

04 Paradox navigators wanted Managers in implementing human resource management

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When was the last time you had a very good conversation with your manager about your work and career? Such conversations are very important for motivating or demotivating us. People do not leave companies, they leave their managers. A lot of research has found evidence for the importance of leadership. My research doesn't focus on the leadership of teams but on the paradoxical role played by managers - in particular, line managers who interact with people on a daily basis in implementing varied human resource management practice. The research was motivated by a friend of mine who constantly got confused about why his manager treated everyone differently. In some cases, it's a good thing that team members receive individualised consideration. However, some consistency should be maintained to ensure team members' satisfaction.

Working with Professor Patrick Flood of Dublin City University, Professor Denise Rousseau of Carnegie Mellon University, and Professor Tim Morris of University of Oxford, we published the first study that explores how a line manager's human resource management (HRM) implementation influences individual and team outcomes, using a paradox perspective. Paradox theory is rooted in the Taoist symbol of yin yang. It argues those seemingly contradictory yet interrelated elements can co-exist simultaneously and also evolve

over time. Treating members in a consistent way but considering individual difference is a paradox. If managed effectively, doing both will promote high performance.

The Head of Talent/Senior consultant in a large consulting firm helped us with data collection from 60 project teams. In this firm, as in most organisations, line managers now share increasing responsibilities for implementing HRM practices, including selecting members into the team, providing mentoring, managing performance and promoting teamwork.

Line managers' consistent but individually considered approach — As paradox navigators, line managers have to take a consistent approach with all team members but also need to consider

individual difference when they implement HRM practices. In our study, we provide examples showing how line managers manage the consistency-individual responsiveness paradox. One example of best practice is that when training programmes are introduced, line managers inform all members about the general opportunities and purpose of the programme while considering individual contributions and likely benefits for each team member in attending the training. In the case of developmental feedback, best practice involved line managers communicating with each team member while varying the mode and nature of the feedback according to the individual's abilities, relational orientation and past performance.



Consistency (equality)



Individual responsiveness (equity)

Na Fu received her BSc from Northeastern University (China) and PhD from DCU. She joined Trinity Business School as an Associate Professor in Human Resource Management in 2016. The recipient of an Irish Research Council Post-doc Fellowship, Na was the multi-award winner from the Academy of Management Emerald, Irish Academy of Management, and Labour and Employment Relations Association, and was awarded as the Dragon 100 Young Chinese Leader in 2013. Her research focuses on strategic HR management issues, knowledge exchange and service innovation in both private and public sectors.

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LEFT – ‘Line Managers as Paradox Navigators in HRM Implementation: Balancing Consistency and Individual Responsiveness’ Fu, N., Flood, P.C., Rousseau, D., & Morris, T. (2018) *Journal of Management*

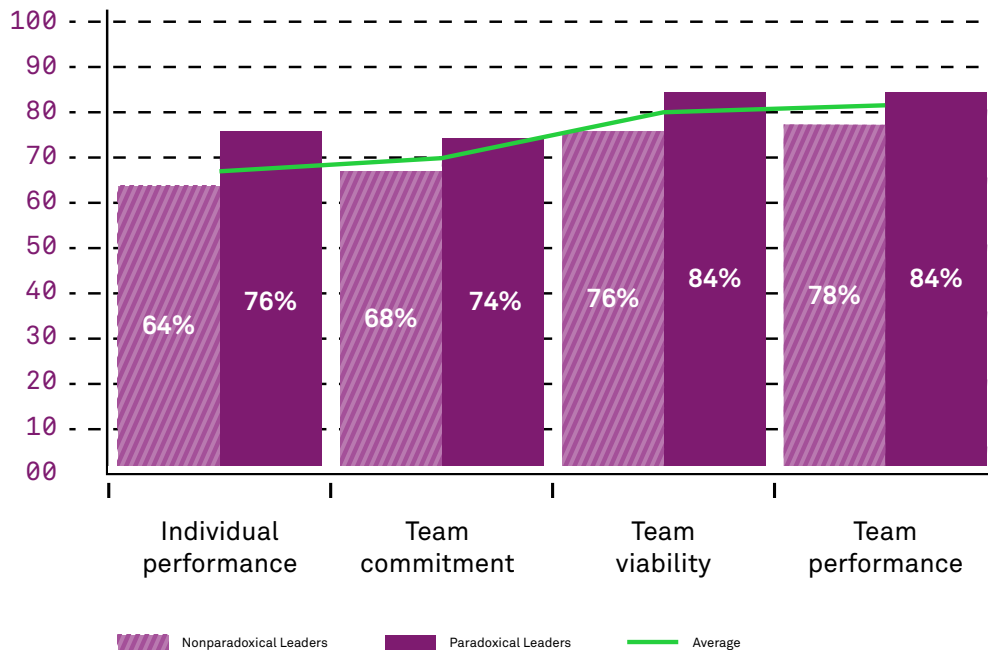
BOTTOM – Individual and Team Outcomes Comparison between Paradoxical and Nonparadoxical Leaders

A key solution to building organisational competitive advantage is through the development of people. Our findings confirm the critical role of line managers in motivating team members’ effective job performance and we establish that, with the right approach, consistency and individual responsiveness can be achieved. Our study, ‘Line Managers as Paradox Navigators in HRM

Implementation: Balancing Consistency and Individual Responsiveness’ was published in the *Journal of Management* (2018). Its findings provide a potentially valuable resource for organisations looking to improve team and organizational outcomes. This research will benefit managers, front line employees and HR professionals to promote a motivating environment in the organisations.

Our research establishes that line managers as paradox navigators need to be upskilled in ways to balance consistency and individual responsiveness in their implementation of HRM practices. Future research is needed to explore other ways in which organizations can improve line managers’ abilities, motivation and opportunities in HRM, ultimately improving team and organizational outcomes.

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