Knotted Paradoxical Tensions of Employees' Communication Technology Use

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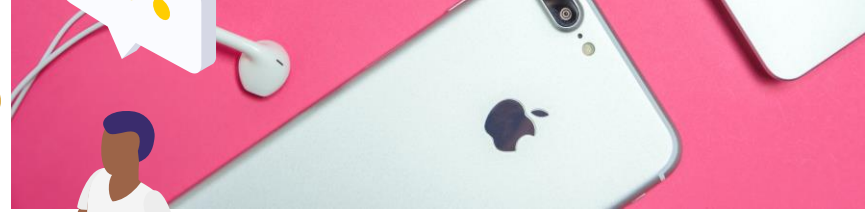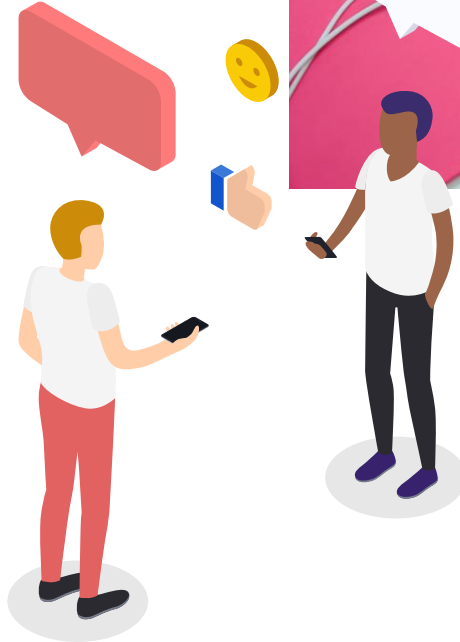4-8 AUGUST 2023 · BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS, USA

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How do you use communication technology in your every day life and on what purposes?

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Research Objectives & Theoretical Framework

- Organizations are riddled with tension.

- **The Constitutive view** = Tensions develop as part of actions and interactions, and language, discourse, and interactions form the reality rather than reflect it.

- **Tensions r**efer to alternative choices or opposing poles that are not mutually exclusive but could be done in tandem.

- **Paradoxes** refer to contradictory features that exist simultaneously and persist over time leading to absurd or irrational outcomes. (Putnam, Fairhurst & Banghart, 2016)
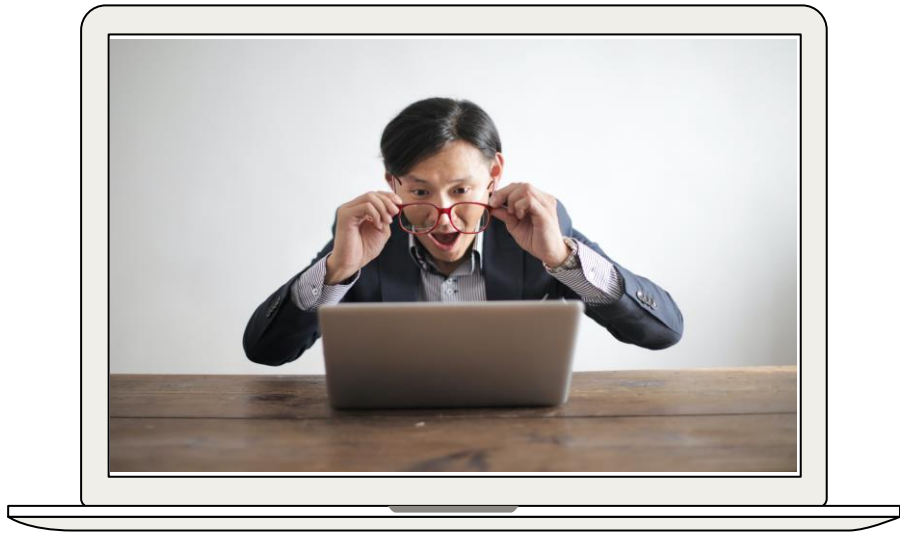
Tensional knots

- **Configurations of entangled tensions** and/or paradoxes that impact one another in differential ways (Sheep, et al., 2017; Fairhurst & Putnam, in press).

- Tensions often emerge from complex situations with complex problems that may lead to new tensions and paradoxes and forming of tensional knots (Fairhurst & Putnam, in press).

WHEN U ARE A CHAT DOCTOR BUT
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2019

Tensions and CT use

❑ Communication technology is permeable by nature which may raise tensions and paradoxes and lead to their entanglements.

❑ Unpacking these entanglements is important as previous literature has mostly treated tensions and paradoxes as singular (e.g., Smith & Lewis, 2011).

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RQ: "What paradoxical tensions related to employees' communication technology use intertwine with each other and how they knot together?"

Data and methods

Informants – Full time knowledge-intensive workers of a well-known Finnish media organization.

20 semi-structured thematic interviews, that were collected in 2019–2020.

Thematic content analysis method (Tracy, 2013)

Applied elements of **contrapuntal analysis** (Baxter, 2011; see also Ban 2017).

Contrapuntal analysis = set of methodological practices that focuses on **the interplay of contrasting discourses**. (Baxter 2011)

Competing discourses **can be recognized by identifying ambivalence** in the participants' responses (Baxter 2011).

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🔍 Research findings

Tensions

Paradoxes

Technology-mediated absence vs. presence between work-nonwork life domains

Beneficial vs. disadvantageous interruptions

Professional connectivity paradox

Convenience paradox

Examples from the data

Technology-mediated absence vs. presence between life domains

"I'm trying to cut back the time I spend on social media [during work]… Sometimes…I have to say [to my child] that 'mommy's working now, can you please hold on a minute, and we'll look at your thing later', and of course it makes me feel bad. **However,** my kid knows that if I'm at home sitting in front of my laptop, it means that I'm working and then I shouldn't be interrupted, unless it's something very important." (Laughs) **(Media worker 19)**

Beneficial vs. disadvantageous interruptions

"If I'm not busy or if I'm even bored [at work], I don't anything nicer than receiving messages from friends or having my dad call me to discuss about politics, and it's totally fine with me. **But** if I'm busy, I don't know anything more annoying than receiving those messages or phone calls…Because, in reality, those contacts can be a disruption for work. We [journalists] have times when intensive focus is required, if we are writing or trying to comprehend the big picture of the news case, we're working on…and if we get interrupted often, of course it brings the quality of the work down. Work gets choppy with interruptions and it's distracting." **(Media worker 6)**

Professional connectivity paradox

"Usually, I never turn my phone on silent mode. **However,** I have a new partner who is a light sleeper, and sometimes I have to turn my phone on silent mode for the night out of consideration. Otherwise, my phone is always on, because sometimes I may be alarmed from work in the middle of the night. Professionally it's important for me to be on call in the case of major news. I'd be gutted if I was called in the middle of the night for a scoop, and I'd be sleeping…I may have my phone turned on silent, but the calls from my kids and from editor-in-chief always bypass the silent mode." **(Media worker 18)**
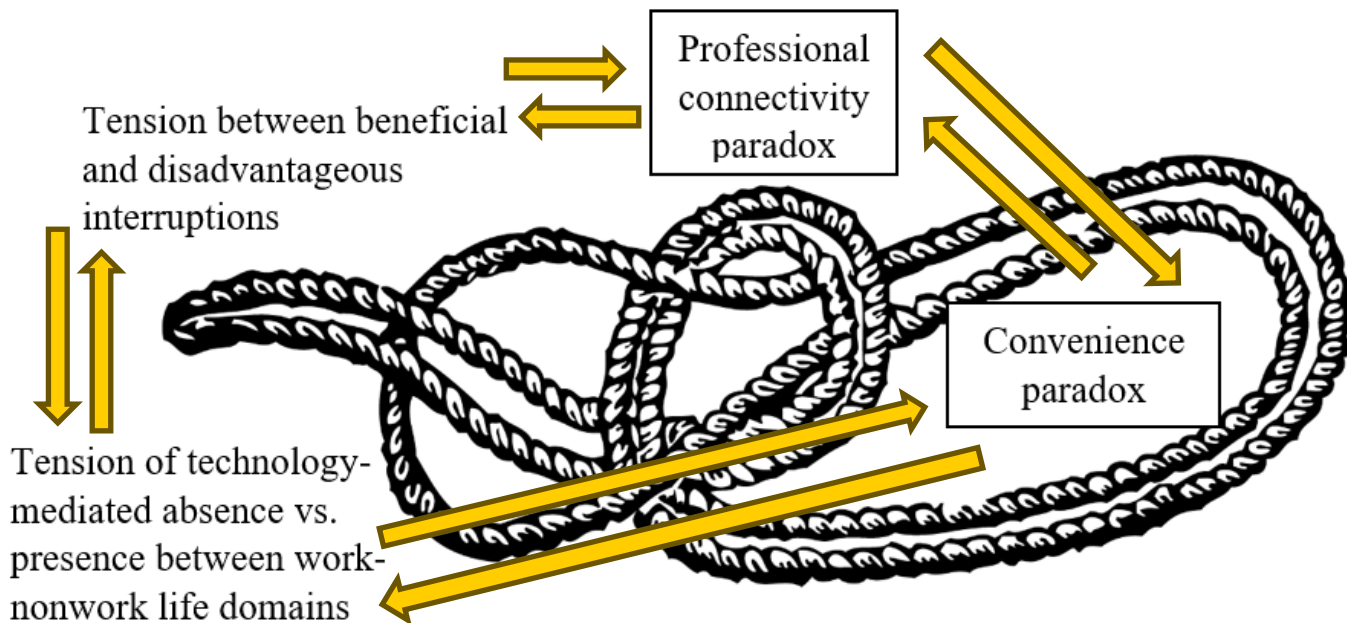
Convenience paradox

"I got an Apple Watch for myself as a Christmas present and I can check all my work notifications from here…it's good that working has become faster…work during my free time is less burdensome this way compared to working with a computer, which would probably feel like an interruption of my free time. **However**, with an Apple Watch, I can sit at home on my couch watching TV and work in the meantime just by clicking the watch a few times…The flipside is becoming aware of work faster than before…I could probably handle it the next day at work too…So that's the downside." **(Media worker 1)**

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Research findings: Knotted tensions and paradoxes

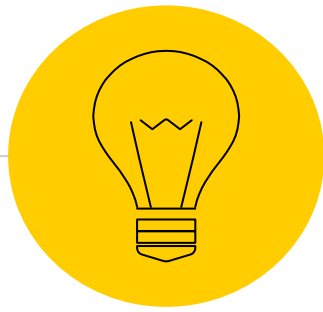Tensional knot of media workers' communication technology use related to work-non work

boundary management (modified from Fairhurst & Putnam, in press)

Conclusions

◉ Tensional knot identified in this study emanated from the media workers attempts to mitigate work–life conflict or maintain balance.

◉ Competing demands can generate new demands and amplify each others' effects in digital working life.

◉ Communication technology use can amplify and mitigate these paradoxical tensions simultaneously.

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Implications and contributions

◉ **Theoretical implications** Contributing to existing tensions and paradox literature by providing knowledge and understanding of **how tensions and paradoxes of communication technolgy use knot together.**

◉ **Practical implications** Helping to develop competence in **managing communication technology and navigating tensions related to it** to support individuals' agency and well–being in digital working life.

Thanks!

Any _questions or comments_ ?