

‘Trust’ Me, It’s Contradictory: How Leadership Shapes The Experience Of Paradox Amongst India’s IT Sector Employees

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Abstract

Organisations are microcosmic models of the Universe where seemingly opposite forces coexist in a delicate balance. Beneath the surface of this equilibrium lies a dynamic interplay of paradoxical tensions, defined as contradictory yet inter-related elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time. Paradoxical tensions are pervasive in organisational life and recent times have seen a resurgence of interest among researchers to better understand them. However, although extant literature abounds in studies on the impact of paradoxical tensions, insights into their antecedents are sparse. Drawing on the Paradox Theory, the present work attempts to fill this gap by studying the role of two leadership patterns, Paradoxical Leadership Behaviour (PLB) and Resonant Leadership Behaviour (RLB), in the experience of paradoxical tensions (EPT). A mediation model was proposed with PLB and RLB as predictors, EPT as the outcome and Affect-based Trust (ABT) mediating the EPT-Leadership relationships. Data collected through standardised self-report measures from 570 full-time employees working in the Information Technology (IT) Sector in India and analysed through Structural Equation Modelling revealed differential pathways through which PLB and RLB related to EPT. Although PLB positively and significantly predicted EPT, RLB did not. Moreover, ABT partially mediated the PLB-EPT relationship while fully mediating the RLB-EPT one. These findings theoretically further the understanding of ABT as a crucial mechanism for paradox navigation, while simultaneously holding practical relevance by incorporating the role of emotions in paradox-leadership scholarship. Finally, this India-based study offers an Eastern perspective on the nature and nuances of living with organisational paradox.

Keywords: Affect-based Trust; India; Paradoxical Leadership; Paradoxical Tension; Resonant Leadership