficient responses of managing paradox (Tsoukas & Cunha, 2017).

What lies in the future. As pointed out above, and regarding temporal dynamics, the approach of process as a sequence of events seems to invite studies to assume some entities as fixed against which the actions to manage them flow over time. In this sense, while this approach helps to investigate the dynamics resulting from paradox, it is limited to studying the dynamics of paradox. Another disadvantage of this approach are models with limited generalizability than the more abstract ones depicting a logical sequence (Langley, 1999). An advantage of the process as sequence of events approach is that it attends to the specific context of the studied phenomenon. This equips this approach better than the previous one to grasp the complexity of reality. Future research could apply the process as sequence of events approach and examine differences in managing different paradoxes such as exploration vs. exploitation or social mission vs. profit orientation.

Process as enactment

Explanatory approach. Process as enactment, differs from the previous approaches and is similar to the following ones in this section, in that it expresses a becoming ontology (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). Studies focus on "how reality is brought into being in every moment in everyday activities and interactions" (Abdallah et al., 2019: 100). Thus, this approach builds on a stronger process view than the two ones we described above. Process as logical sequence reduces temporality to a logical flow. Process as sequence of events reconstructs how entities change over time. In contrast, a process as enactment approach examines how temporary stability and change is enacted in and over time.

An underlying idea is that like a scientist scholars who uses a microscope of studying unique events that "helps understanding the whole through its tiny parts" (Rouleau, 2005: 1419, cited

in: Fachin & Langley, 2017: 20). Analysis focuses on naturally occurring interactions to explain how an entity in question, like a paradox is becoming in that moment in time, for instance, by analyzing discursive patterns (Jarzabkowski & Lê, 2017) or references in the communication (Tuckermann, 2019). Abdallah et al. (2019: 102) found that some studies present their findings by drawing on theoretical categories, while others also bring in elements of context beyond the event to illumine the situatedness of the studied events that helps their interpretation. Alongside the focus on unique events, temporal dynamics are either confined to the events studied, or part of the underlying assumption that time is constitutive to a world as becoming. "[T]emporality is therefore a constitutive feature of the analysis, since performativity can only be addressed in time but ! although present ! is not the main focus of the emerging theoretical stories and models, because the focus is on process, activities, and practices in the moment and what they accomplish or bring into being. (Abdallah et al., 2019: 101).

What is fixed. Applying the approach of process as enactment, the studied event as the unit-of-analysis is fixed. At the same time, this approach acknowledges that even ephemeral events "have longer term origins and consequences than might initially be perceived and this needs to be captured in the research despite the focus on activity and "becoming." (Fachin & Langley, 2017: 22). As in the previous two approaches, paradoxes are also understood as persistent and stable.

What is dynamic. In this approach, the occurring interactions are dynamic, and therefore also what emerges, for example, as tensions, and the notion of actors involved or not, as well as in which role. The underlying idea is what Hernes & Weik (2007) call an endogenous view on process, in which flows bring forth reality, including temporal stabilizations such as organizations, their structures, and causality, although studies can also refer to theoretical categories such as a duality (Farjoun, 2010) or mutual constitution of process and structure (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011). In addition, the explanatory mechanism of the interaction within the event become temporary stabilizations, e.g., as a recurring pattern like humor (Jarzabkowski & Lê, 2017) or the temporal occurrence of references in an interaction (Tuckermann, 2019).

Examples. Jarzabkowski & Lê (2017) study team interactions and reveal how the discursive practice of humor shapes the construction of paradox as the actors interpret specific instances of their work as well as giving rise to their responses to manage paradox. Using a practice approach, these authors argue (ibid., 437) "that smaller responses carry critical importance because the organization is ultimately a culmination of what people do". Their resulting model displays two paths that emerge with a humor-induced construction of paradox and responses,

one of which reproduces existing responses, and the other offering alternative responses that lead to actions that reproduce the overall "paradoxical condition." The movement into either of the two paths depends on whether the humorous construction is consistent with the existing response or disrupts it. Thereby, this work highlights that "responses are often constructed in-the-moment, as part of everyday work," but without the actors necessarily considering "the long-term consequence of such actions" (ibid. 457). The study on invisibilizing paradox (Tuckermann, 2019) complements these insights by showing how paradox also disappears from interactions as part of managing paradox. The study draws on social systems theory (Luhmann, 2000), thereby assuming a recursive reproduction of process and structure through communication that emerge from the ways in which communications connect (or not).

What we learn. These examples of process as enactment contribute to a more fluid understanding of paradoxical dynamics in specific moments in time, thereby illumining the construction of paradox and of responses in unique instances. The approach of process as enactment helps to overcome the analytic distinction or separation between paradox and responses that the approaches of logical sequence or sequence of events tend to assume by fixating paradox vis-à-vis the dynamics of managing them.

What lies in the future. Due to their focus on unique events, the approach of process as enactment, does not investigate the temporal dynamics over time. For example, Tuckermann (2019) provides anecdotal illustration that the invisibilized paradox reappears in the future in other events, but without a deliberate investigation that could have revealed the transformation of paradox over time as system theory implies (Knudsen, 2005).

Process as synthesizing

Explanatory approach. We call the fourth approach "process as synthesizing." This approach builds on a dialectical perspective and is often combined with the process as enactment approach (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2024). This approach highlights that dynamics occur with transformations that result from conflicts (Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2016) between actors and the forces they represent, who then mobilize themselves and others to pursue the conviction. This approach argues that "Tensions play out dialectically as a push-pull struggle in enacting and reacting to competing demands, both recurseively and reflexively over time." (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2024: 19). Transformation and synthesis results sometimes unintentionally from this conflict of opposite forces or thesis and antithesis (Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2016). Another outcome is that one force dominates the other and assimilates it into their own (ibid.). These

studies – as well as insightful examples provides in Fairhurst and Putnam (2024) – display that "any given contradiction is inextricably linked to many other contradictions, both within the organization and at other units of analysis, which compose the "social totality" (Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2016: 325).

What is fixed. In this approach, little is assumed fix because of assumed forces of the omni-present processes that manifest in paradox experienced by actors (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2024). As second important assumption is that paradox manifests in conflicts that may or may not lead to transformation, which includes an emerging new element that leads to subsequent opposition thus suggesting an endless process synthesizing theses and antitheses that characterizes a dialectic perspective (Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2016).

What is dynamic. This approach of process as synthesizing in principle broadens the dynamics to any "thing": "…"things" are no more than transient patterns of stability in the surrounding flux, temporary eddies in the continuous flow of process" (Farjoun, 2017: 135), including –in principle –the actor (Hernes & Weik, 2007: 253), and paradox, because "contradictions are transformed over time " (Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2016: 323).

Examples. We did not encounter many examples of paradox studies leveraging the approach of process as synthesizing. Fairhurst & Putnam (2024) provide telling examples both of unique events, like conflict among church members, as well as unfolding events as in their case of Boeing. One example of a published study is that of a strategic alliance by De Rond & Bouchiki (2004: 67). It traces the becoming of a strategic alliance presented as a narrative that illumines that "The dialectical tensions that arise from the interplay of these forces [of individuals who bring with them a plurality of understandings, interests, and embeddedness in different settings] are neither intrinsically functional nor dysfunctional." The study provides an in-depth insight into how events and performances of actors, including their changing roles or the changing of actors shape the trajectory of the rise and end of the studied alliance between two firms. Corresponding to the underlying dialectic perspective, the analysis remains on the level of narrative, without abstracting an explanatory model as studies of the previous process approaches develop. It thereby foregrounds "the multitude of tensions as entangled in the social fabric" (ibid., 66) without assuming a particular causality, like cause and effect, duality, or mutual constitution. Implicitly, the study allows for interpreting the studied dynamic as an interplay of the above-mentioned forces, actors' performances, and their effects on the becoming alliance as well as on the actors, their roles, and mutual understandings.

What we learn. The approach of process as synthesizing complements the one of process as enactment by tracing contradictions over time that are constructed in unique moments. In addition, with its dialectic underpinning process as synthesizing directs attention to power differences which have long been overlooked in paradox studies (Berti & Simpson, 2021), and at the emphasis on collaboration and dialogue of a paradox lens with that of mobilization and conflict (Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2016: 323). In addition, this approach cautions us of the manageability of paradox but suggests the limited agency of managing and controlling paradox (Farjoun, 2017).

What lies in the future. Future research could further investigate temporal dynamics, for instance, by elaborating on changing attributes of the underlying forces over time. For example, de Rond and Bouchiki (2004) indicate that tensions intensify in certain situations than others which could result from the specific situation and from a change of the forces flowing through them. Intensifying could also be a matter of speed or of changing direction. More generally, as these and other authors argue to assume underlying forces (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2024), others remain silent on this issue (Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2016), which leaves for future research to further elaborate on the relation of forces and paradox to better understand the principles Farjoun (2017: 135) mentions Benson (1977: 3) who speaks of principles "which account for the emergence or dissolution of specific social orders." Finally, future work could investigate the relationship between conflicts and dialogue that a dialectic perspective and the paradox lens promote, respectively.

Process as narrative

Explanatory approach. The approach of process as a "narrative " highlights "how people make sense of the world through stories and narrative accounts" (Langley, 2021: 253). Often, a discourse perspective helps to analyze interview data to identify themes or common threads within the accounts, that illustrate or relate with a "bigger narrative picture" (Abdallah et al., 2019: 105). "Theoretical models are presented as synthesizing devices that make contributions around the identification of narrative patterns or forms of "narrativization" of a phenomenon. According to Pentland (1999), this "narrativization" process is a way of making deeper structures emerge from the more surface-based features of narrative data." (ibid.). Such models search for "meanings" of individuals and of collectives thereby also shedding light on competing multiplicity (Langley & Tsoukas, 2010: 17) and include time as part of the narrative(s) under study.

What is fixed. What is fixed depends in part on the content of the narrative that is being analyzed. Similarly to the previous approach that understands reality as enacted through practice, a narrative approach understands social reality as communicatively constituted, i.e. through communicative practices or processes that refer to and bring forth social structures (Luhmann, 1995; Seidl & Whittington, 2014; Wittgenstein, 1986). Related to that, certain aspects of the wider context – the "bigger narrative picture" – are at times considered rather stable like the paradox under study.

What is dynamic. The dynamic within this approach to process studies is situated in the narrative, that can tell an emerging phenomenon, and with the experience of the individuals (Abdallah et al., 2019: 105). Everything, even actors and the attribution of speech and actions to actors, can be understood as communicatively constituted (Caldwell, 2007; Luhmann, 1995)

Examples. There are some examples of process as narrative within paradox literature. For example, Bednarek et al (2017) investigate the individual construction of paradox and responses of their interview partners using theories of rhetoric. Their study uses paradox as an identified and thereby fixed as a starting point (ibid., 83) while exploring the dynamic unfolding of experience to understand in detail the rhetoric practices through which transcendence occurs in different phases. In this way, they provide insights of how transcendence unfolds over time. Using discourse analysis, Iedema and colleagues (2003) investigate the double role of manager and medical doctors, the emerging tensions and how these can be navigated. In difference, Sheep et al. (2017) investigates how their respondents generate meaning from the messy situations they experience. Their insights suggest paradoxical knots, which point towards the relations in which tensions mutually impact one another (ibid., 469), distinguishing these knots in terms of their effect on amplifying or dampening experienced tensions. These knots provide a pathway of studying the dynamics of the inter-relation between paradoxes (Jarzabkowski et al., 2022). "Tensional knots" are the "precise manner in which organizational members discursively tie ongoing paradoxical tensions together." (ibid., 482).

These studies exemplify a view of process as narrative that focuses on how people make sense within narrative accounts, drawing on theories of sensemaking or discourse, for instance. Time is treated implicitly as part of the narrative. These studies investigate how the studied actors carve out paradox as a means for understanding and thereby shed light on how an otherwise complex situation emerges into a stabilized framing of it as paradoxical.

***What we learn*.** Process as narrative studies underscore the increasing interest in paradox literature on how individuals experience, make sense of, and respond to paradoxes. As the above examples illustrate, this approach to process studies provides avenues for deepening our specific understanding of the communicative constitution of paradox.

What lies in the future. Future studies could further explore the interplay of different narratives within organizational settings, for example, thereby illumining further the dynamics of collectively constructing paradox and its responses. Also, studies could compare narrative accounts of actors who experience power differences with regards to paradox and their management. In addition, Langley and colleagues suggest a stronger emphasis on reaching beyond individual narratives (Abdallah et al., 2019; Fachin & Langley, 2017), for example, by elaborating on the relation of studied narratives to grand discourses pervading society. Furthermore, integrating lenses on the communicative constitution of reality (Cooren & Seidl, 2020; Schoeneborn et al., 2014) and paradox theory, future research could examine the co-constitution of paradoxes and agency, actors, and actions

Process as relation

Explanatory approach For a process as relation approach, "connecting is the central activity in organizing processes," (Hernes & Weik, 2007: 258) and in societal processes more generally. In this view, organizations are temporary stabilizations which occur through "combining heterogenous" elements (ibid., 259). Networks of these related heterogeneous elements are the focus of the analysis, including the entrance and exit of elements, or their change, that induce changes in the network and the other elements as well. Therefore, entities are inherently dynamic, or always in the making. In principle, relationships between elements are symmetrical (Latour, 2005), which means that asymmetries are practical accomplishments, for instance different power relations (Hernes & Weik, 2007: 260).

Scholars also apply this approach to the relation of the research object and the researcher, thus expanding the network to the researcher who becomes part of the becoming process of reality. In this variation of process as relation, also called process as withness (Fachin & Langley, 2017), the focus lies on how understandings are lived forward with research subjects. A core tenet of this variation of process as relation is "dialogical sensemaking" (Cunliffe & Scaratti, 2017: 29) between researcher and practitioner, based on Shotter (ibid., 32) to generate "knowing-from-within" (ibid., 32): Dialogical sensemaking helps capture "fact production" on the

flight (ibid., 32, refers to Garfinkel, 1967, 79). "Shotter (2008) conceives knowledge as unbounded and continually constructed in conversations; contextualized and immanent because it is located in talk "in-the-moment"; and collaborative because meanings are created as people give "shared significance(s) to shared feelings in an already shared circumstance" (p. 56). Shotter called this form of knowledge "knowing-from-within" (p. 32) … not about fact-finding but about creating meaning" (Cunliffe & Scaratti, 2017: 33).

What is fixed. Little appears fixed per se in this approach of process studies, although studies tend to take elements as temporary stabilizations as a starting point in order to illumine the endogenous dynamics of unfolding processes (Hernes & Weik, 2007: 259). Yet, although, or rather, because actors and other entities change with the network, these entities are understood as the same entities over time. In other words, something of the entities remains the same to observe change of an entity instead of observing two different entities in two different points in time.

What is dynamic. The process as relation approach emphasizes the dynamic unfolding of relations and networks. It views entities in the making, thus also including paradox the stabilization of which becomes a focus of empirical investigation. In the variation of a "withness" approach, the becoming expands to the researcher. In comparison, the previous approaches position the researcher outside and distinct from the explored phenomenon. For example, researchers study collective sensemaking with research participants, for example by using a dialogic action research or autoethnography.

Examples. We did not find explicit examples in paradox literature that aim to speak to its further development. However, works that adopt the approach of process as relation point out paradox and related experience in their empirical accounts. For example, Gorli et al. (2015) provide a reflection on a method for changing an organization. They elaborate on "authoring" (ibid., 1349) to integrate members to become co-authors of their organizations because "staff in an organization can become authors of their own work settings when they can play an active role in the daily production, reproduction and transformation of their work processes". In this respect, the study might speak to navigating pragmatic paradoxes (Berti & Simpson, 2021) to address power differences, as it focuses on enhancing reflexivity which serves meta-communication. A second example explores the relation between a researcher and practitioners during the phase of gaining access for ethnographic work (Cunliffe & Alcadipani, 2016). These authors deal with the "multifaceted, nonlinear, opportunistic, and sometimes serendipitous nature of access by framing it as an emergent and political process of immersion, backstage dramas, and

deception" (ibid., 536-537). The study foregrounds the contradictory situations that emerge during research that are entangled with the different (and shifting) expectations of practice and research (ibid., 551). These expectations also include different values and norms so that "practices that contradict her or his own values in order to maintain access" (ibid., 546). Like the previous example, paradox is considered as part of the experience with a potential of referring these insights to advance paradox literature.

What we learn. Despite few explicit examples, we learn from studies like the above about the becoming of paradox as part of an ongoing connecting of a becoming reality. In contrast to other process approaches that understand process as a flow implying directionality, the process as relation approach understands process as ongoing connection and network (trans)formation. This understanding can help to reconsider core tenets of process studies such as "flow" and the directionality of organizational processes as well as of paradox research like persistence of paradox. In addition, process as relation helps to position the researcher as part of the researched. In comparison, all the previous approaches consider the researcher as an outside observer. This question of the researcher's position relative to the studied phenomenon becomes increasingly salient as we experience grand challenges, like the effects of climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, or armed conflicts as in the middle east. Individuals and academic communities find themselves being drawn onto the field, whereas researchers often position themselves as observers at the side-line in the approaches we described above.

What lies in the future. We encourage scholars to apply this approach in future studies on paradox in different ways to build on different assumptions of process and paradox. Future research could examine the formation of networks and their elements including actors, actions and paradoxes. Applying a "withness" approach, researcher could examine the co-creation of paradoxes and responses to them by the research objects (e.g., organization, employees, entrepreneurs) and the researchers.

Discussion

In this study, we have analyzed six ideal-typical process approaches to study paradox. As indicated above, paradox studies combine different ideal-typical approaches in one study. For example, the empirical case of Jay (2013) refers to unfolding events over time, and uses different phases or episodes in order to account for the organization developing as it addresses the

service paradox. At the same time, the author emphasizes the collective sensemaking of the top management team, which resonates with aspects of process as narrative. Finally, Jay (2013) reflects on his own role in repeatedly directing their attention to the service paradox, thereby displaying aspects of paradox as relation. Other studies also hold multiple connections, like Besharov & Smith (2019) or Jarzabkowski et al. (2013) that refer to process as a sequence of events as well as a logical sequence.

The presentation of the ideal types helps researchers in choosing the appropriate explanatory approach or a combination of approaches for their research interests to study paradoxes and reveal new insights. In this section, we discuss the main insights of our study and their implications for future research. We turn to underexplored dynamics of paradox associated with rather little use of process approaches, assumptions of what is fix and what is not, and an extremely strong process view that came to our mind when we studied existing approaches that we label paradox and process as unique events.

We presented a selection of paradox studies to illustrate the ideal-typical process approaches to study paradox, we analyzed and compared several studies. Reflecting on the identification and selection of exemplary studies, it appeared easier to find examples of a relative weak process view than on a strong process view. Existing reviews seem to substantiate this observation (Johansen & Jeppe, 2026; Putnam et al., 2016; Schad, Lewis, Raisch, & Smith, 2016). In addition, we did not find studies that applied a process in relation approach.

As revealed above, applying the process as sequence approach could address an important knowledge gap in paradox research. Much research provides abstract models of how paradoxes can be managed (Jarzabkowski et al., 2022; Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Lalounis & Nayak, 2021; Smith & Lewis, 2011). These models suggest that independent of the type of paradox (e.g., exploration vs. exploitation, aggregate vs. individual, and social/ecological mission vs. profit orientation) and the specific setting, the presented approach might be appropriate to manage paradoxes. Revealing differences in how to cope with different paradoxes differently can provide a more nuanced understanding of managing paradoxes. Studying sequences of events is an appropriate approach for this purpose because it enables to theorize on a more concrete level and depict the dynamics of complex situations that actors face over time. In addition, process as sequence of events leverages the specific context over time to overcome the respective critique raised by some scholars (Cunha & Putnam, 2017; Fairhurst, 2018). We believe that the approach of process as sequence of events can make paradox studies more relevant for more phenomenon-driven research interests, for example, in business sustainability, innovation, and

human resource management (Desalegn & Tangl, 2022; Dutton, Roberts, & Bednar, 2010; George, Merrill, & Schillebeeckx, 2020).

Applying process as relation, as narrative, and as synthesizing approaches could advance paradox theory by leveraging relatively strong process views. For example, using a synthesizing approach may reveal new patterns of how paradoxes are knotted to each other in processes in which syntheses build new poles of new paradoxes. This approach might be useful to address the observation of the literature by Cunha and Putnam (2017) that paradoxes appear remarkably stable despite the attempts of managing them.

Narrative approaches can show how the persistence of paradoxes is communicatively constituted and contribute to overcoming the assumption that socially constructed paradoxes are easier to manage than paradoxes that "exist." A constitutive view on paradox provides a theoretical background (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2024) and narrative approaches offer a pathway for working on this assumption. Besides using discourses, studies could bring in a dialogical perspective (Tsoukas, 2009) to further advance existing insights of interactions for understanding the construction and managing of paradox (Lüscher & Lewis, 2008)

A process in relation approach could depict underexamined dynamics of paradoxes and actions that move away from the idea directionality inherent in theorizing sequences, flows, and dialectics and provide insights into more messy or chaotic dynamics. For example, using Actor Network Theory could help to better understand the complex entanglement between elements that become through their relations with other elements (Latour, 1999; Latour, 2005). Likewise, scholars could leverage a rhizomic approach (Deleuze & Guattari, 1977) or turn to social systems theory, a few scholars used to explore the transformation of paradox (Knudsen, 2005).

The approach of process as relation also provides a pathway for a different positioning of the researcher. Whereas all other approaches assume the researcher as the outside observer, process as relation allows placing the research in relation with the observed (Fachin & Langley, 2017). In this way, this approach provides a starting point for what a quantum view calls a measurement apparatus (Knight & Paroutis, 2017). While this construct has been picked up to distinguish managing paradox from trade-offs focusing on the researched organization or actor (Berti & Cunha, 2023), process as relations enables shifting to include the researcher. Studies in this direction could advance insights about the experience of insiders and outsiders to paradox, methodically tackle questions of whether a studied paradox is observed by practitioners or

the researcher and provide a backdrop for practical relevance through co-production of knowledge between research and practice.

Our study also provides insights that facilitate the development of new understandings into dynamics of paradox beyond specific approaches. More specifically, our study suggests experimenting thoughtfully with assumptions of what is fix and what is processual. While there are significant differences among approaches regarding assumptions about the relationship between actions or practices and paradoxes (e.g., are paradoxes "out there" or do they emerge with social practices?), nearly all studies explore fixed paradoxes because of their assumed persistence (Cunha & Clegg, 2018). Furthermore, most studies present actors as fixed and as cause of social and organizational processes, while one can also think of actors as temporary stabilizations and results of processes. Such research can benefit from working with the approach of process as relation or process as synthesizing. Beyond paradox research, many studies reveal how social or communicative processes are constitutive of agency and structures (Caldwell, 2007; Cooren, 2015; Cornelissen et al., 2015). Applying such a more "radical" (Cooren & Seidl, 2020) communication centered approach might provide interesting insights into the constitution of power relations and paradox, furthering a recently emerging relational view on paradox (Berti & Cunha, 2023; Clegg, Vieira da Cunha, & Pina e Cunha, 2002; Pamphile, 2022).Instead of only categorizing paradox research into stronger and weaker process views, asking what is fixed and what is not helped us to reveal such insights and can inspire future research.

To further advance understandings of the dynamic of paradox, the above differentiation between process understandings also invites pushing the boundaries of paradox research. So-called strong process views emphasize that reality is becoming over time and enacted in each moment. However, also the rather strong process views from process as enactment to process as relation are also based on assumptions of stability and persistence. Across approaches, paradox studies research how paradoxes, organizations, and other entities transform over time, while remaining the same entity. An individual, and organization, or a paradox is in the beginning of a process the same entity as it is after the process. However, if one assumes that each moment is unique and different (at least in the temporal dimension), it is not implausible to think that each actor and each paradox that appear in these moments are unique and different as well.

For example, what can researchers observe if they assume that each actor in an organizational setting experiences different paradoxes (not only different manifestations of a paradox), and

what are the consequences of this assumption for managing paradox? Or, from a relational perspective, what if researchers assume that actors who are usually understood as one and the same person over time are different actors depending on the different paradoxes they face in different moments? While we do not have answers to these questions, we believe that consequently assuming uniqueness of moments and what appears in these moments (e.g., an actor, an action, a paradox) can provide novel insights into paradoxes. One consequence would be shifting the focus from studying how one or a few knotted paradoxes need to be managed to examining how actors navigate sequences of moments, each presenting different paradoxes.

Conclusion

Informed by process studies, we have analyzed six ideal-typical approaches to examine paradoxes. We advance three major contributions. We highlighted The role of time in the unfolding of paradox. We unearthed assumptions about what is fixed and what is not, contributing to render explicit the reification of paradox in organizational paradox theory. Finally we considered missing but possible assumptions to a super-strong process view and could be applied in future paradox research.

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