

# **Paradexity**

## **The convergence of paradox and complexity**

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Paradox and complexity are merging into 'paradexity'. This can be observed in technological advancements that depersonalise, saturate, accelerate, and fragment the world we experience. It is contributing to the emergence of a new set of paradigms - the emotional economy, sense-making, time expansion, and communities of interest - that will require developing four core capabilities: care, wisdom, attention and conversation

## Abstract

Paper Type	Viewpoint
Keywords	paradox, complexity, technology, emotional economy, wisdom
Purpose	to propose a theory about the convergence of paradox and complexity and the consequences of this
Design/methodology/approach	the author conducts an ongoing series of conversations with a range of thinkers in the academic and commercial domains
Findings	Paradox and complexity are merging into ‘paradexity’. This can be observed in technological advancements that depersonalise, saturate, accelerate, and fragment the world we experience. It is contributing to the emergence of a new set of paradigms – the emotional economy, sense-making, time expansion, and communities of interest - that will require developing four core capabilities: care, wisdom, attention and conversation.
Research limitations	further rigorous testing would be required to confirm the validity of the views expressed
Practical implications	this paper has significant implications for the way people engage with one another and the way we organise our workforces, and offers suggestions for ways individuals and society can flourish in this environment
What is original/value of paper	recognition of the convergence of paradox and complexity and the need to work within this construct, rather than eliminate or minimise either. It would be of value to senior business leaders, human resource directors, and those involved with public policy who wish to design more effective organisations and societies.

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# 1 Introduction <sup>[i]</sup>

Do you ever feel like you are immersed in an intricate array of interconnected events while having to choose from a plethora of competing ambiguous choices? Charles Handy observed many years ago that “the more turbulent (the) times, the more complex the world, the more the paradoxes” (Handy, 1994). There seems little doubt that this is a time of intense turbulence in which we are inundated with increasing paradox and complexity. Not only are they increasing, but they are converging in a force I propose to call *paradexity: the convergence of paradox and complexity*.

A recent press article captured an example of financial paradexity. Firstly the paradox:

*“Designing an efficient, dynamic financial system while reducing the likelihood and costs of crises is a challenge.*

And then the complexity:

*“This challenge is particularly hard because of the system’s complexity. Financial interrelationships between major participants dwarf the scale of their business with the real sector (business and households) and involve complex financial products” (Davis, 2008.)*

Australian Treasury Secretary Ken Henry provides an example of taxation paradexity. The paradox:

*“Our tax-transfer system, designed for humans, now vastly exceeds human scale.*

The complexity:

*“Australians should not need to consult an accountant to decide whether to return to work or put their kids in child care. ...*

*An excessive level of complexity wastes resources. ...*

*Complexity undermines social goals (and) provides opportunities for sharp planning practices ...*

*A complex world constrains how simple a nation’s tax system can be” (Henry, 2008).*

Paradexity creates a fog which is hard to navigate, and contributes to feeling that we have lost control as we struggle to manage, make sense of, and live with these forces. It causes a sense of confusion, and never quite being ‘there’ – wherever there may be.

Harnessing paradexity involves not just tolerating ambiguity and managing complexity. It means transcending paradox and embracing complexity as they converge and unsettle us. It requires a new level of human maturity. It recognises that we need to shift from stark choices to integration, collaboration and co-creation fostered by effective conversation.

## 2 Paradox & Complexity

Paradox is inherent in what it means to be human, and is demonstrated in the following remark: “This sentence is false. True or false?”

Accepting paradox means recognising that a thing can simultaneously ‘be’ and ‘not be’. The world in which we live is no longer a world of simple black or white, either or. It is a world of ‘**and**’: East and West, Christian and Muslim and Hindu and Buddhist, left and right, ...

Paradox causes discomfort for those who want life to be straightforward, to be one or the other. These are the people who think “If everyone thought like me, then the world would be a better place, because I am right.” Unfortunately there is no longer room for this point of view, so we need to find a way of embracing paradox, transcending our differences, and becoming comfortable with discomfort.

Leadership in the commercial environment requires constant management of paradox. For example:

- Provide an experience customized for each customer experience *and* reduce the cost of delivering that experience.
- Generate significant revenue growth *and* reduce cost growth.
- Satisfy short term market expectations *and* deliver long term growth

Complexity describes an environment of ‘compounding intricacy’, and is a function of “the number, ambiguity, rate of change and interweaving of variables involved in a problem” (Jacques, 1994).

While we may yearn for a quieter life, and desire to create a simpler world, the reality is we are complex beings who tend towards adding, rather than decreasing, complexity. Each new technological invention or social development brings increasing levels of complexity. Our challenge therefore is to find ways to live with complexity so we are not overwhelmed.

Some examples of contemporary business complexity include:

- Increasingly sophisticated financial products. One readily observes the global impact arising from the ‘compounding intricacy’ inherent in these financial products.
- Increasing interconnections across industry.
- Increasing range of stakeholder inputs – shareholders, staff, Board, community, environment, Government, regulatory bodies.
- We live in a world where we are immediately impacted by removed events.

## 3 Four experiences of Paradexity

### 3.1 Depersonalisation

We experience *depersonalisation* when we feel that we have been treated like a number, or a machine, rather than a person. This happens when

- A computer rings us to confirm our appointment
- We are forced to navigate a maze of complex interactive voice response systems, and just long to talk to a real person
- An email from a colleague elicits a negative emotional response, even though none may have been intended
- We use impersonal devices to communicate, rather than meeting face to face or hearing the voice of the other.

A number of paradoxes may be observed:

- Technology has collapsed the world but we are less personally connected than ever
- We have an unprecedented number of tools to facilitate contact, but have lost the art of communication
- Companies use technology to drive efficiency (eg Interactive Voice Response systems, online contact/feedback) but often sacrifice the personal connection to customers, employees and other stakeholders.

At the same time the compounding intricacy of new technologies, such as an array of tools to facilitate communication and artificial intelligence beginning to do human tasks, enables interaction to become much more one dimensional.

And so we feel depersonalized in the face of paradexity - complex and sophisticated technology fails to deliver what it promised, often makes life more difficult, and can appear to treat us like another piece of technology, not a person with intellect and emotions.

### 3.2 Saturation

Being overwhelmed by the sheer volume of information creates a feeling of *saturation*, and is the second example of paradexity in action. “We live in landscape of abundant information,” (Woudhuysen, 2008) where the amount of useful information is growing, but the “signal to noise ratio on the web is getting worse” (Woudhuysen, 2008).

The paradox is that we have unprecedented access to ever increasing information, with no evidence of increased wisdom, or shared intelligence. Some would argue that we know more and more about less and less. The compounding intricacy of complexity increases exponentially as technology enables everyone to have a voice in every medium, continuing to saturate the world with ‘noise’. Although unable to confirm the source, I have seen suggestions that the volume of information (data) will double every 72 hours by 2020.

Information saturation has a number of consequences, including:

- The inability of ‘regulators’ to keep up with fast moving trends, whether in science, ethics, business, financial markets, education, or any field.
- Addiction to technology and increased burnout. People who are routinely exposed to the same continuous pressure with no relief reach a point where they cannot cope anymore. (Kakabadase, 2008). This manifests psychologically in such ways as forgetfulness, or an inability to cope with emotional pressure. Physical symptoms include clumsiness and a distorted sense of space. Spatial distortion is perhaps the most common symptom, and is witnessed when we inadvertently bump into objects – including having minor car accidents (Kakabadase, 2008).

### 3.3 Acceleration

The paradox of acceleration is that we have an abundance of time saving devices, but less time than ever – we have become an ‘always on’ society. Complex linkages and interconnections across the globe, and previously unconnected entities and events, accelerate our daily exposure and compound the paradox.

The curve showing rate of change has “gone vertical” (Hamel, 2006) and the pace is so frantic that the ‘support stuff’, like ethical thinking, is not being done well (Pearson, 2008). As the fields of human knowledge accelerate, the issues requiring deep thinking and reflection will come thicker and faster. The tremendous changes we experience will escalate in their rapidity, requiring a huge psychological adjustment, which we have little time to do.

Our ancestors had much longer to adjust to technological change when change was less rapid. The hundreds of years that elapsed between the invention of the waterwheel and the windmill is an extreme example of the space to adjust which previous generations enjoyed. We do not enjoy that same temporal space to adjust to accelerating change. This is not to deny the tremendous capability we have to embrace new technologies and adapt to change, but rather to observe that the vertical rate of change leaves us with little time to adapt, let alone think deeply about the changes that are occurring, contributing to a level of superficiality.

Technology is imposing a series of continuous never-ending routines, not dissimilar to the drudgery of less affluent historical times (Kakabadase, 2008). ‘Time saving’ tools like the Blackberry are creating embedded routines for users, including waking up regularly through the night to check email. People now find themselves available to work no matter where they are and hence work extended hours. The flood of information is overwhelming. The speed of routines is far ahead of anything our parents, let alone our forebears, experienced. At the same time we are losing – and may have lost – the capacity to create discretionary time and breakout of our routines.

There are a number of emerging technologies that have the capability to further accelerate our world and our lives (Pearson, 2008).

- Dedicated television channels, such as private family channels
- The emergence of ‘digital bubble’ technology that will surround us and only let through the important data required in that context. Wireless webservers housed in a lapel pin will provide exceptional computing power linked to a heads-up display in your glasses. The next generation of this technology will use lasers to direct images directly onto the retina.
- Interface technology between the human nervous system and computer chips.
- The emergence of ‘active skin’ where temporary electronics will be printed directly to the skin surface. This will enable direct printing of objects such as a pass to an entertainment venue, or temporary building access codes, which will flake off later with the top layer of skin cells.

Ever since Shelley’s Frankenstein – and probably before – we suspected technology of having created a monster that is now dominant, out of control, and will lead to some serious problems (Woudhuysen, 2008). Technology, however, is relatively neutral. We shape and use it – and hence shape ourselves – according to our own choices.

### 3.4 Fragmentation

In conversations and observations one picks up an increasing sense of psychic, emotional and social fragmentation. Many people observe their life being lived in various ‘compartments’, depending on the activity or role at a given time, with sometimes minimal feeling of connection with those who are physically close, such as neighbors or coworkers.

The paradox is we are more connected than ever, but have less sense of community. The complexity is in the deep interconnections that now exist between all and everything.

We can feel closer to someone in another part of the world, with whom we engage online, while completely disconnected from our immediate neighbors. This gives rise to a sense of fragmentation – of belonging in different places at the same time, of belonging to everywhere but nowhere, of feeling pulled in competing directions.

## 4 New Paradigms

In order to contend and live with paradexity we need to develop new mental models or paradigms. The trends towards these paradigms are already underway, and there is an opportunity for some advanced thinkers and organizations to get ahead of the curve. This document identifies four:

- The Emotional Economy
- Sense Making
- Time expansion
- Communities of Interest

### 4.1 The Emotional Economy

Emotional contagion – “the spread of emotion from person to person” (Salovey Caruso, 2004) – has a significant effect on organizational effectiveness. Emotionally aware individuals will play a leading role in the near future, as increasing paradexity contributes to the emergence of an ‘emotional economy’ to replace the knowledge economy.<sup>[ii]</sup> Much of today’s knowledge work – particularly work that follows decision tree structures – will be outsourced to computers and artificial intelligence. People will increasingly resist technological depersonalization – i.e. being treated like a machine – and will yearn for a greater sense of human touch. The growth of an emotional economy is inevitable.

In the knowledge economy people are paid according to the size of their ideas, and thinking capability. Personal value is directly related to how much you know, how much you can create or generate, and the quality of your judgment. The source of wealth in a knowledge economy is “focused intelligence, the ability to acquire and apply knowledge and know-how” (Handy, 1994)

In an emotional economy computers will do most of the work currently done by knowledge workers. Significant attempts are already underway to systemize anything that can be automated. We will spend less time doing knowledge work and more time engaging with people. Therefore, the ability to deeply empathize, to apply emotional know-how, and to reach out and touch people will be the new source of wealth.

The transition to an emotional economy will see the emergence of a range of what appear to be unusual, and – initially at least – irrelevant, jobs. Careers in fields like Feng Shui, healing modalities, and lifestyle therapy that would never have been considered work 15 years ago are becoming more common. Business coaching and mentoring are significant commercial examples of this trend. Careers we have not begun to imagine, and that do not yet exist, will emerge, even in the midst of financial crisis.

“50 years ago people could not understand the service economy,” (Pearson, 2008) and people wondered how the economy could function when most people were not in manufacturing. 100 years ago it was hard to understand how the economy could operate when 98% of the workforce was not on the land making food. Now less than 2% are on the land and less than 20% in manufacturing – the other 80% are providing services to one another (Pearson, 2008). This works because manufacturing is largely automated and done by machines.

With increasing technological capability fewer people will be required to produce what we require to run our lives, and we will spend more time doing human interaction type tasks and less time doing mechanistic activities or those intellectual tasks which can be automated. Leadership will be exercised in every successful role. “The only non-automated jobs left will be leadership jobs. There will be no more work for those who do not make the leadership choice. This dilemma will be a key problem facing humanity in the Third Millennium.” (Koestenbaum, 2002)

One consequence of the emergence of the emotional economy is that we will probably see an inversion of pay scales (Pearson, 2008). For example, nurses are currently poorly paid and have little influence in a hospital. But in the near future, where artificial intelligence will be able to do much of the diagnostic work, patients will want greater care, compassion and human touch. Nursing roles will evolve into highly trained patient care roles and operate as the primary point of contact between the patient and the hospital. In this situation nurses with well developed human interaction skills will be more highly valued and highly paid than diagnostic roles which will be 'outsourced' to artificial intelligence. Emotional intelligence skills will be crucial. Menial nursing roles will be performed by assistants. Medical practitioners will lose much of their client facing work as they are replaced by these new highly skilled practitioners, who nurse the patient back to health.

With an increase in depersonalization, people will yearn for human contact and willingly pay a premium for this level of care. This will further drive the emerging emotional economy. Your personal value will be the size of your heart, not the size of your ideas. As knowledge work becomes commoditised emotional work will become more important.

## 4.2 Sense Making

Another response to paradexity will be the emergence of a new class of 'sense makers.' There is already a shift from purpose driven conversation to sense making conversation. The focus has evolved from "why do we exist?" type questions, to "How do we make sense of what is going on?" as people look for clarity and answers. In seeking answers people will turn to those who can help make sense of it all, who can help to sort through the detail and create a perspective from which sound judgements can be made. They will help us synthesise in a useful structured way (Shergold, 2008). An objective media could add great value in this regard.

The 'sense-makers' of history were usually priests, shamans, and holy men and women who were presumed to have a deeper level of insight about the meaning behind events. Their answers, although perhaps lacking the logical or scientific rigour we may expect today, provided solace to people trying to make sense of confusing events.

As traditional frameworks and references points are lost, sense makers will help us find answers to questions like:

- What is my framework or foundation for making sense of things?
- What is my point of reference?
- In order to make sense of what is happening around me, what are my own deeply held values, beliefs, and character?
- Who can I trust to lead me to the answers and to help me make sense?
- How can I 'connect the dots' of my disparate experiences to understand and form a coherent point of view?
- How can I work out where to focus my attention, what to ignore, what to effect, etc. in a fast moving ever changing world?

We live in an age where few people are able to make sense of the world, and it is getting harder, not easier. In a world that lacks meaning, or where we cannot make sense, we tend to respond to events in very emotional ways, because we feel threatened, anxious, confused, or misunderstood. Hence we observe again the privileged role for emotionally aware individuals and societies that will exist in the near future.

## 4.3 Time Expansion

The combination of depersonalisation, saturation, acceleration and fragmentation will require a new way of thinking about time, and in particular the *capability to expand time*. The multitasking model will be seen for what it is – a recipe for multiple distractions with no real focus.

On the one hand technology will provide the capability to both manage time more effectively and ‘shift time’ to different horizons by adding virtual layers to physical reality – eg an architect could walk you through a property showing what it will look like when you create your dream home, or new office fitout. What may have been plans on a page, or a visual on a screen, will now be ‘real’ as you walk through the future. You will more easily recognise changes that need to be made, for example.

But the big advancement in human capability will be linked to the person’s ability to expand time, creating significantly greater content in any given moment, and hence increased ability to embrace paradexity. The concept of unconscious competence – where someone is so adept at a skill that it is second nature, such as one’s native language - is a simplistic expression of this capability. People who can expand time are not only highly skilled in their chosen field/s, but have ‘unpacked’ action to identify each component, have then perfected these components, and rebuilt these into a seamless whole. They have lifted technical capability to artistic mastery.

An example will serve to make the point. A chess Grandmaster is able to absorb and process a huge volume of data and options at a glance: “... the chunks of information that have been put together in his mind allow him to see much more with much less conscious thought. So he is looking at very little and seeing quite a lot” (Waitzkin, 2007). The beginner on the other hand must labor over the board, the pieces, the options and possibilities.

The key insight here is not the presence of unconscious competence, but the power of mastery, fostered through years of focused training and development, creating the ability to expand time. This is the secret to those people who appear to do much in such a short space of time, while still only having 24 hours in the day. They have lifted activity to the level of mastery, created deep inner linkages between disparate skills and insights, and consequently focus on what matters.

#### 4.4 Communities of Interest

As we lose touch with our immediate physical community we create relationships with those who share our interests, no matter where they live. We have already observed savvy politicians tapping communities of interest and mobilising grassroots power via the web. The next wave of political power will be the power of social groups. In such a world the electoral process will become less relevant with a bipolar shift to local issues (e.g. town council) and regional government (e.g. EU) who will impose decisions across relevant domains.

We are witnessing a general collapse of historical social systems and the emergence of new social orders. In this environment the nation state is less relevant than the dispersed part of humanity with whom we have more in common. Social networking technology will foster and empower connections among people based on common interests.

This has significant ramifications, as there are an increasing number of issues that impact a large group of global stakeholders, such as the environment, regional conflicts, food shortages, global business enterprises, and election of leaders in countries that play global roles. Issues like these will drive global stakeholder democracy and raise questions about the role of national governments. Politics will become issue related rather than geographical: What you stand for will be more important than where you live (Pearson, 2008). Stakeholder democracy will be one of the positive outcomes of influential communities of interest. Anyone with a stake in an issue will participate in the decision making process, rather than just those people who happen to live in that jurisdiction. Technology already allows such a process.

A ‘communities of interest’ world requires a new social structure where we can address issues such as the free movement of workers, normalisation of tax rates across global domains, and virtual work. Work, and those with whom we work, will become a community, creating the need to integrate work and other aspects of our

lives. Work/life balance will be exposed for the unattainable myth that it is, and we will focus on integrating and harmonising different relationships that have very different demands.

## 5 Increased Capabilities

In the face of the paradexity experienced in depersonalisation, saturation, acceleration, and fragmentation, and to cultivate the emotional economy, sense making, time expansion and communities of interest, we need to strengthen our capability in four core areas:

### 5.1 Care

In a paradexical world a far greater premium will be placed on *care* – the ability to meet the needs of others in a way that is emotionally engaging and fulfilling. This is a deep human interaction economy. Much functional work will be done by artificial intelligence, and the remaining core staff in a business will be focused on caring for customers, tailoring services to that specific individual and their needs. These employees will be highly skilled and trained in emotional intelligence.

The call centre industry, for example, is one that could completely reinvent itself to take advantage of this shift (Pearson, 2008). Forward thinking call centre operators in the future will recruit and train emotionally intelligent people for crucial personal touch situations. Workers who focus on caring for the person, rather than achieving an unsustainable call rate, while supported by very powerful artificial intelligence to provide ready answers to the customer, will enjoy a much better quality of life than call centre operators who focus on high-volume transactional work. In this environment artificial intelligence will be able to guide the operator through the resolution of complex problems, enabling them to concentrate on full engagement with the customer. Short-sighted call centre operators will reduce headcount – the wiser operator will retrain staff to provide a higher level of services, leading to increased staff and customer retention, and consequent profitability.

The emotional economy will encourage a distinction between the transaction and the transpersonal. We are already seeing considerable automation of basic transactions, and at the same time expressing a greater desire to talk to a person – this is where value add occurs. This will lead to range of choices about the level of interaction a customer wants and how much they will pay. Many people will be prepared to pay a premium for human interaction. This is a market opportunity that few have yet recognised, given the current tendency to downsize organisations, automate interactions, and use logical rather than emotional measures.

### 5.2 Wisdom

Few people today have the capability to comprehend paradexity because it requires wisdom, and wisdom requires deep thinking and reflection, which requires time and effort. This of course is why wisdom is often associated with age, although wisdom can be acquired by anyone who wants to do the hard inner intellectual, emotional and spiritual work.

As long as we think we are in a knowledge economy we are not going to be involved in the getting of wisdom (Woudhuysen, 2008). The reality is there is no shortage of data, although knowledge – and subsequent wisdom – is hard to acquire. It requires a commitment to work and time to think, yet we live in a world that can deny us that time.

Some people are of the view that we may be entering a ‘wisdom economy’, as the information age becomes a wisdom age. The fact that we search for meaning, however, does not equate to the getting of wisdom (Humphrey, 2008).

Wisdom gives one the capability to “understand deep structures and patterns of the way in which things work over longer period of time” (Humphrey, 2008). It enables us to understand “what makes things tick at that moment, and then see non-linear linkages between them” (Kakabadse, 2008).

This begs the question about how to acquire wisdom. Whatever the process, it calls for the ability to stand back and consider both yourself and what you are considering, which in itself requires a great deal of emotional skill (Kakabadse, 2008). This perspective enables you to learn more about yourself. Once someone has that emotional strength they could be near to what Socrates called wisdom – the ability to find personal ways through difficult circumstances (Kakabadse, 2008).

Wisdom also helps our moral compass align across personal, commercial and social values. In order to make sense we must understand how human beings form sound judgment and make effective decisions.

Hence to acquire wisdom requires space and time, and a world of paradexity will deprive us of these unless we develop capabilities such as those suggested in this paper. Paradoxically we are entering a world that needs greater wisdom but is adopting practices that make it harder to achieve, as the speed of communication and demands for results and outcomes kills discretionary time, resulting in few people having the capacity to stand back and think.

### **5.3 Attention**

Attention to the present is another core skill required if we wish to care for others, make sense, expand time, and engage a wider community. Distractions fix us in the moment, while time itself marches inexorably on. For example, an unexpected argument with a colleague can distract us from what we are doing, and cause us to ‘stop’ in that moment, as we replay the situation over and over in our minds. Repeated distraction naturally causes us to fall further and further behind. Attention is cultivated in ‘down time’, which will become the new productivity time, as employers recognise and support the value of thinking and reflection.

Less is more when it comes to embracing paradexity, hence choosing to be ‘often off’ rather than ‘always on’ is crucial to developing this capability. The inherent paradox is that in order to increase our capability and level of engagement we need to go slower, and take more time for reflection and learning.

Much work has been done on the concept of ‘flow’ by people like Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. His research indicates that flow is the state we experience when we are completely engaged and attentive to the moment, in such a way that the mind and body synchronize in the effortless achievement and enjoyment of challenging activities. His research showed that people enter a state of flow when a high degree of skill meets a significant challenge (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992).

Cultivation of flow, through engaged attentiveness, must be our focus in each task or activity. We need to develop the habit of noticing where we are operating attentively and inattentively, and work to become more attentive.

We need to create space or risk becoming victims of time and routine. We need to take the time to make sense, to ask the questions that really matter, to become masters in our chosen arts, to live a life where we can observe ourselves and our society from a distance. The Western cultural environment does not respect or encourage this position. Thinking is considered a luxury of the wealthy – it is rare to get paid to think.

It is somewhat paradoxical that we expect high quality thinking from our staff, but won’t give them the time to do it. ‘Just thinking’ looks highly unproductive to the casual observer. There is always work to do, even if we work 24 hours a day.

### **5.4 Conversation**

In a fragmented world struggling to care for one another and make sense of our experience, we need to recover the dying art of conversation – and in particular the listening aspect. All relationships have the capacity for powerful conversations.

Meaningful conversation has a number of components, such as reading more widely, debating with the right people, understanding a bit about history, looking for the elements of continuity and change, engaging the mind with those who are thinking - particularly when our opinions diverge (Jeffcock, 2008).

It means shifting from asking small questions to big questions. Small questions ask about matters like productivity and efficiency: “How can I do what I am doing better, faster and make more money?” “What tools will help me do it better and quicker?”

Big questions require the luxury of time and ask about meaning, purpose and sense making – what the philosophers call ontological, epistemological, and phenomenological. These are questions like “How do we know?” “How do we capture what we know?” “What am I doing here?” “What does it mean to be a person, a worker, a parent, a citizen?” “What does leisure mean for me?”

## 6 Concluding remarks

This paper has noted four ways in which we experience paradexity:

- Depersonalisation: sophisticated technology fails to deliver what it promised, often makes life more difficult, and treats people like machines with few human qualities.
- Saturation: technology enables anyone to have a voice in any medium, leading to a flood of information, with no correlative increase in wisdom.
- Acceleration: an abundance of interconnected time saving devices accelerate our world, makes us 'always on', and deprive us of the time we need for more noble pursuits.
- Fragmentation: technology enables more connections than ever but we feel more dispersed with less sense of community.

The wave of paradexity is changing the way we relate to one another and the way we work, and contributing to the emergence of four new paradigms:

- The *emotional economy* - where your value is in your emotional capability, not the size of your intellect - will replace the knowledge economy.
- '*Sense-makers*', who help us find patterns and meaning in our experience, will be highly influential and sought after.
- '*Time expansion*' - the ability to do much more in a smaller amount of time, while living a better life - will replace multitasking.
- *Communities of interest* will replace geographic communities.

In order to peer through the fog of paradexity, and function in a fully human way, we will need to develop capability in four core areas:

- The ability to genuinely *care* for others.
- The ability to translate knowledge into *wisdom*.
- The ability to give focused, laser like *attention*
- The ability to hold honest and effective *conversations*

People who develop competence in these capabilities will flourish under the new paradigms and be well placed to help others navigate the storms brought on by paradexity.

This paper makes an observation about the emerging environment, rather than offering a 'solution' to paradexity. It is not as easy as simplifying complexity and choosing between opposites. It offers rather, a way of living with paradexity, where recognising and accepting the presence of paradexity is the first step. Doing so will help us create new forms of stakeholder democracy, as we recognise that short term adversarial systems do not help resolution of paradox or complex challenges. There will always be another valid point of view, while the trend towards compounding intricacy will escalate.

Many of the crises which we observe and find ourselves swept up in are evidence of failure to recognise paradexity, and the human tendency to want to fix what appears to be broken. The solution lies in embracing paradexity and adapting the paradigms and practices proposed here, in order that something new may emerge.

Search for the sense makers, create organisations that care, spend time seeking wisdom, pay attention to the present moment – counter intuitive practices when the times seem to demand urgency. Doing these does not eliminate paradexity – it is a new reality that will not go away - but equip us, our organisations, and our societies to flourish in this world.

## 7 Glossary

Acceleration: the rapidly increasing pace of learning and change.

Attention: continued focus on the present moment.

Care: the ability to meet the needs of others in a way that is emotionally engaging and fulfilling for them.

Communities of interest: social groups connected by common interest rather than geography.

Compartmentalization: the sense of living in different compartments to suit the moment, with an increasing loss of integration into a whole life.

Conversation: the capacity to engage in dialogue that involves meaning for all involved and which fosters deeper relationships.

Depersonalisation: the experience of being treated like an object rather than a person.

Emotional economy: an economy where the greatest value, and wealth creation opportunities, derive from emotional competence and capability.

Fragmentation: the sense of being pulled in competing directions, with an increasing loss of close relationships and personal identity.

Paradexity: the convergence of paradox and complexity.

Saturation: the experience of being overwhelmed by the sheer volume of information.

Sense makers: people who can help others – both individuals and society - make sense of their experience and create a perspective from which sound judgements can be made.

Time expansion: the ability to create significantly greater content in a given moment.

Wisdom: the ability to reflect on experience and understanding to provide insight, and to then act well based on that insight.

## 8 References

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### 8.1 Contributors to the conversation

The following people participated in the conversations and contributed to my thinking, although not all are directly quoted in the text.

Brian Bacon, Founder and President, Oxford Leadership Academy.

Jonathan Chocqueel-Mangan, Managing Director, Tyler Mangan.

David Grayson, Professor of Corporate Responsibility, Director of the Doughty Centre for Corporate Responsibility, Cranfield University.

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## 9 Endnotes

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<sup>[i]</sup> This paper is the result of thinking and reflection over some years, but crystallized in particular in a series of conversations held in 2008 with a range of people, chosen somewhat at random, who could cross fertilise my thinking with their thinking. The conversations were conducted in a free flowing fashion, allowing it to go where it would. The most common questions asked were “what are you grappling with at the moment?”, “what questions are people bringing to you?” and “what will your world be like in 5 years time?”

<sup>[ii]</sup> Although the phrase ‘emotional economy’ in this context is my own thinking, many of the comments in this section are heavily influenced by Ian Pearson.