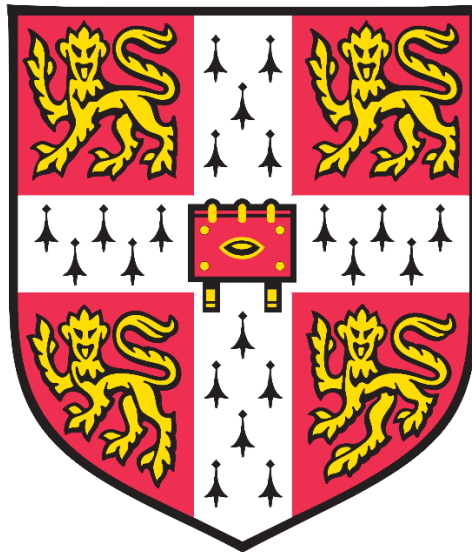


# **Processing Novel and Competing Demands - Essays on Managerial Approaches to Change**

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The dissertation is submitted for the degree of  
*Doctor of Philosophy*



## **Declaration of Originality**

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Abstract. At least two thirds of the original contribution of each of the co-authored papers is my own work. The dissertation has not previously been submitted to any university for any degree or other qualification and does not exceed the maximum length stipulated by Cambridge Judge Business School. All sources of information are acknowledged and referenced in the text and bibliography.

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- Jack Fraser, August 2020

## **Preface**

The central thrust of this thesis is an exploration of how individuals within organizations cope with novel and competing demands. As a researcher, I am deeply interested in the complexity and nuance found at the meso-level, where the understandings and perspectives of managers interact. In particular, I am interested in how different perspectives become salient, how divergent understandings are navigated by managers, and how this affects organizational responses.

I would like to take a moment to give an overview of how these research interests developed, and how this document developed to fulfil those interests.

Prior to embarking on my doctorate, I worked as both a Strategy Consultant and Policy Advisor. While working for very different audiences and clients, each of these involved helping organizations identify and respond to novel demands. In each case, the organizations I worked for promised clarity and direction in the face of complexity. Prima face, the problem was a simple one (albeit one that required significant amounts of time and attention): identify the market forces that will underpin future demand and provide a roadmap for coping with these forces.

I was struck, time and time again, with the swirling disagreements amongst our clients throughout each project. Engaging with managers? revealed numerous, multifaceted disputes about the nature of the problem, the capabilities of the firm, and even the milestones that would accompany a ‘good’ outcome. The process of engaging with new demands surfaced persistent tensions and drove conflict. The result was a process defined by contestation and ambiguity.

I began to puzzle over what underpinned such a diverse range of perspectives, and their role in affecting the ‘strategic’ (if indeed that term still applied) responses of the organization. For

the first time, organizations appeared to function less as a profit-maximising machine, but rather as a collection of individuals, approaching problems through a lens coloured by their experiences, their aspirations, fears, and biases.

In an effort to make sense of the complexity that came up in each project I started to make notes of these cases, trying to unpick the common threads between them. My prior academic background in Philosophy provided a broad framework from which to address these issues. There were several strands of Philosophical enquiry that were relevant, though two in particular stood out. The first concerned Decision Theory and, in particular, the normative claims of Expected Utility Theory. The second concerned the ontological concept of presentism – the metaphysical doctrine that only the present exists.

The orthodox position in Decision Theory – the study of underlying motivations and reasons for an agent's decisions – is Expected Utility Theory, which holds that agents should rationally prefer the value with the greatest expected value (Mongin, 1997). This clear and well-articulated maxim mirrored with the normative mantra of the strategy consultant – to identify the economically 'optimal' decision in the face of complexity. I found that the theoretical critiques raised to Expected Utility Theory mirrored much of the phenomenon I witnessed first-hand in our client's organizations. The 'causal challenge' (Joyce, 1999: 7), poses that agents cannot accurately infer the causal links between their actions and the value of the outcomes. That is, we cannot know that the decisions we make now will have a causal impact on the desirability of the possible outcomes, we can instead only infer with degrees of probability. The second critique that appeared relevant in these cases concerned the presence of vague beliefs (March and Simon, 1958). While the normative maxim of Expected Utility Theory is to pursue the optimal outcome, the fuzzy nature of the values that individuals hold can make comparison, and thus optimisation, impossible in practice (Feldman, 2006).

Individuals may struggle to compare the value of outcomes measured along very different parameters, or outcomes for which a value is hard to determine (Smith, 2010). This resonated with my experience, where individuals struggled to determine whether outcomes could be compared, or what the value of longer-term exploratory courses of action would be.

The Philosophy of Time provided a second conceptual framework for my early exploration of these issues. In particular, I had been fascinated by the metaphysical doctrine of presentism – the ontological position that the present is the only dimension of time that strictly exists (Crisp, 2003). While philosophical enquiry as focused on the metaphysical underpinnings of such a position, my fascination was with its pervasiveness as an idea, colouring our understanding of how people experience time. From the casual, throwaway comments of managers regarding the centrality of ‘now’ (*“there’s no time but the present!”*), to the work of social theorists such as George Herbert Mead (1932); who’s claim that reality ‘is always in a present’ (1932: 28) places a unique emphasis on the processes of ‘becoming and disappearing’ (1932: 28) that constitute our experience of reality. Much of my professional work had been structured by and reinforced this understanding of the present. Consultants focus on telling clients what the future looks like, and what implications this has for them in the present. The assumption in this narrative is that the client inhabits the present and the consultant’s role – much like that of a cartographer – is to tell them what exists beyond the space they inhabit, and what they should do to take advantage of this. Yet in project after project, managers talked about the past and the future as very real places, spaces that they were not in yet, but for the purpose of their decision making existed in a very real sense. The range of perspectives with which managers engaged with the present, past and future became a source of both professional and academic fascination.



These two frameworks jointly directed much of my approach as I applied for graduate programmes. While I had identified a broad topic of interest – the nature and role of managerial beliefs during periods of ambiguity – I had to refine and focus my research agenda. My early interest in the limits of Expected Utility Theory and Presentism lead me to two bodies of managerial scholarship: sensemaking and temporality. The former of these, first championed by Karl Weick (1995), refers to managerial efforts to develop plausible understandings of the world, allowing for action in the face of unknowns (Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld, 2005). The latter recognises time as a ‘sociometrical order which regulates the structure and dynamics of social life’ (Zerubavel, 1981: 2), and focuses on how managers understand and process this order (Orlikowski and Yates, 2002). Through these two bodies of literature, I found a framework that enhanced and refined my nascent research interests. The research in this thesis draws on this work and explores issues at their intersection.

I was fortunate to find that my interest resonated with several practitioners, who were interested in understanding how their organizations made sense of and approached ambiguous and complex situations. This allowed me to start fieldwork at the beginning of my doctorate with a large, multinational banking corporation. My time with this organization has provided a rich stream of insights, and an important training in participant observation for which I am very grateful.

This journey has been challenging, but also immensely rewarding. I hope that this is the beginning of a lifelong vocation, and the first steps to contributing to our scholarly community.



## Abstract

This thesis uses a socio-cognitive lens to explore managerial responses to novel and competing demands. The dissertation is structured around three chapters, each exploring the mechanisms through which managers understand, make sense of, and process competing demands<sup>1</sup>. Each chapter focuses on a context in which competing demands emerge from a change in the normal practices and expectations, specifically: industry disruption (Paper 1), planned organizational change (Paper 2), or the implementation of? institutionally complex working practices (Paper 3). In each case, our concern is with the heterogeneity of perspectives that exist amongst managers, the way in which these divergent perspectives interact, and the process through which they influence organizational responses. In doing so, the paper draws on the notions of framing, sensemaking, paradox, temporal structures, and temporal work. While these chapters exist as stand-alone studies, they have mutually influenced each other.

The first paper in this collection – *‘Exploring Multiplexed Framing in Incumbent Responses to Digital Disruption’* – addresses the nature and role of framing in managerial responses to disruptive innovation<sup>2</sup>. Much of the research that applies a framing lens to incumbent responses to disruptive innovation fails to account for intra-firm heterogeneity. To explore the processes involved, we conducted a case exploration of the response of a multinational

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<sup>1</sup> These papers have been written in collaboration with my supervisor, Shaz Ansari. For the purpose of clarity and continuity I use ‘our’ and ‘we’ in this thesis to reflect this. Each paper in the thesis is at least two-thirds my own work. Shaz Ansari contributed by guiding the research strategy, helping steer theoretical contributions, and editing the text.

<sup>2</sup> A version of this paper has been accepted for publication in *Long Range Planning*. (Fraser, J. and Ansari, S., 2020. Pluralist Perspectives and Diverse Responses: Exploring Multiplexed Framing in Incumbent Responses to Digital Disruption. *Long Range Planning*, Forthcoming.). An extended abstract has been published in the *Academy of Management Proceedings* (Fraser, J., 2020. Divergent Perspectives and Fluid Responses: Multiplexed Framing in Incumbent Responses to Disruption. *Academy of Management Proceedings*, 2020 (1)). The paper was included in the ‘Best Paper’ listing at AOM (2020) and was previously presented at SMS (2017).

insurance group to a digitally-led disruption: the rise of online aggregator platforms between 2002 and 2007. Our analysis mapped managerial frames across three dimensions: Challenge Type, Response Urgency and Firm Heritage. This paper introduces the notion of *multiplexed framing* – accommodating multiple, non-binary frames – and propose that these are *holographically distributed* through the organization – such that conflicting frames can be held by members of the same organizational department or group. The combination of these two characteristics generates an ambiguity within organizational subunits which allows managers to achieve an *equifinal* resolution of conflict: selecting the same responses for different reasons. This enables the organization to rapidly trial and shift between different strategic responses.

The second paper – ‘*The Future is Now: Temporal Work, Sensemaking and Agency during Planned Change*’ – explores the process through which competing temporal orientations are reconciled during planned organisational change<sup>3</sup>. Planned change can trigger substantial uncertainty as managers deal with competing understandings of how to act in the present while changing in expectation of the future. Left unreconciled, these competing accounts can lead to conflict and breakdowns in the change process as managers prioritise present demands. While ‘*temporal work*’ to develop coherent links between the past, present and future may help to overcome these tensions, such an approach can be hard to achieve in contexts where the disparity between the present and future is sufficiently large. This paper draws on a participant-observation study of Fincorp – a multinational organization undergoing substantial strategic change – to explore how managers address this challenge. We find that managers overcome tensions between the present and future by engaging in what we call ‘*Temporal Reconstructual*’ – a kind of “mental time travel” – in which managers

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<sup>3</sup> This paper has been presented at AOM (2020), PROS (2018) and EGOS (2018). It was shortlisted for the Best Student-Led paper of the MOC Division at AOM (2020). The paper is currently under review with ASQ.

make decisions about the present from the perspective of the future, by adjusting their orientation in time. Drawing on literature from temporal sensemaking, neuroscience and cognitive theory, we show how such a process utilizes ‘*hindsight bias*’ to discount the value of immediate demands. This in turn helps managers progress with change initiatives in spite of irreconcilable tensions between the present and future.

This focus on the role of temporality during periods of change and novelty is continued in the third paper of this thesis: ‘*Navigating paradoxical tensions through the interplay of temporal structures*’<sup>4</sup>. This paper focuses on the interplay of distinct temporal structures amongst managers in a new organization at the boundary of two institutional fields. In these contexts, managers are often required to meet contradictory but interrelated demands. While transcendence – accepting both sets of demands as necessary and complementary – has been shown to be an important response to such paradoxes, achieving it places significant cognitive strain on managers. This is particularly problematic in cases where fulfilling opposing institutional demands is required for the survival of the organization. In these cases, there is little empirical research into the practices that managers resort to when initial efforts to achieve transcendence break down. This paper draws on a longitudinal study of the early phases of operation of a joint-venture spanning two institutional fields. We argue that ‘zooming in’ to focus on the interplay of their underlying temporal structures can unveil novel and surprising sensemaking processes amongst managers navigating paradoxes. Through our analysis, we show that managers deconstructed the opposing poles of the paradox into their respective temporal depth – defined as the span into the past and future that they typically consider – and temporal horizons – measured by the frequency of milestones within this span. Through a process of temporal work, managers on both sides of the institutional divide were

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<sup>4</sup> An earlier theory-led draft of this paper was accepted for presentation at the European Theory Development Workshop (2020) and the Saïd Business School Workshop on Social-Symbolic Work (2020).

able to negotiate a new, shared temporal depth that accommodated the temporal horizons of both sides. We show that this process provided a structure within which to consider the demands on both sides as necessary and complimentary, which was not previously possible.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Understanding human responses to discontinuous change has burgeoned into a multidisciplinary problem. Research from the fields of psychology, behavioural economics, sociology, and organizational studies have sought to model how individuals understand and process change, and the impact this has on their subsequent beliefs, decisions, and behaviour. The three papers in this thesis apply a socio-cognitive (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Fiske and Taylor, 2016) approach to explore how managers understand and interpret change, how these understandings interact within organizations, and the impact this has on organizational responses. This socio-cognitive perspective is guided by the notion that individuals ‘develop internal cognitive models that enable them to organize, make sense of, and integrate new information about the world around them’ (Davis and Hufnagel, 2007: 683). The papers in this thesis focus on two lenses associated with a socio-cognitive ontology: sensemaking (Garud and Rappa, 1994) and temporality (Dawson and Sykes, 2019; Maitlis and Christensen, 2014). These lenses place understandings of environmental forces, organisational resources, and the flow of time at the forefront of accounts of managerial responses to change.

The following section provides an overview of the theoretical lenses that have been used to explore organizational change. In particular, I review the interlinkages between sensemaking, frames, and temporality; and their application to issues of strategic change. It is beyond the scope of this introduction to comprehensively review each of these bodies of literature; rather, this section is intended to situate the three papers of this thesis in the wider context of socio-cognitive approaches to managerial change.

## **1.1. Sensemaking**

### **1.1.1. Socio-Cognitive Foundations**

At its heart, sensemaking is the process ‘through which individuals work to understand novel, unexpected, or confusing events’ (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014: 58). It incorporates efforts to structure information and events through an ‘ongoing retrospective development of plausible images that rationalize what people are doing’ (Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld, 2005: 409). Sensemaking is the ongoing process of shaping order and clarity in the face of ambiguous, unexpected or confusing events (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014; Thurlow and Mills, 2009), allowing individuals to interpret their experiences and provide meaning that allows for action (Abolafia, 2010; Weick, 1995).

The concept of sensemaking is often associated with Karl Weick’s second edition of ‘The Social Psychology of Organizing’ (1979) and his latter exploration of the topic in ‘Sensemaking in Organizations’ (1995), though embryonic versions of the concept were present in the pragmatist philosophies of the early twentieth century. William James articulated a version of this concept in his early lectures on epistemology; emphasising the notion that understanding is inseparable from one’s agency and experience in it. In a 1901 lecture, James noted that human understanding is not abstracted from experience, but rather built from it: ‘he observes, discriminates, generalizes, classifies, looks for causes, traces analogies, and makes hypotheses.’ (James, 1901: 162).

Building on these pragmatist foundations, many scholars have conceptualised sensemaking as a process of authoring and constructing reality, rather than simply interpreting it. Sensemaking is a process of ‘authoring as well as interpretation, creation as well as discovery’ (Weick, 1995: 8). It involves both the interpretation of cues, and the development of an appropriate ‘frame

of meaning' (Sutcliffe et al., 2004: 871) with which to interpret cues from the environment, a process that 'precedes interpretation' (Sutcliffe, 2018: 1544). Construed this way, engaging in sensemaking involves agents 'constructing the very situations they attempt to comprehend' (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014: 58).

This process of searching for coherent and meaningful accounts after discontinuous change operates as both an individual and a social process. In the case of the former, researchers have stressed the highly cognitive aspects of sensemaking, emphasising the role of mental models and cognitive schema in helping individuals make sense. Hill and Levenhagen (1995) describe sensemaking as a process of developing and applying a 'mental model of how the environment works' (1995: 1057). Starbuck and Milliken (1988) argue that a common feature of accounts of sensemaking is a process of applying 'schemata' to interpret environmental stimuli (1988: 50).

Other accounts of sensemaking have placed greater emphasis on the collective and social dimension<sup>5</sup>. This is captured by Gephart's notion that sensemaking is a 'discursive process of constructing and interpreting the social world' (Gephart, 1993: 1485). Weick (1995) describes the sensemaking process as inherently social (1995: 17) and builds on Walsh and Ungson's 1991 conceptualisation of organization as 'a network of intersubjectively shared meanings that are sustained through the development and use of a common language and everyday social interaction' (1995: 30). While there may be cognitive mechanisms present, this body of work suggests that such mechanisms take place within a web of inter-subjective meaning (Maitlis, 2005). Sensemaking cannot happen in isolation, but is influenced by 'actual, imagined, or implied presence of others' (Allport, 1985: 3, in Weick, 1995: 39).

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<sup>5</sup> This focus on intersubjectivity resonated strongly with work throughout the twentieth century that emphasised the social construction of knowledge, including Berger and Luckmann's 'The Social Construction of Reality' (1966) and Alfred Schütz's 'Phenomenology of the Social World' (1932).

In accounting for how this process takes place, scholars have drawn on several related concepts. Some have focused on the role of boundary objects – material objects that intersect perspectives and prompt dialogue – in the sensemaking process (Bechky, 2003; Stigliani and Ravasi, 2012). This work has argued that such ‘interactive tools’ (Stigliani and Ravasi, 2012: 1253) can facilitate dialogue about shared and support efforts to create a unified understanding (McGivern et al., 2017). Other scholars have explored the intersection of stories, narratives and the sensemaking process (Boal and Schultz, 2007; Boje, 2001; Dawson and Sykes, 2019). While narratives comprise accounts that move forward chronologically with a distinct beginning, middle, and end (Gabriel, 2004), stories (Boal and Schultz, 2007) or antenarratives (Boje, 2001; Weick, 2012) are ‘a bet on the future’ (Boje, 2011: 1) with the goal to ‘disperse and challenge, providing alternative interpretations’ (Dawson and Sykes, 2019: 4). This use of stories is consistent with Weick’s notion of Strange Conversations (1979: 200), where routine ways of discussing a project are interrupted by the injection of novel perspectives to shape collective understandings.

A large body of literature has found overlap with the related concepts of frames and framing. Frames are understood in this context as ‘schemas of interpretation’ (Snow et al., 1986: 466) or a ‘mental template that individuals impose on an information environment to give it form and meaning’ (Walsh, 1995: 281). Much of the work in this field has used the term framing to refer to the cognitive process of interpretation and enactment (Daft & Weick, 1984; Pondy & Huff, 1988; Reger et al., 1994). More recent work has drawn on the literature of social movement theory to position framing not merely as a cognitive process, but as a political and social action intended to mobilise others around a particular perspective (Kaplan, 2008). In this conceptualisation, framing is ‘an active processual phenomenon that implies agency and contention at the level of reality construction’ (Benford and Snow, 2000: 613). Frames are not

merely cognitive devices, but also a tool ‘that actors use to affect the interpretation of events among different audiences’ (Fiss and Zajac, 2006: 1174).<sup>6</sup>

### **1.1.2. Sensemaking and Change**

The notion of sensemaking is strongly intertwined with the experience of discontinuity; the process of ‘making sense’ is necessary when a flow of continuous and comprehensible events is broken. Such a discontinuity can be noticed as ‘a form of surprise, a discrepant set of cues, something that does not fit’ (Weick, 1995: 2). This process was captured by Meryl Louis in her account of newcomers entering new organizational settings:

*‘The cycle begins as soon as individuals form unconscious and conscious anticipations and assumptions, which serve as predictions about future events. Subsequently, individuals experience events that may be discrepant from predictions. Discrepant events, or surprises, trigger a need for explanation...and, correspondingly, for a process through which interpretations of discrepancies are developed. Interpretation, or meaning, is attributed to surprises.’* (Louis, 1980: 241)

A key element of these accounts is the focus on surprise, novelty, and discontinuity at the level of managers, both individually and as collective groups. While the discrepancy between expectations and reality can be triggered by events and changes at the environmental (Daft and Weick, 1984) or organizational (Balogun and Johnson, 2004; Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991) level, the process of sensemaking begins with a perception of discontinuity in and amongst individuals. In cases of organizational and environmental change, managers struggle to develop coherent accounts of what is taking place (Lüscher and Lewis, 2008). Sensemaking,

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<sup>6</sup> Framing, in this form, is closely related to the notion of *sensegiving* (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991; Whetten, 1984) which involves efforts to influence other agents’ sensemaking process.

frames and framing form a central conceptual spine in the study of managerial responses to organizational change.

## **1.2. Temporality**

### **1.2.1. Time and Social Theory**

A second, related stream of literature on managerial responses to change and discontinuity explores the role of temporality; the notion of ‘how time is experienced and socially organized’ (Reinecke and Ansari, 2016: 2). As with sensemaking, the notion that temporality pervades social order has its roots in pragmatist philosophical traditions (Flaherty and Fine, 2001). In particular, the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century works of John Dewey, William James, and George Herbert Mead place the intersubjective experience of time at the centre of their epistemology (Joas, 1997). In this American pragmatist tradition, knowledge and understanding are derived from experience. Phenomenologically, this cannot be separated from our experience and understanding of time: at a minimum, we process events as a ‘flow of experience’ (Mead, 1932: 351) and understand the world through the partition of the past, present and future (Flaherty and Fine, 2001).

This emphasis on the centrality of time – captured in Mead’s emphasis that we inhabit a ‘temporal world’ (1932: 64) – was built into Emirbayer and Mische’s (1998) notion of agency. For Emirbayer and Mische, agency is embedded in time and understood with reference to the structure of time. Their analysis of the topic separates agency into three components and emphasises their relation to the past-present-future partition. The ‘iterational element’ is concerned with the retrospective ‘reactivation...of thought and action’ (1998: 971), while the ‘projective element’ is concerned with the ‘imaginative generation by actors of possible future trajectories’ (ibid.). It is the ‘practical-evaluative’ component of agency, however, that is most

closely associated with the present. This encapsulates the capacity of actors to make judgements about courses of action and pass normative judgements about the course of action that should be taken (1998: 972).

A central distinction in the study of temporality in the social sciences is between the notions of objective time and time as a subjective reality (Orlikowski and Yates, 2002). The former treats time as quantifiable, absolute, and linear (Reinecke and Ansari, 2015). Time, under this view, is not shaped by those who experience it, but rather progresses ‘independent of man’ (Clark, 1990: 142). In the study of organizations, this can be found in work as early as Frederick Taylor’s focus on ‘time and motion’ in *The Principles of Scientific Management* (Taylor, 1911). A socio-cognitive perspective, in contrast, underpins the notion of time as a subjective product of individuals’ understanding of the world. Time does not exist entirely ‘out there’ in the world independent of human perception, but rather is an intersubjective ‘product of the norms, beliefs, and customs of individuals and groups’ (Orlikowski and Yates, 2002). Understandings and perceptions of time are at least to some degree ‘defined by organizational members’ (Clark 1985: 36).

Recent research has begun to transcend this subjective-objective dichotomy, emphasising the self-reinforcing nature of temporal understandings through their influence on practice. Orlikowski and Yates (2002) argue that temporal structures – socially constructed understandings of time (Grangvist and Gustafsson, 2016; Orlikowski and Yates, 2002) – shape both what managers understand as salient and important (Huy, 2001; Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013; Reinecke and Ansari, 2015), and their ongoing practices (Slawinski and Bansal, 2012). In turn, these practices and beliefs reinforce and legitimise the temporal structures. Through this recurrent relationship, temporal structures operate as both ‘the medium and the outcome’ (Orlikowski and Yates, 2002: 685) of ongoing organizing.



### **1.2.2. Temporality and Change**

The importance of managerial understandings of time is heightened in the context of organizational change. Whether explicitly drawn out by scholars or not, time is central to the phenomena of change (Kunish et al., 2017). This interweaving of time into the ontology of change is captured by Ford and Ford (1995), who formalise change as ‘the differences between two (or more) successive conditions, states, or moments of time’ (1995: 543). Rajagopalan and Spreitzer (1997) build on Van de Ven and Poole (1995) to conceptualise strategic changes as ‘a difference in the form, quality or state over time...in an organization’s alignment with it’s external environment’ (1997: 49). While Huy (2001) proposes that ‘time is inherent in the definition of change itself’ (2001: 601). This intertwining of the two concepts raises the importance of understanding managerial perceptions of time contexts defined by change. Research has identified multiple dimensions through which managers perceive and understand time (Ancona et al., 2001; Kunish et al., 2017). These emerge regarding the perceived urgency of organizational change, the temporal depth they traditionally use, and the degree of focus placed on the past, present, and future.

Urgency reflects a sense of being ‘hurried’ (Shipp and Cole, 2015:243) and a subjective understanding of a rapid pace of time (Chen and Nadkarni, 2017). Jansen and Kristof-Brown (2005) found that high managerial urgency was linked to the subsequent level of impetus dedicated to change activities. In a similar vein, Chen and Nadkarni (2017) find that managers’ sense of urgency is positively related to levels of corporate entrepreneurship. While a subjective sense of hurriedness has been linked to increased commitment to change activities, research has suggested that this may come at the expense of cooperation and coordination abilities. As Leroy et al (2015) note, a sense of urgency can reinforce an understanding of time

as a (relatively scarce) resource. As such, managers with a subjective sense of urgency may be ‘unwilling to temporally adapt to synchronize with others’ pace’ (Leroy et al., 2015: 770).

Temporal depth denotes the distance into the future or past that managers typically consider (Nadkarni et al., 2016; Bluedorn and Standifer, 2006). In the context of strategic change, a longer future temporal depth has been positively associated with more temporally expansive planning (Das, 1987). Reineke and Ansari (2017) propose that ‘a long temporal depth emphasizes long-term changes and a focus on intangible goals’ (2017:411). Complimenting this, Nadkarni et al (2016) build on Laverty (1996) and Marginson & McAulay (2008) to argue that short temporal depth amongst managers can provide ‘flexibility and quick adaption but also give rise to temporal myopia and economic short-termism’ (Nadkarni et al., 2016: 1133). More recently, research has begun to explore how multiple temporal depths within organizations can influence their ability to plan for and enact strategic change. Slawinski and Bansal (2015) find that firms that are able to hold both short and long temporal depths can develop more complex and nuanced solutions to problems related to sustainability. In their study of firms in the biotechnology sector, Judge and Spitzfaden (1995) found that maintaining multiple temporal depths within organisations was relatively cognitively demanding for managers but was associated with superior performance.

An important clarification regarding terminology should be made at this stage. In the burgeoning literature on the role of temporal depth, an overlap in terms has occurred. While this thesis builds on the clarification made by Bluedorn (2002) to refer to the span into the past and future that managers typically consider as *temporal depth*, much of the literature in the field has interchangeably used *temporal orientation* (Souder and Bromiley, 2012; Wang and Bansal, 2012) and *temporal horizons* (Judge and Spitzfaden, 1995; Operti, Lampronti and Sgourev, 2020; Slawinski and Bansal, 2012) for the same purpose. Compelling arguments

have been made for a clearer distinction between the terms ‘depth’ and ‘horizon’. Schultz and Hernes (2019) distinguish the two forms of temporal structure in their work on the interplay between strategy and identity, proposing that temporal horizons are not synonymous with depth, but rather ‘expressive of how the overall temporal depth is divided into segments and how transitions between durations or periods are articulated’ (2019: 109).

Finally, research has explored the role of managerial temporal focus; that is, the extent to which managers direct attention to the past, present and future (Bluedorn, 2002; Zimbardo and Boyd, 1999). Nadkarni and Herrmann (2010) find that managers with a propensity for focusing on the past were less open to new experiences and less strategically flexible than those with a present or future focus. Similarly, a strong future focus might help galvanise energy towards planned change (Ybema, 2004). Recent work has suggested that the value of different temporal foci depend largely on the organizational and industry context. Nadkarni and Chen (2014) find that high focus on the past and present is more effective for undertaking strategic change in stable environments, while a high future focus is more effective for engaging with change in dynamic environments.

### **1.3. Understanding Managerial Approaches to Change: An Agenda**

The papers in this thesis draw the role of sensemaking, frames, framing, and temporality in understanding managerial approaches to change, and explore their interplay. We aim to shed light on the range of perspectives and understandings that exist within organizations, the mechanisms through which these interact, and the impact these have on organizational responses. The thesis reviews change in three distinct contexts: external environmental disruption, planned organizational change, and the creation of a new joint-venture with distinct practices.

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## 2. PLURALIST PERSPECTIVES AND DIVERSE RESPONSES: EXPLORING MULTIPLEXED FRAMING IN INCUMBENT RESPONSES TO DIGITAL DISRUPTION

### ABSTRACT

*Research applying a socio-cognitive lens to disruptive digital innovation often fails to account for **intra-firm** heterogeneity in how an established incumbent frames and responds to disruptive innovation. To explore the heterogeneous framing processes involved within a firm, we conducted an in-depth case study of the response of a multinational insurance group to a digitally-led disruptive innovation: the rise of internet-based general insurance aggregator platforms between 2002 and 2007. We map different response frames across three separate framing dimensions: the Challenge Type, Response Urgency and Firm Heritage, and explore their interplay in shaping responses to disruption. We introduce the idea of **multiplexed framing** – comprised of multiple, non-binary frames – and propose that these are **holographically** distributed – such that conflicting frames can be held by members of the same organizational department or group. This allows managers to leverage the ambiguity generated by multiplexed frames to select the same response strategies for different reasons leading to an equifinal resolution of conflict. We show how such framing enables the organization to trial and adaptively iterate between different strategic responses to disruptive innovation, particularly amid high uncertainty and ambiguity.*

**Keywords:** framing, digital disruption, disruptive innovation, ambiguity.

*'The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function.'*

- F. Scott Fitzgerald, 1945

## **2.1. Introduction**

The ways in which established firms respond to disruptive innovations have received considerable attention over the past three decades (Hill and Rothaermel, 2003; Schumpeter, 1942; Tushman and Anderson, 1986). While we have learned much about incumbents' responses to change and innovation (Ansari and Krop, 2012; Eggers and Park, 2018), how framing affects an incumbent's response strategies remains relatively underexplored within the disruptive innovation literature (Hopp et al., 2018; Kumaraswamy, Garud and Ansari, 2018; Snihur, Thomas and Burgelman, 2018).

Where accounts have utilized framing, they have tended to apply a binary formulation, often relying on a broad opportunity/threat dichotomy (Chattopadhyay et al., 2001; Dutton and Jackson, 1987; Mintzberg et al., 1976; Nutt, 1984). Recent work suggests that frames held by managers may not be unidimensional nor binary (Dutton and Jackson, 1987), but rather multi-dimensional (Osiyevskyy and Dewald, 2015), conflicting (Gilbert, 2005) and non-binary (Hahn et al., 2014).

Acknowledging such frame heterogeneity suggests that there may be not only inter-incumbent variation in how incumbents frame and respond to disruptive innovations (Cohen and Tripsas, 2018) but also *intra-incumbent* variation. Frame heterogeneity raises new issues for how multiple, conflicting frames interact within an incumbent organization and shape its responses to disruptive innovations. The process can be both combative, with managers engaging in

‘framing contests’ (Gurses and Ozcan, 2015; Kaplan, 2008), and collaborative, to combine and merge frames (Ansari et al., 2013; Powell and Sandholtz, 2012) as they try to win the support of others and agree about the right way to respond (Klitsie et al., 2018; Reay and Hinings, 2009). While a greater plurality of frames potentially provides more opportunity for conflict, it also offers greater scope for heterogeneous frames to co-exist and inform a more extensive repertoire of incumbent responses (Gray et al., 2015). Such intra-firm heterogeneity at the level of individuals and organizational units suggests a need for a multi-level perspective that focuses on how interactions among frames espoused by different members of an organization unfold to influence organizational strategy (Gray et al, 2015; Kaplan, 2008).

From these arguments, two questions emerge. What are the different types of frames through which a potentially disruptive innovation is viewed inside an incumbent organization? Where pluralistic frames do appear, how do these interact, and how does this interaction shape the firm’s responses to disruptive innovation?

To address these issues, we conduct a grounded study of framing in an incumbent organization responding to digital disruption. We draw on a case study of the UK General Insurance division of Insurecorp plc, a pseudonym for a large multi-national insurance and investment firm. Our case explores the nature and role of framing within the organization during a period of disruption in the insurance industry—the rise of digital aggregator platforms between 2002 and 2007—to explore how frames develop and impact firm decision-making and responses.

Our findings have two novel aspects. First, contrary to the binary and dichotomous treatment of framing in much of the work on disruptive innovation, we suggest that the frames held by organizational members can incorporate non-binary and unevenly distributed frames. In particular, organizational members develop non-binary framing positions along three dimensions: Challenge Type, Response Urgency and Firm Heritage. We introduce the concept

of *multiplexed framing* to refer to this pluralist, non-binary form that creates significant frame heterogeneity within the organization. Second, we find that these frames are distributed *holographically* throughout the organization such that conflicting frames can be held by members of the same organizational department, team or sub-unit. This notion of holographic distribution originates from the literature on organizational identity (Albert and Whetten, 1985) and occurs when conflicting dimensions are ‘diffused throughout the organization’ (Golden-Biddle and Rao, 1997, 594) such that competing elements coexist within groups (Pratt, 2016, 108). This differs from idiographic distribution, in which opposing elements are ‘housed in...different units or groups’ (2016, 108).

The combination of these frame attributes – multiplexed form and holographic distribution – has two theoretical implications: First, tensions between frames emerge at the intra-team or unit level, rather than *between* teams and units. This leads to less “tribalism” that has been found in other studies (Tripsas and Gavetti, 2000; Gilbert, 2006). Second, each manager had a broad set of frames to rely on, allowing access to multiple and potentially different perspectives and support different response strategies. Combined, this enables individuals to reach complex decisions through the pursuit of equifinality (Donellon et al., 1986; Gray et al., 2015; Klitsie et al., 2018). That is, managers can leverage the ambiguity generated by multiple, non-binary frames to reach consensual decisions on contentious issues without having to agree on the reasons for that decision. This adaptive capability allows the organization to switch back and forth between different responses as needed to respond to an unfolding disruptive innovation. Timely adaptation allows an organization to leverage new opportunities and abandon fruitless or ‘erroneous’ courses of action to improve performance on an ongoing basis. We show the value of a framing lens in explaining how an organization can flexibly and dynamically respond to disruptive innovation.

## **2.2. Theoretical Development**

### **2.2.1. Foundational Perspectives in Disruption**

Our study takes place against the backdrop of an innovation consistent with the notion of disruption in Christensen and Raynor (2010) and Christensen (2013). Under this conceptualization, an innovation is disruptive insofar as it develops along an alternative value trajectory before entering incumbent markets and disrupting them with a new value paradigm. The power of disruptive innovation has been demonstrated in technological changes, such as the hard drive industry (Christensen, 2013), digital imaging (Sandström et al., 2009) and quartz watches (Glasmeier, 1991), and in new business models, such as in digital music distribution (Burgelman and Grove, 2007) and television broadcasting (Ansari, Garud and Kumaraswamy, 2016).

A large part of the literature on disruptive innovation has focused on resolving the ‘innovator’s dilemma’, or how incumbent organizations fail to successfully respond to emerging innovations despite simultaneously doing ‘what is right for the near-term health of their established businesses’ (Christensen, 2013, xiv). Recent work has begun to focus on the heterogeneity of responses amongst incumbent organizations to disruptive innovation (Cohen and Tripsas, 2018; Eggers and Park, 2018; Khanagha et al., 2018). From this perspective, the challenge is to understand why incumbent organizations respond to the same disruption in different and, at times, conflicting ways.

Traditional accounts have focused on macro-level explanations, drawing on a resource-dependent (Christensen, 2013; Pfeffer and Salancik, 2003; Sandström, Magnusson and Jörnmark, 2009) and capabilities-driven (Benner and Tushman, 2002; Ethiraj and Zhou, 2019; Sosa, 2011) perspective on incumbent responses. While providing strong insights, these

studies paid less attention to the influence that interpretive processes have within organizations. This is the focus of a socio-cognitive body of research spearheaded by works such as Dutton and Jackson (1987), Gilbert (2006), Nadkarni and Barr (2008), Rindova et al. (2012), Staw et al. (1981), Thomas et al. (1993) and Tripsas and Gavetti (2000), each of which have explored the role of cognition and framing in incumbent decision-making.

### **2.2.2. A Framing-First Perspective**

Managers of incumbent organizations facing disruption find themselves making decisions in conditions defined by a high degree of uncertainty (Kaplan, 2008; Snihur, et al., 2018). This will likely involve disagreement about what a ‘good’ outcome looks like, who the competitors are and what defines the market (McCaskey, 1982; Weick, 1995). As ‘interpretations are likely to diverge widely’ (Kaplan, 2008, 673), this forces managers to address not only how to achieve a desirable outcome but also figure out what a desirable outcome is (Jauch and Kraft, 1986; Weick, 1995). This is particularly pertinent in cases of disruption involving the emergence of digital platforms. While platforms can provide new channels for reaching customers, they can also destroy the value of existing competencies and leave many incumbents either disadvantaged or disrupted by fundamentally shift the competitive dynamics in an ecosystem (Cusumano, Gawer and Yoffie, 2019; Karimi and Walter, 2015; Khanagha, Ansari, Paroutis and Oviedo, 2020) creating significant uncertainty and ambiguity.

A socio-cognitive lens provides constructs to account for this internal process of coping with uncertainty. Sensemaking enables ambiguous and complex conditions to be overlaid with meaning through a process of ‘ongoing retrospective development of plausible images’ (Taylor and Van Every, 2000; Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld, 2005: 409), while frames function as ‘structures of belief, perception and appreciation’ (Schön and Rein, 1994: 23). Frames act as a filter (Gilbert, 2006: 151), influencing whether and how something is seen as



significant. The content of these frames can include representations of competitors (Reger and Huff, 1993) and the organizations' history and market demands (Tripsas and Gavetti, 2000). This influences how managers interpret and respond to changing market dynamics (Eggers and Kaplan, 2013; Garud and Rappa, 1994). Framing theory posits that where the processing of decisions is limited by what can be known and processed (Eisenhardt and Zbaracki, 1992; Jones, 1999), frames operate as a heuristic to aid decision-making.

Studies into the role of framing in cases of disruptive innovation have often depicted frames as moderators against the influence of capabilities and environmental incentives in incumbent decision-making (Benner and Tripsas, 2012; Eggers and Kaplan, 2013; Grewatsch and Kleindienst, 2018). Under this socio-cognitive perspective, the value of resources and capabilities is not objective, but rather 'enacted' through framing processes (Rindova et al., 2012, 156). Indeed, under a framing perspective, 'disruption' becomes a relational quality between the organization and the context (Kumaraswamy et al., 2018), with innovations being seen as disruptive to some but not to others (Christensen, 2013).

### **2.2.3. Emerging Issues in the Application of Framing to Disruption**

Much of the literature applying a framing lens to issues of disruption has depicted frames as binary and discreet (Daft and Weick, 1984; Dutton and Jackson, 1987; Gilbert, 2006; Khanagha et al., 2014; Saebi et al., 2017). Exploring the newspaper industry during the emergence of digital publishing, Gilbert (2006) showed that while framing an innovation as a threat allowed for the galvanizing of significant resource commitments, it also restricted the range of responses. Conversely, by framing the development of digital publishing as an opportunity, managers could broaden the search processes to include more innovative solutions but generated less resource commitment.

While this model holds strong normative and prescriptive appeal, recent work has begun to break down this binary, discreet heuristic. Osiyevskyy and Dewald (2015) distinguish between degrees of threat; framing the disruptive business model as a non-critical threat was positively associated with intentions to adopt the new business model while framing the disruption as a critical threat did not have the same effect. Dewald and Bowen (2010) present a non-binary treatment of opportunity and threat frames, wherein the content of each frame is concerned with fundamentally different elements of the challenge. Specifically, a threat frame is an outward-looking claim about the challenge posed, while an opportunity frame is primarily an ‘inward assessment’ (2010: 200) about the potential utility for the firm.

This recent turn in the literature implicitly raises the possibility that the frames used by organizational members during periods of disruption may be more nuanced and pluralistic than earlier suggested. However, the presence of multiple, non-binary, divergent frames also raises questions about how such frames unfold and interact over time. Much of the literature on framing in organizational theory has addressed the potential for, and consequences of, clashes between divergent frames amongst actors and the tensions they generate (Fiss and Zajac, 2006; Gurses and Ozcan, 2015). These tensions may manifest in contestation, whereby actors engage in political processes to make their frames resonate and mobilize action in their favor (Kaplan, 2008). Or, tensions between diverse frames can be maintained in a productive manner (Reay and Hinings, 2009) that allows sufficient common ground to emerge, despite the variety of actors and their positions (Gray et al., 2015; Klitsie et al., 2018). Tensions between frames can also be resolved through the re-interpretation of frames—relying on the ability of managers to adjust and reclassify their frames to mitigate conflict (Raffaelli et al., 2019). Osiyevskyy and Dewald (2018) explore how conflicting schemas can moderate each other. Similarly, Ansari et al. (2013) explore the mechanisms through which agents adapt their frames to reach agreements despite having divergent positions.

A plurality of frames or intra-firm frame heterogeneity enables a greater repertoire of responses that can increase the possibility of conflict and contestation (Klitsie et al., 2018). However, people can also hold divergent frames for extended periods or shift their frames to resolve conflicts (Gray et al., 2015) as an organization adapts to disruptive innovation. Whether tensions between plural, heterogeneous, non-binary frames result in contests may depend on how frames are held within the organization. Much of the literature on framing conflict (e.g., Kaplan, 2008) explores political action between groups of individuals with similar frames as they compete to mobilize action. Further work has explored how, when organizational sub-groups identify with different positions, members can engage in ‘splitting’ (Lewis, 2000), whereby ‘we/they’ distinctions are heightened as individuals with similar views coalesce around a shared identity. These differences between organizational sub-groups can reduce mutual understanding (Leonard-Barton, 1992) and perpetuate conflict (O’Connor, 1995). An analysis of the interaction between plural, non-binary frames may necessitate the need for sensitivity to how frames are distributed in the organization.

Taken together, these bodies of literature highlight the need for a grounded exploration of the relational dynamics of frames in an incumbent organization responding to a potentially disruptive innovation. What are the different types of frames through which a potentially disruptive innovation is viewed inside an incumbent organization? How do interactions amongst these frames affect an incumbent’s response to disruptive innovation?

### **2.3. Methodology**

Our study can best be described as theory elaboration (Lee, 1999) insofar as it aims to address foundational questions in existing theory using empirical data to develop novel theoretical insights. The questions developed in the discussion above invite an inductive methodology to

prioritize the ‘discovery of new concepts rather than affirmation of existing concepts’ (Gioia et al., 2012: 17). Following the tradition of influential studies of framing in strategy, we apply an inductive approach (Khanagha et al., 2014; Tripsas and Gavetti, 2000) to the analysis of a historical case (Argyres et al., 2019; Barr, Stimpert, and Huff, 1992; Bingham and Kahl, 2013; Logemann, Piekkari and Cornelissen, 2019; Tsoukas, 2009; Weick, 1993). We use a case selected for its revelatory quality (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007) as an extreme exemplar of the challenges facing incumbent firms in the face of disruptive digital innovation.

### **2.3.1. Research Setting**

We focus on the UK General Insurance arm of Insurecorp plc between 2002 and 2007 in response to the disruption wreaked by the growth of digital aggregator platforms. Aggregators brought a new value proposition to the general insurance market along two dimensions. From a consumer perspective, aggregators provided a convenient resource on which general insurance policies (including motor, home, and travel insurance) could be compared on the Internet, primarily by value. From a provider perspective, aggregators offered a new digital distribution platform, supplementing the traditional broker and allowing access to a broad marketplace without the infrastructure and partnerships traditionally needed to distribute policies.

The emergence of digital aggregator platforms in the general insurance markets displayed many traits of disruptive innovation.<sup>7</sup> Prior to 2002, insurance products were primarily distributed through brokers, bancassurance schemes or direct sales through the insurance provider (Robertshaw, 2012). These products were mostly distributed over the phone or in person, with only 2% of UK motor insurance and 1% of UK home insurance sales taking place

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<sup>7</sup> In particular, this is consistent with a “low-end” disruptive innovation, insofar as it meets the needs of customers who had previously been “over-served” by the existing providers in the market. (Ansari *et al.*, 2016; Christensen and Raynor, 2003)

online (Accenture, 2010) The launch of *Confused.com* in 2002 marked the beginning of a transition in the sector. By 2005, 20% of all motor policies were purchased through aggregators, increasing to 56% by 2012 (Datamonitor, 2012). Mirroring this shift in distribution was the social acceptance amongst consumers of aggregators as a mainstream option. By 2009, 78% of UK consumers reported that they were ‘likely’ to use a digital aggregator to source their motor insurance policy (Robertshaw, 2012: 3).

While digital aggregator platforms began as a technical (and specifically digital) innovation, their presence began to transform the distribution, product and pricing dynamics of providers’ business models. Because the focus on price-led comparison led to a steady commoditization of the sector, many of the value dimensions along which insurance products had previously been sold (such as quality of customer service and affiliate discounts) became less salient when compared on aggregator platforms. Price became the key factor differentiating products in aggregator rankings, reinforced by consumers using price as a purchase driver. By 2011, 30% of sales on aggregators across all policy lines went to the cheapest policy available, with 88% of all sales on aggregators coming from the top-5 cheapest ranked policies (Datamonitor, 2012). A shift in competitive dynamics complemented this change in the customer-insurer relationship. Increased access to distribution channels lowered the barriers to entry for smaller firms who were willing to compete heavily on cost. The industry incumbents faced new market dynamics and competitive benchmarks for product value (primarily cost and speed of access). Sustaining and improving on past performance would require each to adjust to these new dynamics while continuing to serve their existing market.

### **2.3.2. Data Sources**

To improve levels of accuracy and validity, data was triangulated across multiple discrete sources. We prioritized archival content analysis, combined with semi-structured interviews

with former senior management and current employees of the organization. These are summarised in Table 1.

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TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

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We reviewed a total of 68 archival documents from Insurecorp, including *investor reports*, *transcripts of speeches made by senior management*, *regulatory filings*, and *AGM transcripts*. Here we used written commentary and discourse to build an emergent understanding of the salient schemas at play (Barr, Stimpert, and Huff, 1992; Tsoukas, 2009). Archival third-party commentaries from the period (including analyst reviews and industry reports) were used to understand the contextual ambiguity in the industry.

Interviews were conducted with 23 individuals who had held senior management roles with Insurecorp during the relevant period (2002–2007) and had input into decisions regarding the firm’s response to aggregators. This included individuals responsible for marketing, product/service innovation, service delivery, pricing, and product management. To mitigate social desirability response bias<sup>8</sup> (Arnold and Feldman, 1981: 377), we selected individuals who no longer worked for the insurance industry. This was intended to reduce the risk of responses being made that drew on perceptions of ‘acceptable’ or ‘appropriate’ beliefs within the organization or industry. Finally, seven interviews with current management were used to corroborate findings and improve the robustness of the model (Kirk and Miller, 1986).

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<sup>8</sup> Characterized by conditions in which participants try to garner ‘approval’ through use of “culturally acceptable and appropriate” responses (Marlowe and Crowne, 1964, 109)

Our work builds on a growing body of research using ‘history informed strategy research’ (Argyres et al., 2019: 345) to understand organizational decision making through the incorporation of historical data (Wadhvani et al., 2020). In our case, the triangulation (Jick, 1979) of archival documents and interviews through a historic case brings several advantages. First, historical approaches provide a broad explanatory power in ‘revelatory’ (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007) cases, allowing for salient elements of unique and rare contexts to be drawn out and supporting the development of ‘more informed causal inferences and theories...supporting analyses of path dependence’ (Argyres et al., 2019: 345). As Burgelman (2011) notes, ‘historical methods are inherently concerned with longitudinal development and involve reconstructing the unfolding of individual and collective action patterns leading up to relatively unique events’ (2011: 594). Second, leveraging interviews with former employees in the triangulation of our data allows us to mitigate potential motivational biases that can develop amongst current employees when their organizational roles influence their responses (Lerner, 1976). The political benefits of particular responses or degrees of involvement can ultimately shape and bias the collected data (Pettigrew, 1973; Pfeffer, 1981). Finally, utilizing a historical case can help mitigate the ‘pro-innovation bias’ (Rogers, 1983) that can emerge in traditional longitudinal case research into disruptive innovation. In retrospective cases, objectivity is improved by forcing a degree of detachment from the interests of the organization. Through historical data collection and analysis, we can ‘maintain both in appearance and in fact an appropriately open mind about the desirability of the innovation’ (Leonard-Barton, 1995: 52).

### **2.3.3. Data Analysis**

We followed the methodology of Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton (2012), more often associated with grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Drawing on existing literature to develop

the initial research questions and identify relevant theoretical concepts, we are consistent with grounded theory insofar as we employ techniques intended to develop an interpretive model of the role of frames ‘grounded in the views of participants in the study’ (Creswell, 2012: 14).

In the data collection process, we tried to get as ‘close to the informant’s experience’ (Gioia et al., 2012: 17) as possible to ease the ‘discovery of new concepts’ (2012: 17). Interviews were left broadly open, with a flexible protocol (2012: 26) to ensure that the topics seen as relevant by informants could be explored. Clarification questions were made with reference to findings from previous interviews rather than existing theory (Langley, 1999: 693). Secondary content was coded against the vocabulary derived from interviews to ensure that the terminology used was consistent with the understanding of those involved in the organization.

We categorized data from archival content analysis and interview transcripts into first-order concepts (Gioia et al., 2012, 21) that were subsequently grouped under second-order theme headings based on the topic they refer to and the perspective they take (Strauss, 1987). In the penultimate stage of data analysis, we linked the complete list of second-order themes into common aggregate dimensions that pulled them together. These aggregate dimensions function as emergent theoretical constructs, inductively built out of the first- and second-order concepts (Gioia et al., 2012, 20). We subsequently combined these three levels of analysis into a process model that demonstrated their inter-relationships. Aggregate dimensions provided conceptual headings for each phase in which the inter-relationship between the second-order themes were detailed in a process model. We fed back the results of this model twice into interviews with current employees to iteratively test its soundness and identify any discrepancies.



## **2.4. Findings**

### **2.4.1. Data Structure**

Figure 1 provides a representation of the data structure developed from our analysis;

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FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

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### **2.4.2. Environmental Ambiguity and Response Imperative**

Content analysis and interviews support the notion that, between 2002 and 2004, the incumbent insurance providers were aware of aggregators but did not perceive them as pressing or immediately relevant to their business. While interviews with the Group Chief Executive, as early as February 2002, indicate a need to ‘extend our distribution capabilities’ in line with the emergence of these digital channels, doing so was seen as a long-term diversification strategy to lower distribution overheads. In March 2002, the Chief Financial Officer’s recorded briefing to analysts noted that ‘e-enablement of distribution will be key in closing the savings gap... driving down the cost of distribution’. The notion that aggregators represented a supplementary, but not core, distribution route was reinforced with interviews with former management.

As a Customer Experience Manager noted, ‘we knew about online price comparison sites from their inception, but for a long time they appeared to appeal only to a pretty commercially unattractive niche; namely, young men looking for a bargain with no brand loyalty’. This was reinforced by a sense that aggregators’ growth was structurally limited by the focus on online distribution. A former Director of IT Strategy noted that ‘you have to remember that in 2002,

less than half of UK households had internet access, and less than 10% of those had something like primitive broadband... the impact of digital platforms was pretty limited by the infrastructure available’.

No informants could identify a particular moment or event that marked an end to this perception, though a consensus did emerge that digital aggregators were actively discussed in meetings from 2003–2004. Insurecorp’s former Brand Director, for example, discussed an ‘emerging realization’ that aggregators had become a permanent force with an appeal across all customer groups and ‘weren’t going anywhere’. A similar point was made by the group’s former Director of IT Strategy, who discussed the growing acknowledgment that there was a ‘critical mass’ of customers. ‘We had to recognize that “our” customers were trying and returning to this digital front-end, and they were going to be a permanent part of the market in the UK’.

The ‘permanent’ presence of aggregators in the market appeared to trigger a period of increasing ambiguity. Taken for granted assumptions about the structure and dynamics of the UK general insurance market were no longer automatically credible. A widening pool of providers changed the interactions between customers and insurers. Insurecorp’s former Customer Strategy Director noted:

*‘The problem was that our discussions required us to understand who a “good” customer was, which competitors were in “our” set, whether it was possible to avoid commoditization... The market was changing so quickly that none of these things were established anymore’.*

Managers questioned not only the likelihood of the desired outcome but also the extent of the outcome’s desirability. This is consistent with the notion of ambiguity where both risks and

the range of options are unclear and more information ‘may not resolve misunderstandings’ (Weick, 1995: 92). There was no ‘established’ answer – leading to a co-existence of heterogeneous beliefs, perspectives, and strategies – with no one approach being able to claim ‘legitimacy’.

### 2.4.3. Response Imperative

Two broad strategic positions emerged (Figure 1). Interviewees noted that by 2005, all parts of the organization recognized aggregators as relevant and potentially incompatible with the existing business model. As such, no strategic position was consistently aligned with maintaining the status quo. A former Customer Experience Director noted:

*‘You couldn’t make a product, marketing or customer-focused decision without taking into account a platform system that is taking 50% of the acquisitions line. While there were different views about how to cope with it, you couldn’t bury your head in the sand and pretend that it didn’t exist’.*

Our analysis showed the emergence of two response strategies, comprising goals and tactics intended to either allow the firm to *adapt*<sup>9</sup> to the commoditized market that aggregators were generating or to sufficiently *differentiate* the organization and its offer to avoid such commoditization (Figure 1). The first response, ‘*adapt*’, was defined by a set of strategic priorities aimed (in the words of a former Marketing Manager) at ‘beating cheap aggregator-based players at their own game’. The focus was on competing on cost, the primary value dimension from which the aggregators differentiated products. This position incorporated a belief that Insurecorp would not be able to resist the increased commoditization indefinitely, and as such, it was better to adopt commoditization as a positive strategy. This sentiment was

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<sup>9</sup> Although adapt can refer to any change (including to differentiate), here we retain the respondents’ use of the term, where it refers to competing on cost and beating the disruptors at their own game.

captured by the former Head of Operations: ‘If we wanted to, we could have competed on price and attempted to “buy” customers... this would have pulled us into a price war, but we knew that was something we could win’. Informants identified a range of tactics to adapt to the increasingly commoditized market, including restructuring existing departments, ‘buying’ customers by absorbing the cost of acquisition and cutting value-add services such as in-house call centers.

Discussions with informants revealed a second cluster of strategic responses to the threat of aggregators, ‘*differentiate*’. This position was defined by tactics aimed at enabling Insurecorp to resist the ‘creeping commoditization’ (according to a former Innovation Manager) of its business. The range of initiatives varied both in terms of the transformative nature and commitment required. Internal discussions covered topics from investing in strengthening and differentiating the brand to introducing new rewards schemes and improving customer service. Early tactics deployed by the organization are consistent with this, including the launch of 24-hour call centers in 2002 and a telematics-led offering in 2003. These were intended to provide a value dimension that price-driven offerings could not provide, as the former Customer Propositions Director noted:

*‘There were a number of ideas being shared in the industry at the time regarding clever risk models; pooled risk profiles amongst friendship groups, telematics systems, rewards for customers who lower their risk profile. The main goal behind each of these was to build a strong brand based around quality and trust, and retain customers with products they couldn’t get on price comparison sites’.*

It is important to reiterate that both strategic positions acknowledged that aggregators were undercutting Insurecorp’s existing position and required a response beyond maintaining the status quo. This was articulated by a former Brand Manager: ‘there was a sense amongst many

that “if we stay where we are, we are going to price ourselves out of the market that aggregators have created, without giving people a reason to pay more or be loyal”.’ Our analysis shows that there were significant divergences in *how* this challenge was framed and how the organization was framed as capable of dealing with it.

#### **2.4.4. Frame Dimensions**

Our analysis revealed multiple frame dimensions, resulting in a heterogeneous range of beliefs associated with the identification with one of the two strategy positions. These are shown in Figure 1 as the dimensions concerning the *Challenge Type*, *Response Urgency* and *Firm Heritage*.

**Challenge Type:** The first frame dimension concerns the type of challenge that digital aggregators were perceived to pose. A key point of divergence was found in individuals’ understanding of precisely what the rise of aggregators undermined. The polar extremes of this dimension concerned whether aggregators were framed as a *volume challenge* or a *margin challenge*. By framing aggregators as a challenge to *volume*, individuals perceived that the imperative regarding aggregators was to find a response to their ability to attract a broad range of customers, becoming the primary channel for the acquisition of new customers. This was consistent with the notion that the General Insurance arm of the group functioned primarily as a cash generator for the wider business. A 2003 statement by the Chief Executive of the group described a ‘strong business model... allied to a cash-generating general insurance business’. In this understanding, the priority of the group was to maintain the existing volume of transactions through the General Insurance division. Consistent with this, multiple informants noted that an adverse impact on the volume of acquisitions was their greatest fear. A former Head of Product and Pricing noted that ‘scale was crucial to our business model. The volume

of policies you hold impacts on the organizational risk profile, which we wanted to keep as low as possible and consistently drive cash into the business’.

Faced with a challenge to this way of doing business, the initial response was to maintain historical levels of acquisition. As one former Strategy Director noted: ‘when you are looking at losing customers rapidly, the first reaction, at least my first reaction, is to try and get back to where we were, even if it meant a race to the bottom in the short-term’. Crucially, this challenge to volume could simultaneously be seen as an opportunity or threat. The same former Strategy Director that recognized the threat to the acquisition pipeline also recognized it to be an opportunity to simplify their approach, claiming that ‘if we were willing to compete in that way, it could somewhat simplify our acquisitions process’. The *Challenge Type* spectrum is thus opportunity–threat agnostic in that it is possible to hold a clear position on the spectrum without having to commit to framing the challenge posed by aggregators exclusively as an opportunity or a threat.

A second perspective that we identified framed aggregators as a *challenge to margins*. For some, aggregators were a commoditizing force that challenged the levels of customer lifetime value (CLV) that Insurecorp had previously maintained. For these individuals, the concern was less about the revenue accumulated from the market but more about the margins that could be extracted from each customer. This framing was consistent with an understanding of the General Insurance Division as a useful profit-generating business in its own right. This is captured in the Chief Financial Officer’s 2006 statement to investors, which noted that the pursuit of General Insurance margins requires prioritizing ‘better quality risks’ at the expense of volume. Many within the General Insurance Division consistently framed the challenge with this frame. As one respondent noted, ‘Once you begin to sacrifice those margins to increasing commoditization, it is very hard to regain them. It was a brilliant position to have,

and we needed to protect it'. For others, the challenge in maintaining historic CLV levels was not a threat, but rather reflected a new business model. A former Brand Manager noted, 'People used to stay with one bank for life too. Just because customers can switch more easily doesn't mean that the retail banking market is ruined, we just need to accept that success will be in the context of a healthy turnover, and not rely on people maintaining a relationship with us for decades... If anything, strong brands like ours should perform well in a high turnover market'.

These framing positions corresponded with a divergence in opinion regarding which elements of Insurecorp's proposition were worth prioritizing. A former Brand Manager commented: 'Are we an expensive niche player or a general mass market provider? As it was, we were neither, but the price comparison sites forced us to choose'. Framing aggregator growth as primarily a challenge to volume was associated with a preference for strategies from the 'adapt' strategy position. Insurecorp's former Head of Product and Pricing, for example, claimed that maintaining market share by volume required accepting the commoditization of the market; 'the response had to be "how can we retain that volume?" Ultimately, that needed to be achieved through pricing'. Conversely, the framing of aggregators as a challenge to margins led commoditization to pose an alternative question: 'How can we justify to customers that we are worth it?' (Former Customer Experience Director).

***Response Urgency:*** The second major framing dimension to emerge concerned how urgent the threat from aggregators was and how quickly a response had to be found. While both dimensions recognized that aggregators posed a challenge, the divergence along this spectrum represents a difference in understanding regarding the timeframe required for a response.

By framing the challenge as *urgent*, informants conceived of the disruption as requiring a response in a relatively short timeframe or that any response must be implemented quickly to

be effective. As the former Head of Corporate Marketing noted, there was a belief amongst many (including the informant) that aggregators could shift Insurecorp's market position in a very short period: 'Policies renew every year, so in theory we could lose much of our book 12 months from now'. Other informants, including a former Marketing Manager, discussed the need to respond to the 'leak' caused by acquisitions increasingly being processed on digital aggregator platforms.

The heightened sense of imperative that resulted from framing the problem as an urgent crisis was associated with *adapt* strategies. The focus on resolving the immediate challenge appeared to narrow the scope of the objectives; informants who framed the challenge as urgent placed less emphasis on Insurecorp's long-term health and a greater emphasis on the next set of results. As a conversation with the former Customer Propositions Director highlighted, 'whenever results turned against us, attention was drawn to looking at how to reverse the problem as soon as possible. We became very tactical and short-termist'. Interviewees noted a tendency to prioritize tactics that were intended to optimize short-term returns, including competing on price. As a former Insight Manager noted, 'In a tight market, innovative plans to differentiate the organization are seen as a bit of a luxury'.

Our analysis revealed that some Insurecorp managers did not share this sense of urgency; rather, they framed aggregators as a long-term challenge and a natural evolution of the market. It was not until 2005 that a company report began to address the issue, noting that addressing these trends was a matter of 'encouraging innovation and improvement, and championing continuous learning'. The focus was on a gradual evolution, rather than a rapid change, as a former Innovation Manager noted: 'We were not going to become irrelevant suddenly... We had to find a way to operate in a market where aggregators were a major distribution channel, but there is no reason for us to panic'. Several informants, including the former Head of



Strategy, highlighted that digital aggregator platforms ‘had rather a *co-bionic* relationship with us, where we used them as a distribution channel; their business model was not out to destroy us’. This mitigated sense of urgency appeared to be associated with a broader perspective on the range of desirable strategic responses. The former Head of Strategy noted: ‘Things had to change... as things stood, we were in for an uncomfortable few years, but it was less a question of “what do we do?” and more “who do we want to be?”... we needed to be less reactionary and take a long-term view’.

***Firm Heritage:*** The final framing category that emerged concerned the understanding that organizational members had about the heritage of Insurecorp’s General Insurance business. This dimension was bracketed by two positions, framing the organization’s heritage as either *pioneering* or *functional*. This dimension concerns the organization’s heritage instead of its identity. An understanding of the organization’s heritage may be incorporated into the organization’s collective identity beliefs (Brown et al., 2006), but they are not indistinguishable. Framing the organization’s heritage as ‘functional’ does not equate to the organization having a ‘functional’ identity. The *functional* framing position incorporated the belief that Insurecorp had never really differentiated itself in the market, but rather had always found success by becoming very effective at distributing and pricing its policies. The former Customer Propositions Director noted that ‘fundamentally, what we offer hasn’t changed in hundreds of years; we are still building products based on collective risk and pricing them to attract new customers’. Several respondents referred to the functional role that the general insurance business line played in the Insurecorp group—a secondary and supportive function in the larger investment lines of the organization. A former Innovation Manager noted that ‘part of the challenge was that a lot of people saw general insurance as a cash generator for the investment business. Our role was supportive of the wider business’.

The beliefs associated with the *functional* framing of heritage were consistent with the strategies associated with the *adapt* position. The argument that Insurecorp had never been a differentiated organization was associated with a view that competing on price was consistent with the organization's heritage. When discussing the history of the organization, a former Head of Strategy took the position that 'It's not sexy, but we have always focused on pricing well and being operationally agile because ultimately that is what has helped us build a solid business'.

Conversely, the *pioneer* framing position was defined primarily by a belief that the Insurecorp brand had historically differentiated the organization and that it had an innovative history. In a 2005 presentation to investors, the Senior Director of Marketing Strategy argued that the group had pioneered throughout its history and that this would continue to define how they solved problems: 'this ability to think beyond the everyday... (is) at the heart of everything we do'. Many respondents noted the organization's ventures into directly providing policies to customers (bypassing brokers) in the late 1990s as evidence of their innovative heritage. The former Head of Corporate Marketing noted that 'we had spent a long time building the Direct offering, and I think that gave us a certain pedigree as an innovative first-mover'. A presentation by the Chief Executive in 2002 announced a rebranding project to reflect the values of 'innovation', 'growth' and 'progression'. Our conversations highlighted that some organizational members framed the organization's heritage in this manner. The former Head of Global Branding noted: 'We were different; we weren't always the first mover, but we were good at scaling innovations. I think we saw ourselves as historically being much bolder than the other big players in insurance'.

This framing position was more consistent with the tactics of the *differentiate* strategy. By framing the organization as a group with a pioneering, innovative and forward-looking

heritage, members appeared to be more open to innovative responses. As the former Head of Corporate Marketing noted: ‘there is no reason we shouldn’t try to maintain that differentiated value-add position’.

#### **2.4.5. Interaction among Framing Dimensions**

Variation along different framing dimensions influenced the compatibility of an individual’s beliefs with either the *adapt* or *differentiate* strategic position. An individual who framed the situation as an urgent, volume challenge and who framed Insurecorp’s heritage as primarily functional would find the *adapt* response to be more consistent with their beliefs. As such, they would prioritize tactics aimed at competing on price.

It is important to note that these three framing dimensions, though inter-related, are separate. The framing positions of ‘challenge to volume’, ‘high urgency’ and ‘functional heritage’, as well as the set of ‘challenge to margin’, ‘low urgency’ and ‘pioneer heritage’, appear to be mutually constructive at times in discussions with respondents. A conversation with a former Innovation Manager, for example, appeared to link the firm’s pioneer heritage to a lower urgency; ‘I suppose because we were always a market leader, and because we had led the way into the direct channel, there was a sense of arrogance that was surprisingly good at insulating us’. Conversely, it was possible to simultaneously hold framing perspectives that could lead to incompatible response strategies. A conversation with the former Insights Manager, for example, was consistent with framing the organization as a pioneer but the threat as highly urgent and a threat to volume, claiming not only that ‘we were quite innovative and customer-focused’ but also that ‘focusing on the customer becomes a bit of a luxury when you are losing market share so rapidly’. The results of these discussions appear to indicate that the frames held by managers were often complementary but not mutually inter-dependent.

The framing dimensions that emerged represent spectrums, bracketed at either end by polarised framing positions. Individual members' beliefs and perspectives may entirely or in part align with these frames or hold a view somewhere in between. It is possible, for example, for individuals to frame the challenge as 'pressing' (in the words of the former Customer Experience Director) or 'requiring attention' (in the words of a former Strategy Director), neither of which are consistent with framing the threat as urgent or non-urgent, but rather a nuanced position in between.

#### **2.4.6. From Framing Clashes to Emergent Strategy**

To identify how different frames converge and interact within the organization, we examined how frames were distributed through the organization or the extent to which particular frames were uniquely attributable to specific groups. Our analysis revealed that, while there was some clustering of frames in particular groups, teams or departments, conflicting frames would also often be held by members of the same organizational group. Frame positions were thus spread more evenly throughout the organization than we had expected. Tensions between frames thus emerged between individuals within groups rather than between groups or organizational sub-units.

This holographic distribution, combined with the non-binary, multiplexed framing found in our analysis, resulted in situations wherein a broad range of framing positions were held within units or teams. Rather than *tribal* divisions emerging with perspectives separated along organizational lines defined by division function, divergent (and sometimes conflicting) beliefs could be held simultaneously within each team. As the former Director of Innovation Strategy noted, 'It wasn't outward conflict, but we were all coming at this from slightly different angles. For every suggestion, there was someone with another angle to approach it from'. Our findings suggest that this lack of consensus within teams mitigated the degree of

conflict within the organization. Organizational sub-units, each made up of agents using a variety of frames, did not rally around polarised perspectives or positions. As a result, the tribalist tendencies and overt conflict that can accompany these framing clashes did not emerge.

Within teams, we found that the wide range of ways in which agents could frame the situation created an ambiguity about which perspectives were relevant or important. Where interpretations clashed, agents would draw on other ways of framing the situation to make their case. As a Senior Risk Manager noted: ‘No one seemed to see it as urgent in the way I did, they were too inwardly focused to see the changing attitudes of customers. It helped when we could draw on the year-on-year decline in volume’. It also gave agents the scope to find alternative reasons to support the same decision, reducing the scope for direct conflict and allowing workstreams to progress while sustaining a range of interpretations. This was captured in a conversation with a former Insights Manager who, when pressed on the notion expressed by others that the firm could draw on its heritage as a pioneer, dismissed this notion but provided an alternate justification for their support for the project: ‘No, I never bought the idea that being this innovative was “in our DNA”... but we had the time to get there, even if we would make mistakes along the way’.

In doing so, it was possible for a team to see multiple response strategies as legitimate and coherent and as such, move between different ideas in a relatively fluid manner. This was noted by a former Innovation Manager: ‘These views were all perfectly reasonable. We couldn’t do all of them at the same time, but we could change tack and come at the problem from a different angle’. In a similar vein, the former Director of Corporate Marketing discussed how Insurecorp ‘became pretty good at dropping things that didn’t stick and trying something new’; this was in part because ‘there were no “hard rejections” amongst the options,

they were all plausible to each of us for some reason or another’. The range and number of frames held within groups thus encouraged multiple response strategies to be considered and allowed managers to tack between different and potentially conflicting alternatives.

This ability of individuals within the organization to shift between different strategies for different reasons allowed the organization to iteratively trial multiple responses to the threat of digital disruption. Between 2002 and 2007, the organization moved between various strategies. These initially focused on differentiating the brand in both language and pricing (relying heavily on language such as ‘pioneer’). By 2004, the focus had shifted to integrating aggregators into their distribution model, positioning Insurecorp as an organization that could compete in the new commoditized world. Findings from archival documents and interviews show that this was abandoned by 2005 in favor of returning to the brand’s original positioning. In 2006, the organization settled on the creation of a ring-fenced challenger organization to compete in the aggregator space while maintaining the core organization in traditional distribution channels. The co-existence of multiple frames allowed managers to draw on different interpretations to find justification for these divergent strategies for different reasons. This was concisely captured in a conversation with the former Head of Corporate Marketing: ‘No, there wasn’t a sense that we were going back on ourselves, but when projects didn’t develop the way we wanted to, we could see that there were good reasons for trying a new approach’.

## **2.5. A Multiplexed Model of Responses to Disruptive Innovation**

Our analysis identified multiple factors and aggregate themes that were salient in the process of developing a response strategy at Insurecorp. It also served to highlight the mutual relationships and influence between these core factors. Based on our findings, we create a

model of the dynamic interplay between the frame dimensions and response positions (see Figure 2).

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FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

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Our model incorporates the role of disruptive innovations as an antecedent of environmental ambiguity (Weick, 1995). In our case, this triggered a period of sensemaking, during which members evaluated information about their environment, the firm's capabilities and the potential incentives provided by the market. Central to this sensemaking process were three *framing dimensions*; the *Challenge Type* posed by the disruptive innovation, the *Response Urgency* required and the *Firm Heritage*. Each framing dimension is bracketed by an idealized position that marks the furthest extent of the frames reported on the topic. In practice, the frames held by managers more often fall somewhere on the spectrum of beliefs between these two extremities.

The idealized frames that fall on these extremes are consistent with the assumptions that undermine one of the two *strategic response* positions. These frames each represent a cluster of associated strategies and tactics concerned with fulfilling the objective of either successfully competing with aggregators based on price or differentiating the organization and targeting a narrower but higher value market. Framing strategies closely associated with framing digital aggregators as posing an urgent challenge for volume, or perceiving the organization to have a functional heritage, were associated with beliefs consistent with the strategy of price-based competition with digital aggregators in a commoditized market. Conversely, framing strategies closely associated with framing aggregators as posing an urgent challenge to

margins, or perceiving the organization to have an innovative heritage, were associated with beliefs consistent with a strategy of further differentiation. While the responses observed in this case tie closely to these binary strategic response positions, they need not *a priori* be mutually exclusive. It was possible to simultaneously pursue courses of action that fulfilled opposing schemas (see Figure 3).

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FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

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Our analysis found that these framing dimensions are not mutually interdependent. As such, organizational members were able to hold combinations of frames that would allow them to transition between adaption and differentiation-oriented strategies by emphasizing different framing dimensions. Individuals who felt that the group's pioneering heritage increased the chances of developing a differentiation-led strategy also demonstrated support for the adaption-led responses owing to their perceived urgency of the situation.

We propose that this ability to tack swiftly between strategies had a significant impact on the fortunes of the group. As seen in Figure 3, the group shifted between, and even simultaneously pursued, courses of action that fulfilled different purposes. Where projects failed to deliver anticipated outcomes or improve returns, senior managers were able to commission work that met different strategic aims within a short timeframe. Our analysis suggests that this capability allowed the organization to take advantage of new opportunities and abandon fruitless courses of action to deliver better than expected results. Within this period of relative turmoil, the group expanded its market share, moving up two places in the ranking of the world's largest insurers by turnover.



## 2.6. Discussion

We began by advocating for a grounded study of the role of framing processes in incumbent decision-making to address questions about the content, structure, and interplay of frames in incumbent organizations as they respond to disruptive innovations. We propose that this study offers significant contributions to the primary literature streams we drew on.

### 2.6.1. Contributions to the Disruptive Innovation Literature

We build on recent work focusing on framing in the context of disruptive innovation by showing its value in understanding heterogeneous and shifting strategic responses within an incumbent organization (Ansari et al., 2016; Gurses and Ozcan, 2015; Kumaraswamy et al., 2018). The relationship between the framing dimensions we identified and the strategic response positions of *adapt* and *differentiate* extends recent research on the role of framing in managerial decisions under ambiguity. Prior research has suggested that framing an issue as a critical threat results in strategic entrenchment, deliberate resistance and less innovative ‘rigid’ response strategies (Dewald and Bowen 2010; Gilbert, 2006). We extend this work by showing that ‘threat’ in the context of framing disruptive innovations can be distinguished by the *type* of threat that the disruptive innovation is framed as and the extent to which the threat is framed as urgent or non-urgent. This builds on the notion that strategic response is linked to the *temporal* assumptions that are made regarding the pace of progress of the disruptive innovation (Dutton and Duncan, 1987; Kumaraswamy et al., 2018; Osiyevskyy and Dewald, 2018) and sits alongside the type of threat (what it is threatening to) and the perceived firm capabilities in shaping organizational responses.

We extend essentialist understandings of the ‘type of innovation’ (such as radical or incremental) and varying ‘time horizons’ (such as long or short) regarding the adoption of a

potentially disruptive innovation (Ansari and Krop, 2012; Hill and Rothaermel, 2003). We do so by highlighting the role of frames in how a potentially disruptive innovation is viewed by an incumbent and how rapidly it is seen to diffuse and disrupt the industry, which may affect the urgency of the incumbent's response.

### **2.6.2. Contributions to the Framing Literature**

The frame dimensions identified in this case are cognitive, rather than symbolic constructs. They represent understandings of the world that guide information processing and decision making, drawn on to make sense of a complex and highly ambiguous situation (Cornelissen and Werner, 2014; Weick, 1995). These frames are not created as a rhetorical tool, but instead represent enduring and relatively fixed individual beliefs about the nature of the firm and its environment. While the content of these frames is relatively fixed, their plurality, non-binary structure, and holographic distribution allowed for remarkable response flexibility. We explore the implications of this form and structure for the broader framing literature.

***Multiplexed Framing:*** Rather than schematically classifying disruption as a threat or opportunity, our analysis suggests that organizational members can use multiple, non-binary framing dimensions to develop a multi-faceted view of the nature of the challenge (*Challenge Type*), the urgency of the challenge (*Response Urgency*) and the capabilities of the firm (through understanding the firm's *heritage*), resulting in a varied combination of framing perspectives. We introduce the term Multiplexed Framing to refer to the joint presence of multiple framing dimensions with a non-binary structure. This perspective allows individuals to simultaneously hold beliefs that are consistent with framing the disruptive innovation as a threat *and* as an opportunity. An individual could consistently frame the challenge of disruption as a threat (for example, insofar as it provides a highly urgent challenge to the volume of sales) and as an opportunity (for example, insofar as it provides a narrow window

in which to promote the organization's pioneering heritage). Because these frames exist in separate framing dimensions (in this case, *Challenge Type* and *Firm Heritage*), they can be held simultaneously, even though they may have differing implications for whether the disruption is seen to be consistent with a traditionally construed threat or opportunity. This provides a more nuanced understanding of how potentially disruptive innovation is differentially viewed inside an incumbent organization.

These framing dimensions suggest a more granular approach to framing in cases of incumbent decision-making triggered by disruptive innovation. This allows members to distinguish between different understandings held internally regarding the nature of the challenge posed by disruptive innovation. Furthermore, we suggest treating framing dimensions as a *spectrum* of positions on a particular issue. Prior work has tended to treat frames as binary positions, without specifying the possibility of the varying degrees of these positions. Our model depicts the spectrum of beliefs held by members between the two abstracted 'ideal types' (Doty and Glick, 1994) or categorical frames (threat/opportunity), which gain differential resonance. Indeed, 'ideal types rarely exist in pure form, the actual frames of decision-makers will lie between the endpoints' (Hahn et al., 2014: 466). Focusing on only the endpoints of the spectrum of framing positions would lead to missing out on the range of responses that emerge in practice.

***Framing Tensions, Equifinal Resolutions, and Progress:*** We address how frames interact within the organization and its impact on response strategies. We found that frames are distributed 'holographically' (cf., Albert and Whetten, 1985), such that each sub-unit of the organization comprises individuals utilizing a range of frames. This differs from an idiographic distribution (Pratt, 2016) where members of a particular unit hold the same frame, as found in Tripsas and Gavetti (2000) and Gilbert (2006). We suggest that framing positions

are distributed both between and *within* organizational units or divisions and no framing position may be exclusive to anyone organizational unit. Organizational members may not equally or uniformly represent a specific frame because a disruptive innovation may be differentially interpreted by individuals within an organizational unit. By highlighting this holographic distribution, we show how members arrive at non-uniform understandings of disruptive innovation, enabling varying responses.

Similarly, while prior work on disruptive innovation has tended to treat disruption as an organization-level phenomenon, we add nuance by showing how a disruptive innovation may be framed differently by individuals and units *within* an organization. This builds on a broader trend in the framing literature emphasizing plurality and intra-firm variation (Gurses and Ozcan, 2015; Kaplan, 2008). We suggest that an incumbent's response to a disruptive innovation should not be seen to be unitary or uniform across an organization but rather as both differentiated and varying among its units and members comprising these units. Not only there may be inter-firm heterogeneity vis-à-vis incumbents' response to disruptive change, but also heterogeneity within firms and their subunits.

We propose that the combination of multiplexed frames and a holographic distribution enabled the organization to rapidly switch between different responses to the unfolding disruptive innovation in a relatively short timeframe. As frames were not monopolized by specific teams or sub-units, tensions emerged *within* rather than between groups. The broad range of framing positions distributed throughout the organization enabled the firm to avoid the inter-team tribal conflict that tends to characterize incumbents' responses to disruption.

While previous research has described how these tensions unfold through competition and conflict (Gilbert, 2006; Gurses and Ozcan, 2015; Kaplan, 2008; Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013), we propose that the plurality of framing positions within each team in the organization

helped mitigate conflict by allowing organizational members to pursue the same response even if for different reasons. This is consistent with the utilization of equifinal meaning (Donellon et al., 1986; Gray et al., 2015) in the process of overcoming tensions between inconsistent understandings within groups. Relying on the co-existence of multiple frames, agents can circumvent conflict by finding different ways to agree on decisions without agreeing on why these decisions are necessary. Multiple framing dimensions thus preserve and exploit the ambiguity regarding how to best respond to disruptive innovation. In our case, it allowed subunits and teams to consider a wide range of response strategies and tack between them fluidly, rather than get tied to a specific response (that was no longer appropriate), with each strategy being understood as a ‘legitimate’ response despite different reasons for selecting that response strategy. As a result, the organization could dynamically manage the disruptive innovation process by responding in a manner that seemed optimal and prudent at a point in time, but then adjust the response as needed in line with changes in the unfolding disruptive innovation process.

This arrangement allows frames to maintain their potency as a heuristic device, while still allowing managers to adapt to changing conditions. The broad variety of framing positions generates an ambiguity that enables managers to draw on different frames to see alternative solutions, without having to challenge and undermine their existing frames. The different frames held by a manager may be collectively coherent but individually support different response strategies. A manager could move from a differentiation to an adaption strategy by drawing on a separate frame dimension, prioritizing (for example) the importance of a high response urgency over a pioneering heritage. This allows existing beliefs underpinning their ‘pioneer’ frame to be maintained while allowing the manager to adapt in line with other and changing organizational responses.

Extant research has accounted for this adaptability by conceptualizing the content of frames as flexible, open to reinterpretation and renegotiation to agree to a course of action (Azad and Faraj, 2008; Cornelissen and Clarke, 2010; Glynn and Lounsbury, 2005; Raffaelli et al, 2019). We propose that frame flexibility can emerge not just from altering the content or scope of frames, but also from reflexively placing greater or less emphasis on particular frames.

The accommodation of heterogeneous and even divergent frames facilitates a degree of sequential ambidexterity (O'Reilly and Tushman, 2013; Raisch and Birkinshaw, 2008), allowing the firm to adapt its responses in light of the changing conditions and new information. Incumbent organizations can embrace these paradoxical structures (Khanagha et al. 2018; Smith and Tushman, 2005) to meet the disparate needs of the market and adapt in a manner that would not be possible through the pursuit of internal alignment.

### **2.6.3. Managerial Implications**

Our study carries several implications for managers of large organizations facing disruption. We find that Insurecorp's strategic flexibility allowed the organization to test alternate responses in a relatively short time frame and drop strategies that failed to bear results in practice rather than aim for a planned or deliberate strategic response under high ambiguity. We propose that such flexibility (e.g., Volberda, 1996) can act as a strategic capability, enabling the organization to navigate a period of disruption by dynamically adapting based on feedback from the market.

We propose that firms need to foster a repertoire of response perspectives not just within the organization, but also within organizational units. Rather than seeking convergence around a single approach or perspective on how to best respond to disruptive innovation, which can pit one unit against the other and reinforces tribalism and conflict, firms need to nurture and

leverage the diversity of perspectives at the intra-unit level. An organization can aim at creating organizational sub-units in which no one voice dominates. Allowing open discourse and accepting diverse opinions can serve as a basis for collaborative action. Such organizing can include building teams with a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences from which to frame problems, and encouraging movement and collaboration between members of organization units that face different pressures to respond and have different perspectives on how to respond.

Achieving this flexibility in an organization also requires managers to embrace the ambiguity of the situation, and acknowledge that there may be no ‘one truth’ or optimal path forward to respond that can be known a priori, and any response is indeed just one of several options. Such an acknowledgment can enable managers to recognize the validity of a range of perspectives and approaches, and reflexively assess the implications of their framing positions. Acknowledging the presence of multiple perspectives as valid and allowing open discussions about different interpretations allows managers to “re-weight” frames to tack between different response strategies. Creating a culture or a mindset that accepts ambiguity also allows managers to pursue a strategy without necessarily agreeing why it is necessary. Multiple justifications for the same response can be seen as equally valid when it is acknowledged that there is no single optimal solution or ‘best’ response to disruptive innovation. This allows greater flexibility and fluidity in responses to disruptive innovation, and the ability to switch responses when needed rather than be stuck to a suboptimal response even if environmental conditions change.

#### **2.6.4. Future Research and Limitations**

The use of an interpretive case to develop a grounded model of the nature and role of framing was intended to enhance the internal validity and accuracy in describing the processes in play.

This interpretive methodology, however, may reduce the generalisability of the findings to other cases of disruptive innovation. The methodology used demands a trade-off of internal descriptive validity against generalisability. While the findings cannot be generalized, our conceptual insights have implications for similar cases of incumbent decision-making in cases of disruptive innovation in the service sector, particularly for large multi-unit organizations confronting digital disruption.

Moreover, while we focused on the role of frames of organizational members in understanding an incumbent's responses to disruptive innovation, we did not examine the role of external audiences such as security analysts and media that also influence firms' perceptions and responses to disruptive change (e.g., Benner, 2010). Future studies can examine the roles of both external and internal audiences in influencing an organization's framing of disruptive innovation and its response strategies.

## **2.7. Conclusion**

We provide an interpretive intra-organizational view on an incumbent's varied responses to digital disruption. Consistent with a view of disruptive innovation as a process and not a one-off cataclysmic event, we developed a grounded conceptualization of framing within incumbent organizations confronting the typical ambiguity that accompanies digital disruption. Our core contribution is the development of a multiplexed model of framing that eschews traditional formulations of framing in favour of multiple, non-binary interpretations, distributed holographically throughout the organization. It explains the equifinal resolution of conflict – managers can leverage the ambiguity generated by multiple, non-binary frames to settle on a particular course of action at a point in time, but with different reasons for doing so. The plurality of frames combined with a holographic distribution allows individuals to select the same strategies for different reasons and rely on alternative frames to justify these



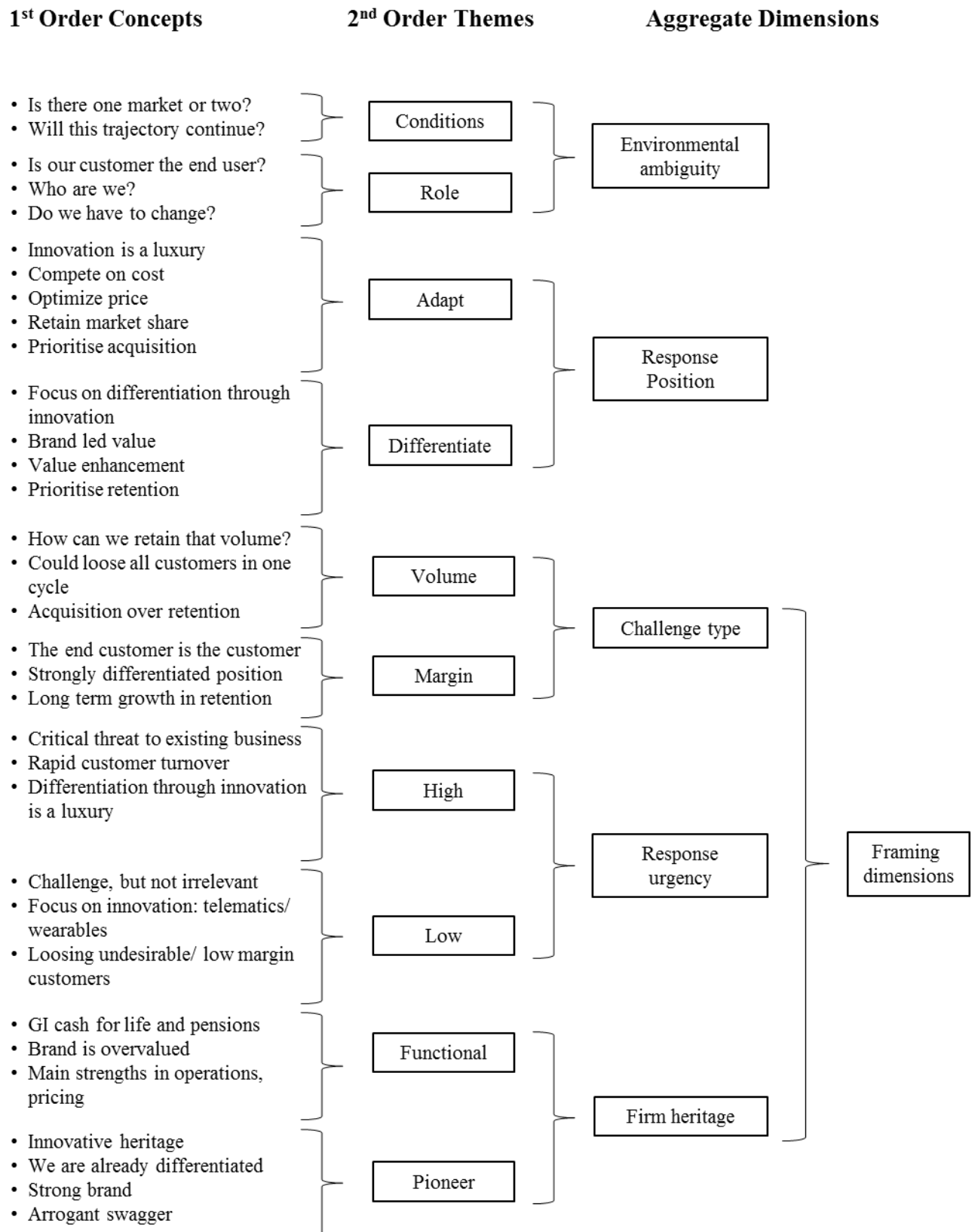
strategies. We show how multiple response strategies can be seen as legitimate and plausible allowing an organization to switch relatively fluidly between different strategic responses. Faced with the threat of digital disruption, multiplexed framing enables the organization to nimbly navigate the unfolding disruptive innovation process, particularly in periods marked by high uncertainty and ambiguity.

## 2.8. Tables and Figures

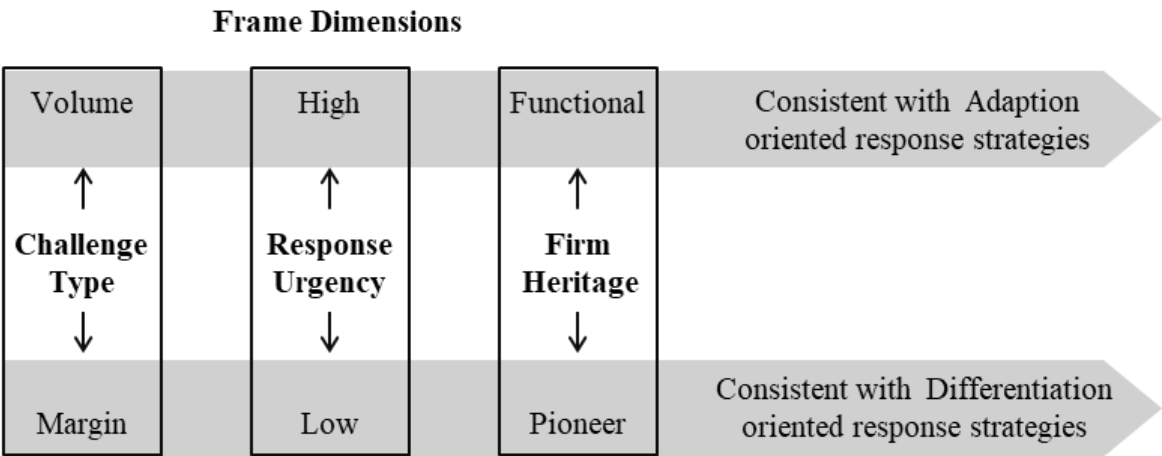
**Table 1: Data Sources**

Source	Temporal Orientation	
	Present-Tense	Retrospective
<b>Company Documents and Presentations</b>		
Investor Reports	21	
Interview and Speech Recordings	7	
Regulatory Filings	2	
Strategy Presentations	11	
Archived intranet content	9	
<b>Interviews</b>		
Former Senior Management		23
Former Consultants		2
Current Management		7
<b>Third-Party Commentary</b>		
Equity Analyst Reports	6	
Industry Research Reports	13	
<b>Total</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>32</b>

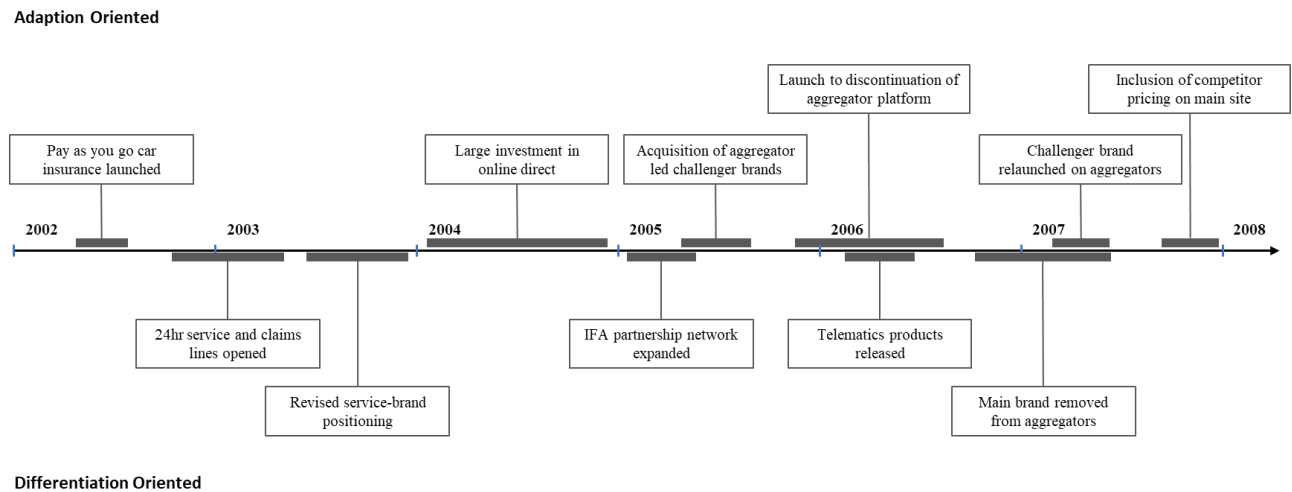
**Figure 1: Data Structure**



**Figure 2: A Model of the Role of Framing in Responses to Disruptive Innovation**



**Figure 3: Timeline of Organizational Responses**



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### **3. THE FUTURE IS NOW – TEMPORAL WORK, SENSEMAKING AND AGENCY DURING PLANNED ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE**

#### **ABSTRACT**

*Coping with change is a formidable challenge for organizations. Dealing with uncertainty during change triggers a sensemaking process as managers must deal with competing strategic accounts of how the firm is expected to behave ‘now’ versus going forward. If unreconciled, these competing accounts lead to cognitive breakdowns as managers attend to pressing present demands that conflict with those of the desired future. While “temporal work” to create coherence across the present, past, and future is one way to address such impasses, at times it is hard to achieve such coherence due to the disparity between current demands and future expectations. Through a participant observation study of Fincorp, we explore how organizational members address this challenge by adjusting their orientation in time, reduce the fixation on the present and overcome seemingly irreconcilable conflicts between present and future demands. We contribute to the literature on temporal sensemaking, and organizational change by showing how managers engage in temporal reconstrual – “mental time travel” – in which they make decisions in the present from the perspective of the future. They thus mitigate the significance of present concerns that impede organizational change by using “hindsight” as a cognitive tool to make decisions in the present.*

**Key words: organizational change, sensemaking, temporality, cognition, retrospective, prospective**

*Time hypnotizes. When you're nine, you think you've always been nine years old and will always be. When you're thirty, it seems you've always been balanced there on that bright rim of middle life...You're in the present, you're trapped in a young now or an old now, but there is no other now to be seen.*

— Ray Bradbury, *Dandelion Wine*

### **3.1. Introduction**

Strategic change is not only an economic imperative for many organizations but even a matter of survival (e.g., Grol et al., 2013; Pettigrew et al., 2001). However, many change initiatives fail due to breakdowns associated with the competing demands that accompany the change (Lüscher and Lewis, 2008; Dawson, 2014b). These breakdowns often have strong temporal underpinnings. Organizational members are confronted with competing accounts of how the firm is expected to behave in the present versus what it *should* become or do, going forward (Balogun and Johnson, 2004; Dawson, 2014b; Lüscher and Lewis, 2008). Such temporal conflicts in managing change can trigger breakdowns in understanding (Ybema, 2010) and cognitive disorder (McKinley and Scherer, 2000), which inhibit progress and reinforce inertia (Balogun and Johnson, 2004; Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010). How then do managers cope with this temporal conflict during periods of planned organizational change?

As any strategic change initiative involves the unfamiliar and a need to deal with uncertainty, it triggers a process of sensemaking (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2014). Managers seek to navigate change and restore cognitive order in the face of uncertainty (Gioia et al., 1994; Weick 1995; Weick et al., 2005). Sensemaking during periods of strategic change often takes on a strong temporal element (Brown et al., 2015; Maitlis and Christianson,



2014; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2014; Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005), drawing on understandings of the past (Hatch and Schultz, 2017; Tripsas and Gavetti, 2000), the present (Emirbayer and Mische 1998, Reinecke and Ansari, 2015) and the future (Gephart et al., 2010; Kunish et al., 2017; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2014). The firm is guided by ideals of the past, demands of the present, and projections of the future.

Often the future demands on the organization can clash with present demands, and the demands of the present or future may be misaligned with the organization's past. To bridge these conflicting temporal accounts – oriented to the past, present and future – organizations engage in temporal work to create a coherent, plausible and politically acceptable narrative for the strategic change initiative (Bansal et al., 2019; Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013; McGivern et al., 2017; Wood et al., 2019). However, creating a coherent account by aligning the three temporal dimensions becomes highly challenging when the demands of the present are starkly misaligned with the organization's future aspirations or its past legacies (Lüscher and Lewis, 2008; Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013; Wiebe, 2010). During planned change initiatives, tensions between the present and the future become particularly salient (Taylor and van Every, 2000; Tsoukas and Shepherd, 2004), as managers are forced to navigate conflicting demands arising from how the firm is expected to behave in the future versus what it needs to do currently (Dawson, 2014b; Kaplan, 2008; Wiebe, 2010). How can managers avoid being mired in the pressing demands of the present while trying to steer the organization towards a desired future?

Through a longitudinal, inductive case study of Fincorp, a multinational bank implementing a program of planned strategic change, we shed light on the unique demands that change-driven projects place on the managers tasked with implementing them. Using a grounded enquiry, we explore how managers adjust their perspective and orientation in time (past-present-future)

while engaging in temporal sensemaking to *discount* – or attach less weight to – the considerations of the present and overcome otherwise seemingly irreconcilable conflicts between present and future demands.

We contribute to the wider literature on temporal sensemaking, agency and organizational change. First, we build on the notion of temporal sensemaking (Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013; Wiebe, 2010) by introducing the concept of “temporal reconstrual” – a form of mental time travel wherein individuals can reposition themselves in the temporal spectrum – project themselves forward – to reflect on the present from the perspective of the future. This can help to resolve the conflict between current demands and future expectations when it is not possible to develop a coherent, plausible, and acceptable narrative across the past, present and future. As such, managers can overcome constraining present concerns to bringing about the desired change. Second, we reconceptualize the role of the present in temporal sensemaking. We propose that a bias towards the present (or “presentism”) can be overcome by shifting a central component of an individual’s agency – the ability to problematize and deliberate (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998) – *out* of the present. Third, we propose that temporal reconstrual is a useful tool for managers seeking to overcoming cognitive breakdowns and decision impasses during organizational change. We conclude by exploring some broader implications for theory and practice and outlining some potential avenues for research.

## **3.2. Theoretical Development**

### **3.2.1. Temporal Sensemaking and Change**

When studying the role of ambiguity and uncertainty in strategic organizational change, significant emphasis is placed on sensemaking among organizational members as an ongoing collective process of building a shared understanding of what is going on (Weick, 1995; Weick

et al., 2005). Planned change initiatives, such as the corporate restructuring undertaken at Lego (Lüscher and Lewis, 2008), trigger sensemaking efforts among those organizational members most affected by the change, who try to clarify their situation by framing and contextualizing cues from their environment (Balogun and Johnson, 2004; Stensaker and Falkenberg, 2007).

When attempting to navigate change, individuals engage in a process of negotiating understandings of what is occurring in the present and what form the future will take, based on their prior understandings (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991; Gioia and Thomas, 1996). Sensemaking during change is often conceptualized as a retrospective process, focused on developing plausible accounts that will mitigate ambiguity in the present by orienting oneself “backward from a specific point in time” (Weick, 1995: 26)<sup>10</sup>. In contexts that involve change, the past guides organizational members as they draw on previous experience to help them make sense of changing present circumstances (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010).

While the past can serve as a guide when navigating change, managers need to make sense not just of the present but also of the imagined future (Rosness et al., 2015; Tapinos and Pyper, 2018). However, there is disagreement in the sensemaking literature about the phenomenological nature of understanding the future (Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2020), especially if it is radically different from the present (Augustine et al., 2019). Building on the work of Karl Weick, some scholars (e.g., Gioia and Thomas, 1996; Schültz, 1967) consider sensemaking about the future to be essentially retrospective, such that the imagined future is viewed through a retrospective lens, as if already complete (Weick, 1969). Even future-oriented notions such as plans are essentially derived from retrospective sensemaking, because “when one thinks about the future,” this thinking is not done in future tense, but rather “in the

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<sup>10</sup> This is not to claim that the past is a static base from which the present is understood. The present can affect our understanding of the past so that “projects and feelings that are under way will affect the backward glance and what is seen” (Weick, 1995: 27).

future perfect tense” (Weick, 1969: 65). While this idea of “future perfect” thinking was introduced to the management literature by Weick, it was first conceptualized by Schültz (1967: 61) who described it as the process of considering an intended future course of action “as if it were already over and done with...pictured as if it were simultaneously past and future”.

However, other scholars have argued that the idea of the future perfect is particularly “inadequate in order to understand prospective sensemaking processes” (MacKay, 2009: 91). In situations where there is complexity, ambiguity and uncertainty (Stigliani and Ravasi, 2012: 35), understandings of the future are highly contested beliefs about a possible state of affairs viewed from the present (Gephart et al., 2010; Lord et al., 2015; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2014; Wiebe, 2010). Prospective sensemaking thus occurs when people use “intersubjective meanings, images, and schemas” to “project images of future objects and phenomena” (Gephart et al., 2010: 285). During periods of change, these future projections can be generated and passed down by senior managers in a process of sensegiving (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991) and can then be negotiated collectively by others within the organization (Pitsis et al., 2003).

Regardless of which sensemaking conceptualization we adopt, all three temporal dimensions come into play in each of these strands of research. Understandings of the future affect interpretations and behaviours in the empirical present (Lord et al., 2015; Mische, 2009), and the perspective of the present can be used to reinterpret the past (Fine, 2007). In the context of organizational change, the degree to which managers emphasize expectations of the future or lessons from the past has been found to influence how the change is processed in the present (Wiebe, 2010; Ybema, 2004). As each temporal dimension can influence the other, with none having any *a priori* precedence, there is potential for tension and even conflict arising from discontinuous interpretations of the past, present and future (Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013;

Lüscher and Lewis, 2008; McKinley and Scherer, 2000; Wiebe, 2010). This is particularly pertinent in contexts of organizational change, where the present and future can be very different.

### **3.2.2. Temporal Work**

As organizations plan and prepare for the future, they make decisions about actions that need to be taken now (Taylor and van Every, 2000; Tsoukas and Shepherd, 2004). This raises a unique challenge for temporal sensemaking because the future may be very different from the present. Managers often find themselves having to negotiate tensions between what the firm ‘should’ become in the future and how it is expected to behave in the present (Dawson, 2014b; Kaplan, 2008; Wiebe, 2010). The demands associated with these conflicting understandings can place a strain on managers tasked with implementing strategic change (Lüscher and Lewis, 2008), resulting in cognitive breakdowns (McKinley and Scherer, 2000) that hinder the change process (Rouleau, 2005). A central challenge for organizational members is therefore to find ways of reconciling these conflicting temporal accounts in order to bring about planned change (Wiebe, 2010).

Much of the research on how individuals overcome discrepancies in interpretations of the past, present, and future has focused on the ability to negotiate new, coherent understandings (Bansal et al., 2020; Maitlis and Christianson, 2014). Hatch and Schultz (2017) showed how organizations anchor change by drawing on inspirations from the past. Suddaby et al. (2010) explored how the ability to reinterpret the past in light of present concerns can be a source of competitive advantage. Different temporal orientations (Wiebe, 2010) and foci (Shipp, Edwards and Lambert, 2009) thus influence managers’ framing of organizational change.

Kaplan and Orlikowski (2013), in their exploration of temporal narratives in strategy, introduce the notion of “temporal work” (2013: 976). This describes the process of overcoming tensions between differing accounts of the past, present and future. Through collective sensemaking, managers engage in a reconciliatory practice of “reimagining the future”, “rethinking the past” and “reconsidering present concerns” to reach a ‘provisional settlement’ – an accepted coherent account. This provisional settlement creates plausible links between all three, limiting the tension between them to allow action.

### **3.2.3. “Presentism” in Temporal Work and Strategic Change**

For Kaplan and Orlikowski (2013), effective temporal work requires the present to be equally amenable to reinterpretation as the past and future, so that each are “on the same footing” (2013: 3). To achieve this, Kaplan and Orlikowski (2013) distinguish between the *interpretive* present, comprised of the subjective interpretations of the moment, and the *empirical* present where action occurs. While this distinction allows for the present to be interpretable, it also acknowledges and reinforces a special role for the present as the locus of agency – the point from which interpretations are made and the point at which action occurs. Individuals may orient themselves towards the past, present or the future, and they can engage in temporal work to adjust interpretations of any one of these dimensions, but they do so from the perspective of the empirical present. This ontological “presentism” (Johansen and De Cock, 2017: 186) has its roots in George Herbert Mead’s notion that reality “is always in a present” (1932: 28) and is part of the taxonomy of agency developed by Emirbayer and Mische (1998), where the “practical-evaluative” element of problematizing, deliberating and deciding takes place in the empirical present. In making decisions, actors engage in an iterative exercise of continually adjusting their interpretations of the past and future in accordance with the demands of their current situation. (Reinecke and Ansari, 2015).

However, in cases of planned strategic change, where organizational leaders are as concerned about the future as the needs of the present, this emphasis on the present becomes problematic. As organizations embark on strategic change, they often orient themselves strongly to the future by focusing on an idealized future that they can strive to achieve (Johansen and De Cock, 2017; Ybema, 2004). This focus increases the potential for conflict between present demands and expectations about the future. This issue becomes particularly pertinent when an organization undergoing change is attempting to break with the present and restructure itself for the future. While the challenges of the future may require huge changes for an organization, the pressing day-to-day demands of the present are often too salient and pressing to ignore. This can become problematic in cases where preparing for the future requires attention and resources to be drawn away from more immediate challenges. When change is driven by a necessity to reinvent the organization for the future, how do organizational members prioritize the future while still engaging with the immediate demands of the present?

### **3.3. Methodology**

#### **3.3.1. Research Setting**

Our insights emerged from an inductive study of the strategy, strategic marketing and technology arms of Fincorp, a pseudonym for a multinational consumer and commercial bank. The study explores the sensemaking process within the bank between 2016 and 2019, a period of rapid change in both the organization and the wider finance industry.

Along with many other financial services providers, Fincorp suffered significantly during the 2007–2012 financial crisis. Having enjoyed a period of continuous expansion up to that point, the group found itself exposed to the rapidly deteriorating credit market, resulting in a crisis of capitalization that was familiar to many financial services firms in 2008. Like many other

banks, it found itself increasingly exposed to highly leveraged positions in credit markets, and lacked the liquidity needed to meet its financial obligations. As an emergency measure many organizations, including Fincorp, were forced to improve their liquidity through share issues, bond releases and quantitative easing measures. The industry-wide crisis led to painful adjustments for Fincorp, including redundancies and share issues to improve liquidity ratios. Like other financial services organizations during this period, Fincorp faced sustained public criticism from 2008 onwards for its perceived role in creating the crisis. There was consistent negative rhetoric from sections of the press, campaign groups and political figures, who alleged that the firm had taken unwarranted risks in the years leading up to the financial crisis.

These commercial, political and brand challenges persisted for years. By the time we began fieldwork in 2016, the organization was beginning to show some indications of a sustained recovery. There were signs of a return to profit and an end to the painful restructuring the bank had been undergoing since 2008. Under a new leadership team, the emphasis shifted to repositioning the bank for the future as a viable financial services firm and avoiding the values and behaviours of the previous decade. While the repositioning exercise involved reconfiguring all business elements as part of a firm-wide redirection, there was a particular emphasis on functions most closely associated with customer experience. This included the strategic marketing, communications, product development and technology arms of the group.

As the repositioning project progressed, multiple topics emerged and began to coalesce around distinct “project streams” – loose collections of participants from across the organization working collectively on similar sub-problems and objectives. These project streams were sometimes given explicit names but were more often referred to by their objectives or by the sub-problems they sought to resolve. There was regular overlap between the different workstreams.



We focus on one of these project streams (which we refer to as “Project Home”) and the interpretations of past, present, and future that became salient to those within the firm. As results improved, the upper echelons of the organization instigated a series of strategic directives to reposition the bank. As part of this, in early 2016, they decided to reorient Fincorp under a revised brand identity, which would emphasize the role of the bank in the communities it served and highlight its historic connection to them. It would acknowledge the mistakes of the past while positioning itself as a community-driven and technologically innovative organization. With the direction of the strategic repositioning determined, the strategic marketing, internal communications and personal banking products teams had to create (on an ongoing basis) campaign materials, services and products that were in line with both the revised direction and the immediate demands on the business.

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#### TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

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We explore the sensemaking process within these teams as organizational members attempted to create a new brand campaign and associated materials that would fit coherently with both the new strategic direction and conflicting understandings of the present and future within these teams. In so doing, we explore how organizational members made sense of the past, present, and future, what impact these understandings had on their work, and how temporal conflicts affected the sensemaking process. Finally, we explore the techniques they used to reduce that conflict.

### **3.3.2. Data Sources**

We drew data from multiple sources to increase its soundness and validity (Jick, 1979). This included participant observation over a period of 21 months, interviews with senior management, and content analysis of internal documents. The phenomenological focus of this study emphasizes the primacy of the experiences of organizational members. We thus relied heavily on the subjective experiences of individuals as captured through interviews and participant observation (Pettigrew, 1990). We held semi-structured interviews with individuals who held management roles within the strategy, strategic marketing, and technology teams. In total, 52 individuals were interviewed across five distinct phases of fieldwork. In order to understand respondents' interpretations of the past and the future, we used an "active" format for the interviews (Holstein and Gubrium, 2004). We incorporated findings related to temporal elements into the later interviews to test the consistency of the understandings and ensure our analysis was sensitive to the different temporal conceptions that existed within the organization (Dawson, 2014a).

These interviews were arranged during extended periods of participant observation of daily working practices, including both informal and formal meetings. In total, one author observed 280 hours of working practices across five periods of analysis. We triangulated observational and interview data with archival content analysis of internal documents and commentaries by external analysts. In total, we reviewed 82 archival documents, including internal strategy memos, shareholder AGM transcripts and company-wide communications from the senior leadership team. Collectively, these were used to corroborate the narrative that was emerging from the interviews (Webb and Weick, 1979), and provided some insights into the sensegiving process from the organization's senior management. We used analyst commentaries to build an understanding of the contextual forces at play.

### **3.3.3. Data Analysis**

As we were seeking to balance construct rigour with a rich account of processes, our analysis used a blend of inductive analytic methodology (Gioia, Corley and Hamilton, 2012), commonly applied in grounded theory, and ethnographic practices and tools (Reay et al., 2019). In order to prioritize discovery of novel themes over application of existing models, we needed to get as “close to the informant’s experience” (Gioia et al., 2012: 17) as possible. To achieve this, the structure and content of interviews used a flexible protocol (2012: 26) to allow topics to emerge naturally and in line with the experiences of informants (Langley, 1999: 693). Terms used in interviews and through observation formed the semantic basis for subsequent coding to ensure that the resulting model was consistent with the experiences and terminology of the informants.

After the first phase of fieldwork, we systematically categorized findings from interviews, observations and content analysis into first-order concepts, second-order themes and, finally, aggregate dimensions (Gioia et al., 2012: 21). We used this structure to help identify common topics and issues in the temporal sensemaking process within Fincorp and to highlight the areas where breakdowns had occurred. This directed our research towards the phenomena and issues that were most pressing within the organization. The interplay between different understandings of these issues, the subsequent conflicts, and attempts to reach a settlement became the focus of our research in the second, third and fourth rounds of fieldwork. Following each phase of fieldwork, we recoded the findings, using the process outlined above to structure our analysis.

In order to capture the dynamic nature of sensemaking and the process of reaching ‘provisional settlements’, we combined our analysis with the use of vignettes. The inductive analytical techniques drawn from Gioia, Corley and Hamilton (2012), which we used to structure our

analysis, have limited scope for capturing processual changes over time (Nicolini, 2010) or the complex interplay between identified concerns, individuals and processes (Tsoukas, 2017; Reay et al., 2019). As we used the themes and aggregate dimensions identified from our fieldwork to identify areas of temporal conflict and to organize the narratives we encountered, the focus shifted to providing accounts of the resolution of these phenomena using evocative episodes from meetings, interviews and informal discussions. In this way, we aimed to achieve a balance between structured analysis of a broad data set and a rich, granular evocation of the interplay between these constructs in practice.

### **3.4. Findings**

#### **3.4.1. Temporal Conflict in Sensemaking**

Our analysis revealed that, across both the Project Home workstream and wider discussions, individuals largely used the *perfect* tense when discussing events within the organisation. This is used to refer to actions and events in the past, present, or future as complete rather than ongoing and continuous across dimensions. Managers spoke of what the organization was, what it would be, and what its current state was in a manner that reflects an understanding of each as relatively discrete and stable. The *imperfect* tense – which captures continuity, becoming and change – was rarely used. As a result, the past, present, and future were often communicated as distinct dimensions with little overlap. Upon reflection, interviewees suggested that this may in part be due to the nature of the change that Fincorp was going through, with a narrative within the organization of a completed past and an (as yet) unseen future. One Product Manager captured the situation: “I think we’re in a strange limbo between a pretty troubled recent history and a somewhat utopian future. We’re not what we were and we’re not what we want to be yet.” In this context, temporal orientation became a highly

relevant part of the sensemaking process, as distinct understandings emerged in each temporal dimension with little reference to the other dimensions.

***The Past:*** The collective understanding of the past was especially consistent across the organization. Within the Strategic Marketing, Communications and Product teams an understanding emerged that the past was defined by mistakes driven by a relentlessly aggressive and expansionist business model. Among those explicitly sharing this view was a Senior Product Manager, who noted that the group was defined by a commercial ruthlessness and a vast appetite for risk-taking: “I mean, we were just belligerent...The focus above all was on getting the deal done.” A similar understanding was identified in a conversation between a Strategy and Communications Manager regarding the phrasing of materials for an internal leadership brief:

CM: “I’m worried that [his course of action] will feel like a return of our old hubris.”

SM: [laughing] “The bad old days when we wanted to dominate the world?”

CM: [with ironic emphasis] “Yeah, what a thrill.”

At no point during the observational or interview phases did anyone express enthusiasm for the approach taken prior to 2008. While one member of the Products team indicated a degree of sympathy for those employed at the bank through those years – noting that “we all went along for the ride” – the majority expressed a sense of solemnity and inherited remorse. This was made clear in a discussion between two Communications Managers regarding a statement made in the industry press about the need for organizations such as Fincorp to be less apologetic about their role in the financial crash of 2008:

CM1: “I know we’ll need to stop apologizing at some point, but when that is, isn’t really our decision to make.”

CM2: “It has to come from the top?”

CM1: “No. I mean it works the other way. We stop being reticent when the resentment and hurt is gone...People really suffered. They won’t forget just because we stop apologizing for it.”

This collective understanding of the past as a source of regret is mirrored in the Project Home strategic directive. While most of the document focuses on positioning the bank in the present and the future, there is an emphasis on acknowledging the mistakes of the past and demonstrating a commitment to making amends. By openly acknowledging the challenges of the past but focusing primarily on the present and future, the Project Home direction not only sat coherently alongside the collective understanding of the past, but also reflected its relative importance for organizational members. Individuals recognized the organization’s problematic history, without drawing on it heavily in day-to-day discussions. This was, as one Product Manager noted, a period that few had been around for: “Maybe it’s a sort of inherited guardedness. But most of us didn’t work here through that... It’s something to be aware of, but not something that constantly needs addressing.”

***The Future:*** Imagined futures were characterized in part by their active break from understandings of the past. Organizational members often referred to the bank in the future perfect tense as an agile and nimble organization, able to adapt rapidly and support customers. Internal memos referred to a future in which the group was “lean and customer-focused.” This was reflected in the attitudes of senior managers within the bank. One Technology division leader noted:

*“The competitors in our market aren’t going to be building societies or high street banks. People don’t really have a relationship with their bank, they have*

*transactional relationships with products. In five to ten years those products will be offered by the likes of Google and Amazon... We're going to think and work more like them...quick, innovative and adaptive."*

Parallel to this collective understanding of the organization as a digitally led, agile bank was a vision of Fincorp as a far more "human" organization. In part, this appeared to be driven by the acknowledgement that it would not have the scale it had previously had. Members spoke of increasing localization and stronger links with the communities in which the bank operates. One Product Manager described the bank's future while discussing new products for rural communities: "We used to be seen as this giant multinational. I think in the future that will disappear – we're going to rely on close relationships with local businesses to rebuild."

For many within the bank, these visions of the future had a normative dimension to them, representing not just what the bank *would* become, but what it *should* become. This was in part driven by their fit with the group's stated vision (articulated in internal briefings) to be the nation's most "trusted" bank, with the "highest results for customer service". The notion that people within the organization would take on board these articulated visions was captured in an interview with a Digital Communications Manager: "There are a lot of 'true believers' in the company...there is also a bit of a self-selection bias here, I guess...The people who join, and the people who stay the longest, tend to be those who fit naturally in a large corporation. Those are people that are happy to buy in and not resist too much." This normativity is reflected in the manner in which the imagined future fits so closely with the strategic direction of Project Home; a strong collective narrative emerged about what the bank would and should be in the future, reflected in the organizational repositioning.

***The Present:*** In contrast to the quasi-normative vision of the future, the understanding of the present that emerged was grounded in the challenges the bank faced. A consistent

understanding emerged that the bank was not viewed from the outside as an organization to be trusted. This emerged both in interviews and in casual discussions and light-hearted comments exchanged between employees. In one discussion about the launch of a new community initiative, two Communications Executives noted the “siege mentality” within Fincorp:

CE1: [Jovially] “Does this make us friendly yet? Are we the good guys?”

CE2: “No, I’m afraid we’re still in the Death Star.”

This understanding was displayed in more serious tones in commercial discussions. When discussing the rollout of more technology and automation in branches, a Digital Product Manager noted that “it’s inevitable that this will be spun to our detriment. It will look like we are replacing employees, when in fact we are keeping everyone but giving customers more of what they want. Every piece of news, every press release, will be viewed with a huge degree of suspicion.” Our analysis showed that while this understanding of the external image of the bank was consistent across the bank, there was variance in how organizational members responded to it. At times, the accounts of the reputational challenges the bank faced were accompanied by a sense of resentment. At other times, members were quick to show they understood why the bank was seen this way, reflecting a somewhat stoic perspective.

By the time fieldwork started, there was a growing belief inside the bank that things were better than they had been. Multiple respondents noted that (in the words of an Internal Communications Manager) “the recent results mark a bit of a turning point.” Similarly, a Strategy Manager referred to the “change in feeling within the bank lately” but was very quick to add “not that anyone outside feels any differently about us.” While those inside the



organization felt that things were improving, their main point of reflection with reference to Project Home was the perceived negative external image of the bank.

While the collective interpretations of the past and the future fitted closely with the strategic direction of Project Home, the interpretations of the present were not effectively aligned with the direction provided by this initiative. A particular concern was the degree to which the organization could justifiably claim to be “community-oriented” and “innovative” when this was so incongruous with the prevailing understanding of the bank. As our analysis shows, organizational members questioned the credibility and the appropriateness of the bank’s repositioning due to a lack of fit with their understanding of the present.

### **3.4.2. Intertemporal Tensions and Conflict**

In practice, this manifested itself as a resistance to the implementation of the new direction. In some cases, the resistance was relatively mild, and involved efforts to soften the language used in marketing materials to bring them more in line with the collective understanding of the present. As one Communications Manager said when reviewing the materials of Project Home:

*“it fits [the Project Home strategic direction], but maybe it’s a bit too ‘on the nose’. If people can’t recognize us in it, it’s a bit like we’re putting on a leather jacket and calling ourselves punk.”*

In other cases, the lack of fit between the Project Home’s strategic direction and the collective understanding of the present was significant enough to retard and even threaten workstreams within the project. This was brought out in multiple interviews, and was particularly clear in a conversation in November 2016 between two members of the Strategic Marketing team discussing the development of new campaign materials:

SM1: “The label just doesn’t stick. I mean, how can we possibly say that we’re part of these communities when we’re closing branches?”

SM2: (interjecting) “Being there for customers isn’t about the branches. We’re showing how we can be relied on to be there, and how we grew out of these communities.”

-minutes later-

SM2: “It reflects what we are becoming.”

SM1: “Fine, but I’m not happy with this if it doesn’t honestly reflect who we are now.”

This dialogue highlights both the resistance that emerged from those with a strong orientation towards the present, but also the conceptual ease with which Project Home fitted with those who had a strong orientation towards the future. The following dynamic emerged multiple times during our research: those oriented towards the future highlighted that the strategy fitted with what the bank naturalistically *would*, and normatively *should*, become, while those oriented towards the present highlighted its lack of credible fit with what the bank currently was. Table 2 illustrates how this tension manifested itself over the three Project Home workstreams we observed.

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TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

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As illustrated in Table 2, the directives of Project Home became a source of temporal conflict, as they were not coherently aligned across all three temporal dimensions. While Project Home fitted with managers' collective understandings of the past and future, it jarred with managers' beliefs about the present state of the organization, its capabilities and its reputation. This was not just a matter of a poor conceptual fit reducing enthusiasm for the project; rather, it influenced the way in which strategy was implemented and, in some cases, whether project workstreams could make any progress at all. Overcoming this temporal conflict thus became essential for anyone looking to drive the project forward. The subsequent analysis explores the manner in which organizational members attempted to mitigate this temporal conflict in the sensemaking process, and the implications this had for the range of options available.

### **3.4.3. Temporal Work, Reinterpretation and Temporal Reconstrual**

We observed a very limited number of discussions that attempted to reinterpret the organization's present. In each of these situations, managers raised possible reinterpretations that would allow their understanding of the bank's present to align with both the Project Home's strategic direction and the bank's imagined future. Many of these cases took the form of managers expressing a "vision of the present" that mirrored the normative account of what the future should look like. This approach did not appear to be effective in practice. It amounted to "wishful thinking", or what one Strategy Director referred to as "corporate optimism...people say things that they feel they're supposed to, then hope they turn out to be true." The collective understanding of the present did not change in any of the dialogues we observed. The widely held account of the present was the only one agreed to be "plausible" (Senior Communications Manager) and "justifiable...given what we know people think" (Insights Manager).

While attempts to reinterpret understandings of the present failed to gain traction, our analysis showed that the bank's senior managers increasingly began trying to change the *perspective* held by organizational members on the challenges and demands of the present. Where the understanding of the present could not be renegotiated through further sensemaking, organizational members attempted to collectively re-examine the present from another perspective. In all the early discussions, comments about the present and future were made from the perspective of the present: organizational members could orient themselves towards any one of the temporal dimensions – past, present or future – but they did so from the present. The content of their statements indicates that the future is something yet to occur; the past has happened, and the present is the immediate, changing period they are in and what is currently at stake. As this sensemaking process failed to resolve the temporal conflict that had emerged between the past, present, and future, organizational members began to not just *reorient* themselves in time but to *reposition* themselves in order to view the challenges of the present from a *different* temporal perspective.

In practice, this involved managers reflecting on the concerns of the present from the perspective of an imagined future, and introducing this into the sensemaking process. Managers would reflect both on the problems of the present and the implications of the decisions being taken. In a conversation between two members of the Strategic Marketing team about editing elements of a campaign video that made reference to the mistakes of the bank's recent inglorious past, one attempted to move the discussion along by encouraging reflection from the future: "What will it look like next summer if we chose to spend yet another year apologizing for the past?" Managers realized that "overdoing apology" would undermine confidence and might even look insincere in the face of unpopular decisions that needed to be taken now, such as downsizing or closing down bank branches. In a parallel workstream involving members of the Internal Communications and Marketing teams, a Communications

Manager sought to mitigate the resistance to the phrasing of some marketing materials that fitted with the Project Home strategy but clashed with the collective understanding of the present:

SM4: “It’s just not what people know us for.”

CM2: “Maybe it doesn’t stick yet, but we will be happy that we did what we could. We’ll be happy someone tried to move the conversation on.”

This reflexive re-examination of the present from the perspective of the future – what we refer to as “temporal reconstrual” – emerged both organically in conversation and, later, through its top-down application as a managerial tool. This concept is related to both “episodic future thinking,” which is about mentally projecting oneself into the future, and “autobiographical memories,” which involve mentally porting oneself into the past (Berntsen and Bohn, 2010). The idea is to mentally transport oneself forward or backward in time, and then use that perspective to guide decision making in the present.

In November 2016, Fincorp introduced a new checklist to guide decision making. One of the five core points in this document was a requirement that managers account for the effects of their decisions on the future of the bank, asking managers to answer: “How will this decision be perceived in three years’ time?” This checklist was integrated into Fincorp’s Risk Assessment process, and all managers had to address it in any decision requiring a review of financial, reputational, or operational risk. The checklist was also presented in graphic form in most of the meeting rooms in Fincorp’s head office.

The result of this practice was a tendency for organizational members to place greater emphasis on the concerns of the future by imagining being there, and to mitigate or downplay those of the present. In the marketing materials workstream, the conversation shifted from discussing the fit with the present (e.g., “It’s just not what people know us for”) to the

importance of the fit with the future. This culminated in the Strategic Marketing Manager (who had earlier objected to a lack of temporal fit) changing her stance: “Well, I suppose the key is that it’s plausible enough that it doesn’t jar. I do understand that we need to be aspirational too.” Similarly, in a follow-up interview, a Product Manager who had recently completed a risk assessment case noted the shift in temporal emphasis: “I suppose it means we think less about risk in terms of what we could forfeit now, and more in terms of what we could lose in the future.”

#### **3.4.4. Integrating Temporal Reconstrual into Temporal Sensemaking**

Our analysis identified a pattern of behaviour in which managers would apply the notion of “temporal reconstrual” to review the complete span of interpretations from the perspective of the imagined future they had projected themselves into. In this, the aim was less to find a way of reconciling the past, present and future; rather, it was to reweight or recalibrate the concerns of the past, present and future in order to mitigate the impact that any temporal conflict would have in blocking organizational change.

Table 3 illustrates the form of each instance of temporal reconstrual across the three workstreams described above. As explored in the analysis above, each case involved limiting the concerns of the present, which diluted the severity of the temporal conflict. In each example, the tension between the present and the future was not strictly resolved by establishing a new renegotiated understanding. Instead, the importance of the present and the future was reweighted so that the lack of fit between the future and the demands of the present was no longer treated as a barrier to progress in the different workstreams of Project Home.

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TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

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Our findings have been incorporated into a model of the interplay between renegotiation and temporal reconstrual in the sensemaking process, as illustrated in Figure 1. The model emphasizes the role of temporal reconstrual as a sensemaking tool, allowing organizational members to pursue strategic change and break the deadlocks arising from temporal conflicts.

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FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

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Our model incorporates strategic change as an antecedent of ambiguity and conflict (Balogun and Johnson, 2004). In our case, this manifested itself as a tension between interpretations of the strategic direction set out in the vision for change, understandings of the present in light of the organization's past, and projections of the future (1). This temporal conflict triggered a period of sensemaking, in which members of the organization sought to resolve the conflict in a manner that would allow the Project Home workstreams to progress. In each of the cases we observed within Project Home, this began with an attempt to renegotiate and recalibrate understandings of the present (2). The objective of each of these renegotiations was to achieve a settlement that would allow the conflict to be resolved by creating an account that was coherent across each temporal dimension (3). In each of the instances we observed, this did not seem possible, resulting in iterative but failed attempts to establish an alternate coherent settlement that organizational members could agree upon. This process was disrupted by the

introduction of temporal reconstrual to the sensemaking process (4). While this meant that managers were not able to develop a new settlement and thus did resolve the temporal conflict decisively, it did drive a move to an alternative, novel perspective. In this new perspective, there was a shift in the relative importance attached to the present and the future, with the concerns of the present now being outweighed by the need to achieve a fit with the organization's desired future (5). This allowed organizational members to resolve the temporal conflict arising from incongruent temporal demands on the organization and to make progress in fulfilling the Project Home strategy (6).

### **3.5. DISCUSSION**

The study of Fincorp advances our understanding of the role of interpretations of the past, present, and future in the sensemaking process, and the implications these have for organizations during periods of planned change. Our study supports prior findings that failure to resolve temporal tensions in the sensemaking process can result in both conflict and inertia, which thwart strategic change (Balogun and Johnson, 2004; Rouleau, 2005; McKinley and Scherer, 2000). We extend these studies by proposing that, in cases where temporal conflict cannot be resolved through creating coherent accounts across the three temporal dimensions (Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013), managers can mitigate temporal conflict by reorienting themselves on the temporal spectrum of past, present, and future. This holds particularly for cases of organizational change, where understandings of the desired future and accounts of what is at stake in the present pose different – and even conflicting – demands on the behaviour and expectations of managers. We explore the fit between the model we developed and the existing literature on sensemaking and agency and we outline our contribution in each of these areas.



### 3.5.1. Temporal Reconstrual in Sensemaking

The model developed in this case builds on recent research into temporal work during the sensemaking process (Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013; McGivern et al., 2017; Wood et al., 2019). Consistent with this literature, we find that temporal conflicts trigger a break in the sensemaking process, which limits the ability of the organization to implement strategic change initiatives. Initially managers will attempt to resolve this by renegotiating understanding of its present to seek coherence with the future. Then, in a process which we call temporal reconstrual, individuals will shift the temporal perspective from which decisions are made. Both of these processes seek to reduce the temporal conflict that prevents the organization from achieving its planned change by adjusting how the present and future are understood. We therefore argue that the notion of temporal reconstrual extends current notions of temporal sensemaking.

There is a wide body of literature that views retrospective (Tripsas and Gavetti, 2000; Weick et al., 2005) and prospective sensemaking (Flaherty and Fine, 2001; Ybema, 2004; MacKay and Parks, 2013; Kunish et al., 2017) as a process of negotiating the content of beliefs about the firm and its environment. In these cases, interpretations across all temporal dimensions are fluid and negotiable, but the perspective of the interpreter – and her or his *relationship* to these temporal modalities – does not change. Our model suggests that *both* the content of beliefs about the subject in question, and the interpreter's relationship to that subject, is open to recalibration through mental envisioning. Sensemaking can involve collectively negotiating both our understanding of a topic and our temporal perspective or relationship to it. This is consistent with a Heideggerian notion of existential time (Heidegger, 1962: 265) in which the past, present and future are not perceived as sequential, but rather as simultaneous (Hernes, 2017; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2020).

This perspective on time complements the Weickian notion of future perfect thinking, which involves perceiving intended actions as “conceptualized in the context of a completed future strategy” (Weick, 1988: 333). Individuals could see the future as something that is already completed and so were able to grasp, in a very tangible way, what was previously an abstract vision of the future (Granqvist and Gustafsson, 2016). The notion of temporal reconstrual extends how future perfect thinking can be deployed strategically to reduce the “perceived open-endedness of the future” (Fuglsang and Mattsson, 2011: 451) and to reduce the uncertainty associated with change initiatives, which can inhibit action. Managers still engage in a process of future perfect thinking – imagining the future as something that has already happened – but they then position themselves not in the present but in this “completed” or realized future. They then orient themselves towards the present to question the decision choices being made now but from the perspective of the future. When they ask themselves: “What will this decision look like in five years?”, they are both imagining the consequences of their actions as completed in the future and attending to matters of the present. The talk and actions are *about* the present (oriented to the present) but as seen *from* the completed future. Managers are thus actively interrogating the assumptions, values and understandings of the present from the perspective of the imagined future.

This idea builds on the notion of future perfect thinking while also being distinct from it conceptually and pragmatically. As a tool, temporal reconstrual allows organizations to overcome breakdowns arising from a conflict between the desired future and present demands in a way that they could not achieve by deploying future perfect thinking. In our case, future perfect thinking stabilized a vision of the future that was very distinct from the urgent concerns of the present. While future perfect thinking can reinforce stable understandings of the future, these can still conflict with the present and lead to breakdowns during organizational change

initiatives. Temporal construal can then be deployed to aid managers in overcoming and moving past the conflict that is inhibiting change.

### **3.5.2. Reconceptualizing the Role of the Present in Sensemaking**

We argue that this active examination of the present from the perspective of a completed future has important implications for how we understand agency in sensemaking. Taking Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) temporally embedded conceptualization of agency as a starting point, we propose that central facets of agency can be associated as strongly with the projected future as with the interpreted present. While embedding agency in the flow of time allows individuals to reorient themselves as required towards the past, present or future, for Emirbayer and Mische (1998) and for Mead (1932) the present continues to play a dominant role in decision-making. The central *practical-evaluative* facet of agency is positioned largely in the present, and is the context within which problematization, deliberation and decision making take place (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998: 97–98).

Our analysis found that managers were able to deliberate on problems in the present from the perspective of an imagined future, and could thus transmute the locus of agency. To resolve conflicts and provide a new perspective on an established problem, managers could deliberately position themselves in the projected future, and from that perspective they could orient themselves towards the present through cognitive “time travel.” This builds on the notion of foresight as a tool for coping with the future (MacKay and McKiernan, 2004; MacKay and Parks, 2013; Tapinos and Pyper, 2018; Tsoukas and Shepherd, 2004; Wood et al., 2019). Within this, the notion of “mental time travel” (Wood et al., 2019) or “chronesthesia” (Suddendorf and Corballis, 2007) refers to the capacity of individuals to experience the future subjectively by building models to “project themselves...forward to prelive events” (Suddendorf and Corballis, 2007: 2). Drawing from the neurology and

behavioural sciences literature (Kwan et al., 2012; Suddendorf and Corballis, 2007), Wood et al. (2019) suggest that this ability to subjectively “prelive” events can be a useful tool that enables managers to cope with the future, allowing individuals to subjectively experience outcomes. This subjective, first-person understanding of events yet to happen is akin to a neurologist’s notion of “memories of the future” (Ingvar, 1985: 128) – episodic memories of events yet to take place – which play a role in guiding behaviour and enhancing planning.

We extend this idea to propose that it is not just the ability to prelive the future, but rather the specific ability to deliberate reflexively on problems of the present, from the perspective of the desired future, that is crucial for overcoming temporal conflicts. It matters not just that managers can travel in time to experience the future, but that a central element of agency – the ability to deliberate on problems – takes place within this projected future while they are looking back at the present. It is this that allows managers not just to understand the demands of the future but to “unstick” themselves from the present.

If this practical-evaluative element of agency can be invoked from the perspective of the imagined future, then – contrary to what Mead (1932) proposes – the present is *not* the exclusive domain of agency. Elements of agency can be distributed across different interpreted temporal dimensions, as these become the basis from which individuals make sense of their environment. Crucially, our analysis shows that this sensemaking behaviour extends beyond being a thought experiment for managers; it has a meaningful impact on their choices. Our analysis suggests that temporal reconstrual changes the basis on which individuals discuss the challenge at hand, resulting in a subjective de-prioritization of the present and a distancing from its demands. The sensemaking behaviour can lead to a reduction in temporal conflict and the removal of barriers to otherwise undesired options, but without any coherent account of the past, present and future (Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013) having been constructed.

The notion that organizational members “live in the present”, as Flaherty and Fine (2001: 147) extract from the ontology of Mead, does not capture how agency works during temporal reconstrual. Rather, some of the core elements of agency – interpretation, problematization and deliberation – can take place cognitively outside the empirical present as interpreted from the perspective of the future.

### **3.5.3. Managing Change and Overcoming Inertia**

Preparing for a future that is radically different from the present while living in the here and now is a common problem for established organizations in fast-changing markets. Our case provides insights into the tools available to managers who are dealing with this issue as they try to implement planned strategic change. Our study has implications for the problem of corporate “short-termism” (Lavery, 1996; Marginson and McAulay, 2008), where short-term impact trumps long-term considerations (Flammer and Bansal, 2017; Reinecke and Ansari, 2015) and impedes performance (Bridoux, Smith and Grimm, 2013; Souder and Bromiley, 2011). Not allowing present-day concerns and their short-term impact to override the long-term benefits of tough decisions in the present is one way in which an organization can get past the obstacles to change.

We add to a growing body of literature on the power of temporal sensemaking in guiding and facilitating organizational change (Huy, 2001; Boal and Schultz, 2007; Hernes et al., 2013). Organizations can find themselves facing a temporal conflict when understandings of the present demands of the market (Gilbert, 2005) or the firm’s present capabilities (Leonard-Barton, 1992) function as barriers to change and result in an impasse – despite the long-term benefits of change in preparation for the future (Christensen, 2013). In many cases, these conflicts will be resolved through a process of collective sensemaking, potentially involving the creation of a provisional settlement through temporal work (Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013;

McGivern et al., 2017). In other cases, deliberate encouragement of temporal reconstrual may, as our case has shown, reduce the weight of the present and current demands and allow alternative perspectives (such as those of the future vision) to guide the choices made within the organization. In this case, the temporal conflict is not so much resolved as minimized by limiting the significance of the present. This effect has echoes of the concept of “hyperbolic discounting” (Frederick et al., 2002) in the economics literature, in which it is argued that individuals tend to place less value on costs and rewards the further away these are from the immediate “now.” Similarly, temporal reconstrual – projecting oneself into the future to pre-experience it and then taking decisions in the present – allows managers to place less weight on the concerns and demands of the present by viewing these from the context of a completed future.

In our case, there was an emphasis on finding an account of the past, present and future that was “good enough” to overcome any objections that emerged as a result of temporal conflict. Such satisficing sets a lower bar than the higher standard of doing temporal work to develop a narrative that is fully coherent across all three temporal dimensions – past, present and future. This is also consistent with the notion of sensemaking as a search for “simplicity” (Colville et al., 2012: 7), an account that marries sufficient complexity and depth with enough simplicity to motivate action. Reweighting the competing narratives of each temporal dimension enables managers to develop an account that allows intuitively plausible and acceptable narratives to prevail; at the same time it also provides a rationalization for overcoming any obstacles that the organization currently faces as a result of conflicting temporal demands.

#### **3.5.4. Broader Implications for Theory and Practice**

By making temporal reconstrual part of the toolkit available to senior leaders, we believe that managers will be better able to overcome the temporal conflict that can stall progression during

organizational change. This deliberate and strategic focus on future circumstances is similar to the use of “scenario planning” during organizational change. Developed in the high uncertainty that characterized the 1970s – and adopted by the Stanford Research Institute, Hudson Institute and Shell (Patvardhan, 2013) – scenario planning involves managers developing alternative visions of the future to determine “which issues...and events will make up tomorrow” (Marsh, 1998: 44) and to prepare accordingly. While both scenario planning and temporal reconstrual can be used as tools to invoke the future in planning for the present, temporal reconstrual is different in two important ways. First, it does not aim to reduce ambiguity by setting out multiple visions of the future, and indeed it does not require multiple, alternative futures. Second, the success of temporal reconstrual comes from the ability to form a desirable vision of the future and interrogate the present from this vision. Its purpose is to “unstick” managers from the concerns of the present, such as having to make unpopular decisions, rather than to help them cope with the ambiguity of an uncertain future (Augustine et al., 2019).

In this sense, temporal reconstrual applies a “hindsight bias” – the tendency to see events as highly predictable in retrospect, giving one the sense of “having known the outcome all along” (MacKay and McKiernan, 2004: 70). As Wasserman et al. (1991) note, this perspective gives us a very different view of events: “Events in the past usually appear simple, comprehensible, and predictable in comparison with events in the future. Everyone has had the experience of believing that he or she ‘knew all along’” (1991: 30). From the perspective of the completed future, the need to prepare for the future and the folly of focusing on a business-as-usual present seem much clearer. Through temporal reconstrual, which allows one to port oneself into the desired future in order to take decisions in the present, this perspective can be utilized by those leading the planned change to transform how managers see the present and the future.

Our analysis suggests that there are two ways in which managers can use temporal reconstrual: as rhetoric and as boundary objects. They can use rhetoric by asking questions that require others to deliberately reflect on the present from the perspective of the organization in the expected future. This is consistent with Weick's notion of "strange conversations" (1979: 200), where routine ways of discussing a project are interrupted by the injection of novel perspectives to break with business-as-usual approaches. Rhetorical techniques such as this can be used to "disperse and challenge, providing alternative interpretations" (Dawson and Sykes, 2019: 4). As with temporal reconstrual, the purpose is not to create a coherent narrative across time but to use non-chronological interjections to challenge established ways of understanding the organization's context. This rhetoric can be complemented through the use of boundary objects – material objects that cut across different perspectives and prompt dialogue (Ancona et al., 2001). Tools such as project plans and timelines (Tukiainen and Granqvist, 2016) can prompt managers to address and make sense of temporal conflict in the project, but they can also be used to impose a perspective and create a unified understanding (McGivern et al., 2017). Fincorp's use of temporal reconstrual in risk assessment documents and meeting room checklists imposes such a perspective and limits the values by which success is measured.

Our model provides both a descriptive account of the steps taken by organizations to overcome temporal conflict and suggests practical steps that can be taken to drive change initiatives when this form of conflict arises.

### **3.5.5. Limitations and Future Research**

We acknowledge that we have explored a specific form of temporal conflict. The salient tension that emerged in our study was between the present and the future. However, this will not always be the case. Situations emerge where organizations place greater emphasis on the



past or the future in ways that can be problematic. By focusing too strongly on past successes, organizations can become less able to adapt to their environments (MacKay et al., 2006). Similarly, an organization that is oriented to the future may experience greater rates of new product development (Nadkarni and Chen, 2014) and change (Ybema, 2004), but this can also create new rigidities, which lead to current issues not being adequately addressed (Chen et al., 2019). In these cases, temporal conflict may emerge in ways that could require a different form of temporal work and reconstrual to move attention and emphasis away from the past or future and on to the present. Further research could explore how temporal reconstrual is used in contexts in which organizations need to deprioritize the past or the future in order to overcome breakdowns in the change process.

In our case, managers were unable to reach a provisional settlement for a coherent account across the present and future. Temporal reconstrual served as a secondary route to overcome the breakdown without reinterpreting the present or future to reach a provisional settlement. While we found temporal reconstrual to be an alternative to traditional approaches to temporal work there is no reason – a priori – that it could not be used as part of the traditional model of temporal work to change the understandings of the past, present and future in order to develop a coherent account. Further research could explore the role that repositioning and reorienting oneself could have on collective sensemaking efforts, giving us a richer understanding of how individuals overcome conflicting demands and expectations from their present situations and the desired future.

### 3.6. Tables and Figures

**Table 1: Project Home Objectives and Implications**

Participating Teams	Strategic Choice	Considerations by topic			Ongoing Actions
		Customers	Culture	Business Model	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic Marketing</li> <li>• Internal Communications</li> <li>• Personal Banking Products</li> <li>• Technology</li> </ul>	Reposition the bank, emphasizing its participatory role in the communities it serves and its innovative culture.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Find a fit between the understanding held by customers and the direction in which the bank is developing</li> <li>• Ensure the strategy is fulfilled in a manner that is persuasive and coherent to customers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop new ways of working that fit with the strategy</li> <li>• Ensure the strategy is advocated and bought into by employees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review products and services to ensure a fit with the strategy</li> <li>• Revise technology development pipeline</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reposition products to fit the new direction</li> <li>• Redirect consumer technology</li> <li>• Develop internal and external brand campaign materials</li> </ul>

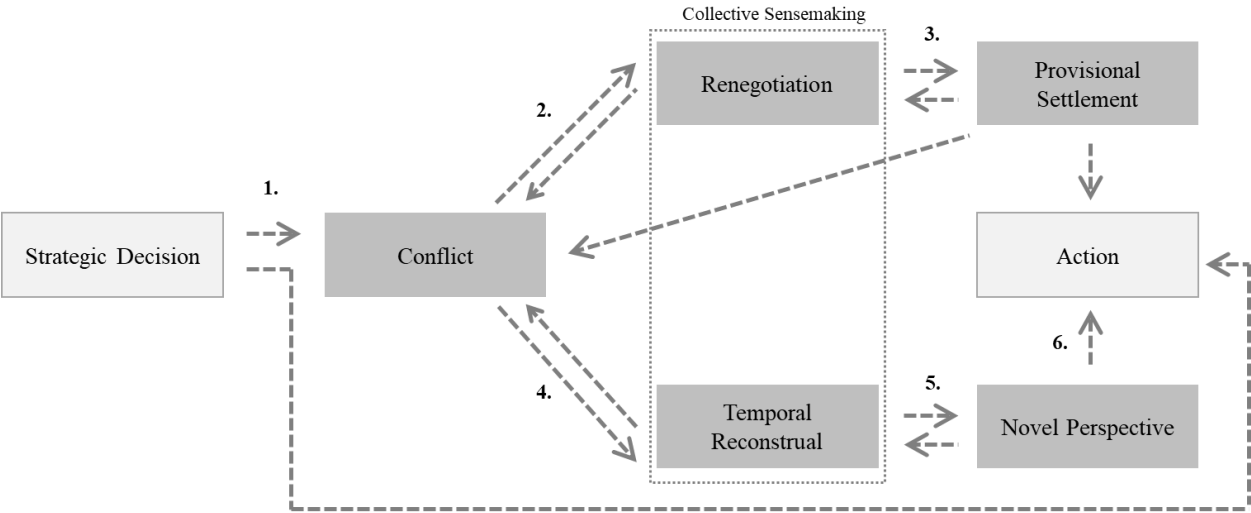
**Table 2: Illustrative Temporal Breakdowns by Directive**

Workstream	Directive	Degree of consistency with temporal schemas			Nature of Breakdown	Impact on Implementation
		Past	Present	Future		
x	Development and communication of a revised proposition for business customers. Decision taken to emphasize existing community ties.	<i>Moderate.</i> Organizational members could call on examples that fitted with this approach, but this narrative was often disputed, with examples cited from the organization's 'globalist' past and its 'ruthless' treatment of business partners.	<i>Poor.</i> The closure of branches, and lack of investment in B2B service provision were put forward as material examples of the directive's implausibility. Seen as incongruous with both internal and external perception of the bank.	<i>Moderate-Consistent.</i> The proposed measures were largely agreed to be feasible and consistent with the accepted understanding of the bank's direction and the future demands of the market. Minor doubts were raised about whether the bank would commit to the level of investment required.	Breakdowns emerged between the understanding of the firm's relationship with community businesses in the present, its heritage, and the direction it intended to take. Most apparent was the discontinuity the understanding and demands of the present and expectations of the future. The revised proposition would fit with the understanding of what would be necessary in the future, but appeared to be a poor fit with the current reputation of the firm and its relationship with its business customers.	Participants questioned the legitimacy of the directive. The process of developing and approving the new proposition was drawn out by disagreements about what was plausible and whether greater levels of investment would be required to change the proposition.
y	Shift in product development in technology to focus on developing and promoting products that would emphasize security and trustworthiness.	<i>Moderate-Consistent.</i> Despite some past issues with technological infrastructure, managers understood the bank to have a 'strong pedigree' in digital products for customers.	<i>Poor.</i> There was significant pushback regarding the notion that the bank could plausibly or credibly be seen as 'trustworthy'. There was also resistance to the notion that this was a key priority for customers in the current climate.	<i>Consistent.</i> The directive fitted closely with an understanding of the market as moving towards mobile products.	The expectations of the future which drove the directive clashed with an understanding of the present in which Fincorp's credentials as being 'trustworthy' were seen as inherently implausible.	There was a reluctance to invest in developing and promoting products that were not seen as 'core strengths'. Disagreements led to work being held up and project inertia.
z	Creation of communication materials (across all products and brands) to emphasize Fincorp's revised brand values.	<i>Moderate.</i> The values involved in the repositioning were drawn from a long-view of Fincorp's history. Many counter-examples existed, but an understanding developed that, for an organization of Fincorp's size and age, there would always be multiple plausible narratives. Acceptance that the materials would be plausible, if not universally accepted.	<i>Poor.</i> There was strong resistance within the communications and strategic marketing teams. There was an agreement that the language in the materials was strongly at odds with how managers understood the bank was perceived externally. Arguments were made that the bank should either moderate its tone or change its approach.	<i>Consistent.</i> There was a sense that if Fincorp was going to succeed in the future, it would have to position itself to fulfil these values. This was often described in normative, rather than descriptive terms.	The values and norms presented were consistent with what the organization aspired and expected to become, but were viewed as incoherent and implausible in relation to the understanding of what the organization was now.	There was strong resistance to the notion of devoting resources to the relatively costly repositioning of the organization for the future when the cost of competing in the present was already very high. The debate about whether to allocate attention and resources to a rebranding rather than to product-focused communications resulted in ongoing delays.

**Table 3: The Role of Temporal Reconstrual**

Workstream	Directive	Tension Observed	Nature of Reconstrual	Outcome	First observed
x	Development and communication of a revised proposition for business customers. Decision to emphasise existing community ties.	Breakdowns emerged between the understanding of the firm's relationship with community businesses in the present, its heritage and the direction it intended to fulfil. Most salient was the breakdown between the understanding and demands of the present and the expectations of the future. The revised proposition would fit with the understanding of what would be necessary in the future, but appeared a poor fit with the current reputation of the firm and the nature of the relationship with its business customers.	Reflecting on the launch of the proposition in the present from the point of view of the future - 'what will this look like in 5 years time?', 'will we be better off then for having committed to this now? - an understanding formed that the potential gains to be had would vastly outweigh the 'difficult' fit with the understanding of the present. Crucially, changing the understanding of the bank would require 'years of bedding in', forcing the change to be made sooner rather than later.	The tension with the present was not eliminated, but rather downplayed. There was an agreement to emphasise the more plausible aspects of the vision and produce a proposition that would 'tee up' the bank for the future. There was an acknowledgement that the proposition did not fit with the understanding of the bank or its relationship with its business customers in the present, but that this was to be treated as of less concern than the fit with the bank's aspirations for the future. Not launching the new proposition was seen as 'borderline irresponsible' from the perspective of the completed future.	Jan-17
y	Shift in product development in technology to focus on developing and promoting products that emphasise security and trustworthiness.	The expectations of the future which drove the directive clashed with an understanding of the present in which Fincorp's 'trustworthy' credentials were seen as inherently implausible.	Acknowledgement that while the directive may not appear plausible in the present, this would be reflected upon after its rollout as a 'statement of intent' or 'brand stretch'. Recognition that the directive is necessary to fulfil the intended outcomes of the bank in the future. Against this backdrop, the lack of a plausible fit with the present is seen as a 'period of awkwardness' to navigate, rather than a project-critical challenge.	The majority of the project participants reframed the tension in the present as an awkward but necessary period of transition. While a minority of members of the technology and product development teams continued to object to the directive - citing a clash with their understanding of the present - project leaders were able to use the revised perspective from the to delegitimise these objections and move the project forward in spite of them.	Apr-17
z	Creation of communication materials (across all products and brands) to emphasise Fincorp's revised brand values.	The values and norms presented were consistent with the aspirations of what the organization intended and expected to become, but were viewed as incoherent and implausible against the understanding of what the organization was now.	From the perspective of the future, it was accepted that 'customer narratives' regarding the organization were not fixed and immovable, but flexible and could be influenced by the bank. Against this understanding, the communications materials were seen as an inherent part of the launch a new 'paradigm' which could alter the understanding of the bank, rather than a project that would fail due to an incongruence with the present understanding of the bank.	Conversations shifted within the communications and marketing teams from talking about fit with current insights drawn from market research, to fit with the Project Home brand strategy. While a plausibility and legitimacy issue remained in the present, the emphasis shifted to the extent to which any decision fitted with what the bank would become. In the context of the collectively understood vision of the future, not proceeding was framed as 'too cautious' and 'risk averse'.	Aug-17

**Figure 1: Temporal Reconstructal in Temporal Sensemaking**



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## 4. NAVIGATING PARADOXICAL TENSIONS THROUGH THE INTERPLAY OF TEMPORAL STRUCTURES

*Organizations at the boundary of two institutional fields are often required to meet contradictory but interrelated demands. While transcendence – accepting both sets of demands as necessary and complementary – has been shown to be an important response to such paradoxes, achieving it places significant cognitive and behavioural strain on managers. Despite the importance of ‘and/both’ approaches for the survival of institutionally pluralistic organizations, we still know little about the practices that managers resort to when initial efforts to achieve transcendence break down. Through a longitudinal study of a joint-venture spanning two institutional fields, we demonstrate that managers can address otherwise insurmountable paradoxical tensions through an emphasis on the interplay of their temporal structures. By deconstructing conflicting demands into their respective temporal qualities of temporal depth – defined as the span into the past and future that they typically consider – and temporal horizons – measured by the frequency of milestones within this span – managers can process paradoxical demands in novel ways. Through a process of temporal work, managers on both sides of the institutional divide were able to negotiate a new, shared temporal depth that accommodated the temporal horizons of both sides. We show that this process enabled managers to achieve a form of transcendence, providing a structure within which to consider the demands on both sides as necessary and complementary, which was not previously possible. We suggest that ‘zooming in’ to focus on the complexity of temporal structures can unveil novel and surprising sensemaking processes amongst managers navigating paradoxes.*

*“Time flows in the same way for all human beings; every human being flows through time in a different way.”*

- Yasunari Kawabata

#### **4.1. Introduction**

Recent approaches to institutional complexity – contexts in which organizations operate across multiple institutional fields (Greenwood et al., 2011; Kraatz and Block, 2008) – have begun to draw on a paradox lens to understand how managers navigate the associated competing demands (Jay, 2013; Smith and Tracey, 2016). A paradox approach emphasizes the interdependence of the opposing demands in these contexts, such that addressing one demand makes the opposing demand more imperative (Farjoun, 2017; Smith and Lewis, 2011). For example, managers may face competing pressures to explore new product development and exploit existing capabilities (Andriopoulos and Lewis, 2009; Smith and Tushman, 2005), or between the need to compete and cooperate with other firms (De Rond and Bouchiki, 2004; Rosenkopf and Tushman, 1998). In these contexts, trading off one demand in favour of another would ultimately be a ‘pyrrhic victory’ (Reineke and Ansari, 2015: 639), which would damage the organization’s long-term prospects. The challenge, from a paradox perspective, is to move from an understanding of conflicting institutional demands as “either/or” trade-offs and instead position them as opportunities for “both/and” solutions (Gibson and Birkinshaw, 2004; Lewis, 2000; Smith et al., 2017). Transcendence – in which agents understand both poles of the paradox to be necessary and complementary (Jarzabkowski, Lê, and Van de Ven, 2013; Lewis, 2000; Smith and Tracey, 2016) – may be necessary in contexts defined by institutional complexity. In these contexts, jointly satisfying competing demands is a ‘minimum requirement for bare survival in the face of pluralism’ (Kraatz and Block, 2008: 5).

While valuable, such an approach is cognitively demanding and difficult to achieve in practice (Lüscher and Lewis, 2008; Smith and Lewis, 2011). Accepting such demands as necessary and interrelated ‘intensifies experiences of tension, challenging actors’ cognitive limits’ (Smith and Lewis, 2011: 395). Consequently, such paradoxical inquiry has been understood – even by its proponents – as ‘precarious’ (Lüscher and Lewis, 2008: 237). Understanding the mechanisms through which managers do manage to navigate competing expectations is especially pertinent in institutionally complex contexts, where jointly satisfying multiple demands is necessary for the continued existence of the firm (Kraatz and Block, 2008).

We argue that recent research exploring the interplay of oppositional temporal structures can provide insights into the processes that managers use to navigate paradoxical demands. Temporal structures are socially constructed understandings of time (Grangvist and Gustafsson, 2016; Orlikowski and Yates, 2002) that underpin practices (Rowell et al., 2017) and influence how managers interpret and their environment (Grangvist and Gustafsson, 2016; Oborn and Barrett, 2020). Recent research has suggested that the interplay of these structures can help managers bridge gaps between opposing practices and demands (Oborn and Barrett, 2020; Schultz and Hernes, 2019; Reineke and Ansari, 2015). Schultz and Hernes (2019) show how recombining the constructs of temporal depth and temporal horizons influence the interplay of strategy and identity. Reineke and Ansari (2015) explore how, through a process of reflexivity and negotiation, managers at Fairtrade International were able to bridge the deadline-oriented ‘clock time’ with event-oriented ‘process time’ to operate with both a market and development model.

While the interplay of temporal structures may help bridge competing practices and demands, the application of such an approach to paradoxical tensions driven by institutional complexity raises several issues. The underlying temporal structures of opposing demands may not be



immediately apparent to managers. Rather, managers face surface-level tensions (Schad and Bansal, 2019) between competing dualities of identities, practices and strategic goals (Greenwood et al., 2011; Kraatz and Block, 2008; Jay, 2013). There is a lack of empirical research into the process through which these temporal structures become both salient to managers and the primary mechanism through which they process paradoxical tensions. Understanding the processes involved in this kind of ‘interpretive shift’ (Staudenmayer et al., 2002) sheds light on how a temporal structuring approach can address paradoxical tensions.

In a similar vein, the role that the interplay of temporal structures has on managerial understandings of paradox is not clear. While research supports the notion that structural interplay can allow managers to work with competing temporal structures to achieve a form of ‘temporal ambidexterity’ (Slawinski and Bansal, 2015: 544), it is not clear whether or when this amounts to a shift in managerial understanding that the poles of the paradox are ‘inextricably linked and mutually influential’ (Chen and Miller, 2011, 13). Further empirical research is needed to understand whether such structural interplay can influence how individuals understand paradoxical demands.

To explore these issues, we conduct an inductive, longitudinal case study of Creative Hub – a joint venture formed by two parent companies in separate sectors: the banking and advertising industries. Through participant observation, depth interviews, and content analysis, we explore the organizational complexity in this structure, and the paradoxical demands that arise as a result. Initial efforts to process these paradoxical tensions through a transcendent approach proved difficult to maintain. During an extended period of sensemaking, the differences in the temporal structures of each pole became salient, with marked differences in temporal depth (the distance into the past and future that managers normally consider) and temporal horizons (the intervals at which agents measure progress). A form of temporal reflexivity emerged, in

which managers acknowledged and interrogated their temporal assumptions. In the latter stages of fieldwork, managers engaged in a process of renegotiating a shared temporal depth that accommodated the temporal horizons of both sides. This mid-length, defined temporal depth created a common ground to discuss and justify their respective temporal horizons.

While managers did not come to believe that the objectives of the opposing paradigm were necessary or complementary to their own objectives, they were able to accommodate them within the revised temporal depth. We argue that this *quasi-transcendence* – in which opposing demands are accommodated though not fully accepted as necessary – allowed the organization to satisfy competing demands in a manner that was less cognitively demanding than the traditional notion of transcendence. We argue that such an approach was possible through a focus on the interplay of temporal structures. In breaking down opposing paradigms into their distinct depth and horizons, managers were able to negotiate a more nuanced interplay that was not possible when the conflicting demands were considered as binary forces.

## **4.2. Theoretical Exposition**

### **4.2.1. Institutional Plurality and Paradoxical Demands**

Organizations that operate in multiple institutional contexts have to navigate conflicting demands from their environment as a minimum standard for survival (Greenwood et al., 2011; Kraatz and Block, 2008). This pluralism of demands places significant strain on organizations, as satisfying demands from one institutional context can inhibit the organization's ability to meet those of the other (Kraatz and Block, 2008; Pache and Santos, 2010). While early approaches to these competing demands drew largely on an institutional theory – conceptualising such competing demands as emanating from competing institutional logics (Greenwood et al., 2011) – recent work has called for greater emphasis on a paradox lens (Jay,

2013; Smith and Tracey, 2016). A paradox approach emphasises the interrelation of such contradictory demands as an inherent facet of organizing (Schad and Bansal, 2019). Paradox emphasises not only the contradiction in institutional plurality, but also the dyadic interdependence of opposing demands, such that addressing one demand strengthens its opposition (Clegg et al, 2002; Farjoun, 2017; Smith and Lewis, 2011).

Emphasising a social constructivist ontology, much of the paradox literature has focused on the ability of managers to treat contradictory demands not as “either/or” trade-offs, but rather as opportunities for “both/and” solutions (Gibson and Birkinshaw, 2004; Lewis, 2000; Smith et al., 2017). Transcendence – this ability to treat both sides of the paradox as necessary and complementary (Jarzabkowski, Lê, and Van de Ven, 2013; Lewis, 2000) – has been shown to allow managers to overcome the conflict associated with opposing demands (Farjoun, 2010). By ‘moving to a higher plane of understanding’ (Jarzabkowski, Lê, and Van de Ven, 2013: 249) managers can treat competing demands as jointly necessary and simultaneously address both poles of the paradox (Bednarek et al., 2016).

The literature exploring the mechanisms that underpin a transcendence approach largely draw on socio-cognitive traditions – emphasising the role of framing (Jay, 2013; Smith and Tushman, 2005), sensemaking (Lüscher and Lewis, 2008), and sensegiving (Bednarek et al., 2016). In doing so, this work gives managerial cognition a central role. Hahn et al (2014) distinguish between a business case frame and a paradox frame. While the former highlights economic objectives, the latter underpins a more ambivalent perspective, allowing managers to consider “more comprehensive responses” (2014: 465) to sustainability challenges. In their study of the cognitive microfoundations of responses to paradoxical demands, Miron-Spektor et al (2018) identify a ‘paradox mindset’ – the ability to be ‘accepting of and energised by tensions’ (2018: 26) – as central to managers’ ability to navigate competing demands.

A parallel stream of research has explored the collective sensemaking approach that takes place amongst managers. Lüscher and Lewis (2008) explore how reflection and collective sensemaking allows managers to view contradictory demands as inherently related. Building on earlier work by Cameron and Quinn (1988) and Poole and Van de Ven (1989), Lüscher and Lewis (2008) propose that a ‘paradox lens’ (2008: 222) allows managers to ‘consider other perspectives, alter their assumptions, and explore issues in fundamentally different ways’ (2008: 234). This use of a paradox lens in the sensemaking process moves the question away from ‘either/or’ dilemmas to more nuanced questions about how to accommodate both demands, allowing for sufficient workable certainty to progress.

#### **4.2.2. Limits, Complexity, and Alternate Lenses**

While the pursuit of ‘and/ both’ approaches could help managers navigate the contradictory demands inherent in contexts of institutional pluralism (Smith and Tracey, 2016), such an approach is cognitively demanding and difficult to sustain in practice (Lüscher and Lewis, 2008; Smith and Lewis, 2011). Smith and Lewis (2011) argue that attention to interrelated yet opposing demands ‘intensifies experiences of tension, challenging actors’ cognitive limits’ (2011: 395). Embracing paradoxical tensions tests managers’ cognitive capabilities and requires a high degree of emotional equanimity (2011: 391). Leana and Barry (2000) propose that unique managerial capabilities – including openness to new experiences and a tolerance for ambiguity – are crucial factors in managerial attempts to cope with competing demands. This is supported by earlier findings in the cognitive science literature that shows that individuals prioritise consistency (Cialdini, Trost, and Newsom, 1995) and have a tendency to respond to contradiction with emotional anxiety (Schneider, 1990) and defensive behaviour (Vince and Broussine, 1996). In a similar vein, Lüscher and Lewis (2008) note that paradox

frames are precarious, due to a managerial tendency to revert to old approaches in the face of ambiguity.

Left unresolved, irreconcilable divides between competing demands can lead to breakdowns in understanding (Ybema, 2010), resulting in conflict (Amason, 1996; Golden-Biddle and Rao, 1997; Hatch and Ehrlich, 1993; Lewis, 2000; Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010; Pache and Santos, 2010). The consequences of breakdowns in addressing competing demands are especially pertinent for organizations such as joint ventures, where attending to demands emanating from two parent organizations is necessary for the survival of the organization (Inkpen and Currall, 2004; Jay, 2013; Kaatz and Block, 2008). In contexts defined by institutional complexity, how do managers accommodate polarised demands when efforts to recognise each pole as ‘necessary and complimentary’ (Bednarek et al., 2016) fail to take hold?

To address this, we build on recent work calling for a movement away from visible, dualistic tensions, and a greater focus on the complex ontology of paradoxes in practice (Schad and Bansal, 2019). Tsoukas (2017) emphasises the importance of moving beyond simplified dualitisms to acknowledge the complexity of understandings, processes and relationships in complex organizations. Schad and Bansal (2019) argue that ‘zooming in’ would result in a richer understanding of paradoxical tensions and the steps taken by managers to navigate them. Nicolini, (2009) proposes that a ‘zooming in’ approach is concerned less with increasing detail, but rather ‘the switching of theoretical lenses to allow for new aspects of the phenomenon to come to the fore’ (2009, 18). In the following section we propose switching theoretical lenses to elevate the role of temporality. Specifically, we argue that focusing on the role of temporal structures and their interplay (Reineke and Ansari, 2015; Schultz and Hernes, 2019) can uncover new approaches to managing paradoxical demands.

### 4.2.3. Temporal Structures

Recent research within the temporality literature has emphasised the interplay of different temporal structures – socially constructed understandings of time that influence how managers make sense of and coordinate practices (Grangvist and Gustafsson, 2016; Kunish et al., 2017; Orlikowski and Yates, 2002) – in navigating intra-organizational tensions. Temporal structures can differentiate the urgency understood by managers (Shipp and Cole, 2015; Chen and Nadkarni, 2017), the degree of attention paid to the past, present or future (Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013; Zimbardo and Boyd, 1999), or the distances into the past or future that managers consider (Bluedorn and Standifer, 2006; Kunish et al., 2017). These temporal structures underpin practices (Rowell et al., 2017), influencing how managers coordinate patterns of working (Grangvist and Gustafsson, 2016; Orlikowski and Yates, 2002).

In their study of the Carlsberg Group, Schultz and Hernes (2019) explore the interplay of strategy and identity by deconstructing their differing temporalities into the structures of temporal depth and temporal horizons, and exploring the effect that different combinations of these components have on the interaction between strategy and identity. Their work builds on Bluedorn's (2002) conceptualization of temporal depth – as 'the temporal distances into the past and future that individuals and collectives typically consider' (2002, 114). This depth is distinct from the notion of temporal horizons – which mark the events or moments that segment this overall depth. By distinguishing between different forms of temporal structures, Shultz and Hernes (2019) explore how different combinations of these temporal constructs influence the interplay between the macro-structures of strategy and identity. In their study of temporal perspectives in response to climate change, Slawinski and Bansal (2015) found that management teams who were able to integrate broader temporal perspectives with longer time horizons were able to develop more comprehensive responses to climate change.

Some authors have emphasised the collective processes that facilitate this temporal interplay. Reineke and Ansari (2015) explain how Fairtrade International managed to bridge deadline-oriented ‘clock time’ and event-oriented ‘process time’ structures through a process of contestation and negotiation. Their work builds on the notion of temporal reflexivity – ‘the human potential for reinforcing and altering temporal structures’ (Orlikowski and Yates, 2002: 698) – to argue that contradictory temporal structures can be reshaped and aligned. Ultimately, this resulted in a ‘mutual appreciation’ (2015, 636) of the temporal demands of each side.

Adjacent literature has emphasised the cognitive and behavioural capabilities of individuals as key to facilitating sustained temporal interplay. Chen et al. (2019) draw on the interplay of different temporal structures to understand how organizations cope with the competing demands in the pursuit of organizational ambidexterity. This work builds on the notion – first identified in Das (1987) and Wang and Bansal (2012) – that longer temporal horizons direct attention to the distant future; while short horizons lead managers to attend to current environmental cues that prioritise more immediate results (Shipp et al., 2009; Lumpkin and Bringham, 2011). From this, Chen et al (2019) argue that a diversity of time horizons is key to achieving ambidexterity. Their work identifies the behaviours and capabilities of senior leadership teams – including effective scheduling and synchronisation – as key to maintaining multiple, often opposing time horizons (2019, 16).

We argue that this interplay of temporal structures provides novel routes towards understanding how managers process competing, paradoxical demands. By ‘zooming in’ to unpick the temporal structures of each demand, complex and nuanced interactions become possible that would not emerge if we were to focus on the surface level demands (Schad and Bansal, 2019). Our work seeks to empirically explore nature of the temporal structures that comprise competing paradoxical demands, and their interplay in addressing paradox.

#### **4.2.4. Addressing Paradox Through Temporal Structural Interplay – Emerging Issues**

*The salience of temporal structures.* Research that has applied a temporal lens to paradoxical tensions has predominantly focused on contexts in which managers already understand the paradoxes facing them in temporal terms. As a result, the process through which temporal structures become salient is under explored. Research has highlighted the propensity of managers to view the tensions between exploitation and exploration as one of inter-temporal choice, weighing up the demands of the near and distant future (Ancona et al., 2001; Chen et al., 2019; Mathias et al., 2017). Similarly, issues surrounding organizational change are often formulated by managers as an inter-temporal choice between the needs of the present and understandings of the future (Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013). Individuals who are capable of holding multifaceted temporal perspectives are better able to navigate the tensions around organizational change (Gibson et al., 2007; Kunish et al., 2015).

While temporal structures may play a significant role in helping managers navigate paradoxical tensions, the process through which such structures become relevant remains under explored. This is particularly significant in cases of paradoxes driven by institutional complexity, where the competing demands facing managers may not initially be understood with relation to their temporal structures, but rather as competing dualities of identities, practices, and goals (Greenwood et al., 2011; Kraatz and Block, 2008; Jay, 2013). Navigating paradoxical demands through the interplay of their temporal structures would involve an ‘interpretive shift’ (Staudenmayer et al., 2002) – changing the categories through which managers understand the world.

*Structural Interplay and Transcendence.* A related issue for researchers concerns the role that an approach focused on the interplay of temporal structures has on managerial understanding of paradoxical demands. While research has explored the processes through



which managers process and accommodate multiple temporalities, it is not yet clear what impact this has on managers' understanding of the relationship between the 'inherent and persistent' contradictions that constitute paradox.

While research supports the notion that the interplay of different temporalities can underpin a form of 'temporal ambidexterity' (Slawinski and Bansal, 2015: 544) at the organizational level – in which the organisation can pursue both short and long term horizons – it is not clear whether this amounts to a recognition at the managerial level that the two poles of the paradox are 'inextricably linked and mutually influential' (Chen and Miller, 2011, 23). While temporal structures have been shown to shape practices (Huy, 2001; Rowell et al., 2017), and direct what managers pay attention to (Oborn and Barrett, 2020); whether and how they influence individuals' understandings of paradoxical demands is less clear.

#### **4.2.5. Challenges and Considerations**

While a focus on the interplay of temporal structures is a promising pathway for researchers seeking to understand how managers process paradoxical demands, challenges remain for paradox scholars. First, how do temporal structures become both salient and pertinent for managers addressing paradoxical tensions? Secondly, what role does this interplay of temporal structures have on managers' understanding of the paradoxical demands they face?

The remainder of this paper seeks to address these issues through an inductive, longitudinal exploration of the interplay of temporal structures in the maintenance of a joint venture, an organizational form susceptible to tensions between opposing yet mutually necessary demands (Battilana and Dorado, 2010; Pache and Santos, 2010). The very existence of joint ventures from different industries often depends on their ability to meet demands stemming from two distinct poles (Jay, 2013).

### **4.3. Methodology**

This paper is intended to “reconnect and redirect” (Lee et al., 1999: 166) two related yet often distinct research streams; paradox theory and temporality in sensemaking. In doing so, we aim to explore the manner in which temporality influences how paradoxical tensions are processed. To achieve this, our study focused on hybrid organising through joint ventures, a setting associated with the emergence of paradoxical tensions (Battilana and Dorado, 2010; Inkpen and Currall, 2004). In keeping with the view of responses to paradox as a dynamic process (Bednarek et al., 2016; Smith and Lewis, 2011), we adopt a longitudinal, process-driven approach (Langley et al., 2013) to capture how understandings and practices develop and adapt over time.

#### **4.3.1. Case Selection and Context**

Our insights emerged from an inductive study of the formation and initial years of CreativeHub, a joint venture established by Fincorp – a multinational financial services organisation – and Commcorp – a media and communications conglomerate. The aim of the joint venture was to provide Fincorp with an in-house creative agency who could support a range of communications, design and advertising services at a lower cost and higher speed than an external agency.

This model, initially referred to as ‘the Fincorp Agency’ before it’s branding prior to launch as CreativeHub, was a new approach for both parent companies. Fincorp had previously used external agencies for all of their branding, advertising, and communications work. These agencies would be managed by Fincorp’s marketing department, who would select through a pitch process and hire agencies through a retained contract with additional payments for work that was outside the scope of the retained agreement or that took significantly more time or

staff to complete. Commcorp ran a network of advertising and communications agencies throughout Europe, each retained by multiple clients on contracts that were regularly reviewed based on the quality and cost efficiency of outputs, and the creative quality of the work.

For both Fincorp and Commcorp, creating an ‘internal’ agency to run as a joint venture brought several benefits. For Fincorp, having a dedicated internal resource would allow work to be developed faster and at short notice. Work would be able to be tied much more strategically into the aims and goals of the marketing department through a closer working relationship and a shared understanding of the organization. Through greater transparency and cost control, it was believed that the cost of agency services would be dramatically reduced. For Commcorp, creating an internal agency with a multinational financial services organization created the opportunity to secure a financially stable blue-chip client, and provide a stable, long term revenue stream in a highly volatile market. It was also hoped that a closer client-agency working relationship would help the agency produce more compelling and powerful creative work.

The new entity was created through a joint-ownership agreement with each parent company owning a 50 per cent stake. The organization was launched in Q4 2016 following 6 months of discussions and was initially comprised of 12 executives transferred from Commcorp and a further 10 individuals seconded from Fincorp’s marketing function, though this number changed substantially during our fieldwork. While CreativeHub was registered as a stand-alone company, it’s staff remained on either Fincorp or Commcorp contracts, and were seconded to CreativeHub who would reimburse the parent companies for staff wages. It was hoped that this would provide more protection to employees in the event of the failure of the new organization and allow the parent company to rapidly scale or shrink. These staff were

co-located in what managers referred to as ‘the CreativeHub HQ’, comprised of a half-floor in Fincorp’s headquarters, based alongside the marketing department.

During the span of fieldwork, from December 2016 to May 2019, Creative Hub grew to become an organization with 108 employees. This period was also defined by the emergence of a range of persistent paradoxical tensions, underpinned by a structural dynamic that placed simultaneous, opposing demands on managers. Tensions emerged between the opposing demands for efficiency and flexibility, exploitation and exploration, revenue growth and professional recognition. We argue that these fulfilled the criteria of tensions normally studied by paradox theorists, representing persistent contradictions (Smith and Lewis, 2011), inherently built into the process of organizing (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013). These tensions appeared at multiple levels of the organization, forcing managers throughout the organization to make sense of their paradoxical qualities.

#### **4.3.2. Data Sources**

To capture how temporality becomes salient and influences how paradoxical tensions are negotiated, we adopted a longitudinal, process approach (Langley et al., 2013). The data from these sources were qualitative and interpretive in nature, to prioritise understanding how meanings are shared, challenged and influence action “in situations in which alternative meanings and understandings are present and possible” (Gephart, 2004, 457). To understand how meanings are created and their dynamic interplay with behaviours (Van Maanen, 1979), we used a range of ethnographic techniques to collect data. These allowed us to gain detailed, contextualised, and highly nuanced insights into the nature of the paradoxical demands inherent in the joint venture and the role of temporality. To increase both the richness and soundness of the data, we triangulated collection across multiple sources (Jick, 1979). This included direct participant observation over a period of three years, semi-structured interviews

with senior management and content analysis of internal documents. In keeping with the phenomenological nature of this study, collection across each data source focused on capturing the lived experiences and understandings of organizational members.

***Ethnographic Observation:*** In line with a process approach, our data collection prioritised *events* as a central construct for analysis (Langley, 1999). We gained access to CreativeHub during a period of extended fieldwork with Fincorp in 2016. One of the authors conducted pro-bono strategy support in CreativeHub's head office across five periods (T1-T5) between August 2016 and March 2019. During this time, we were able to collect data on working practices, observe planning meetings, and take part in organizational social events. In total, this amounted to more than 320 hours of participant observation. Using a field diary, we were able to continually record observations of the of discourse, behaviours and incidents that formed the basis of our primary data collection. Reinforced by the notion that collective sensemaking takes place in events (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014), this data formed an important starting point for much of our analysis. In an effort to capture the underlying meaning of these symbols and actions, we continuously recorded our immediate reflections on the meaning managers were intending to convey and the assumptions that underpinned their actions and discourse (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). These were used to guide our understanding of the organization and were regularly reviewed in light of new information.

***Interviews:*** Interviews took the form of semi-structured conversations with individuals throughout the joint venture – Creative Hub – and also with senior managers from both parent organizations: Fincorp and Commcorp. In total, 80 interviews were conducted with 38 individuals. Interviews used a 'flexible protocol' (Gioia et al., 2012: 26) to allow conversations to be guided by the experiences and understandings of managers. This was further supplemented with daily brief and informal conversations with managers and staff

members throughout the organisation to help grasp immediate responses to events and decisions. Clarification during the interviews referenced findings from other interviews and observed behaviour, rather than theory (Langley, 1999, 693).

***Internal Documents:*** Observational data was triangulated with content analysis of internal documents and external analyst commentaries. In total, 62 archival documents were reviewed: including internal strategy memos, presentations, and briefing documents. Collectively, these were used to corroborate the narrative portrayed through interviews (Webb and Weick, 1979) and provided insights into the “intended image” (Brown et al., 2006, 102) that the organization’s senior management sought to develop.

#### **4.3.3. Data Analysis**

A central aim of this research is to develop an understanding of how managerial understandings of, and approaches to, paradox change over time. To achieve this, we apply a process-driven methodology to emphasise the linkages of themes and concepts across time (Langley, 1999; Langley and Tsoukas, 2017). This combined an inductive, analytical approach to concept generation (Gioia, Corley and Hamilton, 2012) with the use of narrative techniques and vignettes (Reay et al., 2019) to highlight events and the patterns that link them across time. By combining these two techniques, we aim to balance ‘showing and telling’ (Berends and Deken, 2019: 5) – jointly pursuing both construct robustness and examples that bring their interplay in practice to life, and demonstrate the changes in the interplay of these constructs over time (Pettigrew, 1990).

Following the first phase of fieldwork, we created a list of recurrent themes that had emerged from the first round of interviews. These themes formed the basis of ‘hunches’ (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 186) regarding what managers understood to be relevant and pressing issues in

the formation of the joint venture. To develop an understanding of how these might influence practice and behaviour, we began to link observed events (discussions, moments in meetings, responses to news) to these themes. We also began to identify how managers clustered according to their level of agreement with the themes we had established. Although only preliminary data, this first phase of analysis raised several issues that provided a starting point for deeper enquiry and suggested ‘directions along which to look’ (Blumer, 1954: 7). In particular, it became clear that there were differences in understanding (found in both interviews and observations) about what the firm was supposed to be doing, and what a good outcome would look like. Furthermore, it gave us an early insight into the extent to which these differences clustered around managers’ institutional affiliation (that is, whether they joined CreativeHub from Fincorp or Commcorp).

Following the second phase of fieldwork, we began to analytically structure our growing data set. In the first stage, we coded observed events, internal documents, and interviews into first-order concepts. To help guide our understanding of the distribution of perspectives, we linked these where possible to the relevant individuals involved. Following the third phase of fieldwork, we revisited this coding and supplemented it with additional codes that had emerged during the latest round of research. It was at this stage that temporal structures started to become relevant, with managers’ explicitly and implicitly discussing urgency and differing time horizons. We began to cluster these first-order concepts into second-order themes. This process involved iteratively moving between data and theory to frame (Reineke and Ansari, 2015). In some cases, these themes were linked to terminology in wider theoretical discourse. It was at this stage that notions such as ‘Temporal Depth’ and ‘Temporal Horizons’ were built in as themes. Other themes, such as ‘reputational benefit’ and ‘collegiate approach’ grew out of terms used by respondents.

These codes and second order themes were further developed after both the fourth and fifth phases of fieldwork, with new codes being added and existing codes and themes being reviewed in light of new data. Codes were ranked in chronological order (according to their emergence in the data) to capture the introduction of new concepts. From these themes we developed higher-order aggregate dimensions that guided the structure of this paper (Gioia *et al.*, 2012, 21).

While this analytical approach, drawn from Gioia, Corley and Hamilton (2012), helped us develop a robust and mutually exclusive set of codes and themes to guide our analysis, it is of limited use in accounting for change over time. Changes in process (Nicolini, 2010), and interplay between themes and processes (Tsoukas, 2017; Reay *et al.*, 2019), are difficult to capture through such a ‘snapshot’ approach. To build on this, we worked chronologically backwards and forwards through the data structure to identify common threads (ongoing issues amongst managers) throughout all five phases of fieldwork, and changes to the ways in which these were addressed. We have structured the presentation of our findings around events and vignettes tied to these threads (Langley, 1999). Such an approach aims to draw out the interplay between different demands and temporal structures during episodes (events, moments) of collective sensemaking (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014). By focusing on a narrative approach linking vignettes, we hope to maintain the ‘temporal coherence’ (Berends and Deken, 2019: 2) of the case, drawing out both consistencies and changes over time.

## **4.4. Findings**

### **4.4.1. Divergent Demands and Paradoxical Tensions**

When fieldwork began, latent tensions within the newly formed CreativeHub had begun to materialise in dialogue and behaviours between managers, and in concerns raised in T1 and



T2 interviews. While managers did not explicitly refer to these tensions as ‘paradoxical’, they did describe an experience consistent with the definition of paradox – detailing a process of coping with contradictory, persistent demands that were understood to be inherent in the joint venture. There were multiple issues that made these tensions salient, at each point the fissure was a manifestation of contradictory demands captured in two paradigms: agency orientation and bank orientation. These paradigms within CreativeHub incorporated divergent understandings of the purpose of the joint venture, the relationship with the parent companies, and the form that success took.

The agency orientation emphasised an understanding of CreativeHub as an independent service provider to Fincorp. This emphasised a service driven operating model in which the bank was to be treated as a client, while CreativeHub was to maintain a distinct identity. Under this view, CreativeHub’s primary value came from it’s ability to provide expertise and creative vision not found within Fincorp, but with greater responsiveness and efficiency than a traditional agency. Success, under this orientation, was measured by two standards used elsewhere in the creative communications and advertising industries: creative reputation and revenue growth. The first of these demanded exemplar creative work, measured by industry recognition through awards, commentary and reviews. The latter derived from an understanding of the organization as a stand-alone independent business and placed an emphasis on winning an ever larger share of Fincorp’s advertising and communications budget.

The second, bank oriented, paradigm was grounded in an understanding of CreativeHub as an extension of Fincorp’s marketing and communications capabilities, and an alternative to external resource. The organization’s value came from it’s relative integration with Fincorp, adding resources to the existing marketing team. The organization was to sit as seamlessly as

possible next to the marketing function to allow it to be a highly accessible resource, and an alternative to using agencies altogether. Phenomenologically, the joint venture would feel like an ‘invisible extension’ (Account Director) of Fincorp. In a more quantifiable sense, it would be seen as a success under this paradigm if it generated significant cost savings and efficiency for Fincorp’s marketing function.

The differences between these two paradigms were most apparent when managers addressed the issue of what success looked like for the organization, and what the relationship with Fincorp and Commcorp should be. Managers circled – in conversation, interviews, and practices – disagreements about the relationship the joint-venture had with the parent companies and what the markers of success were. We detail these in Table 1 and elaborate below.

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TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE  
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Discussions regarding the relationship with the parent organizations largely took the form of disagreements about the manner in which CreativeHub was expected to interact with Fincorp. The agency-oriented paradigm fundamentally underpinned the idea that this was a client service relationship. This involved treating the marketing and communications divisions of Fincorp in much the way that an agency would traditionally manage their relationships with clients. There was an emphasis on providing value by functioning as a ‘source of external expertise’ (Planner) and acting as a service provider. The agency-oriented paradigm underpinned an understanding that in day-to-day practice, Fincorp was to be treated as a client. In the early phases of fieldwork (T1-T2), this distinction primarily emerged through discourse.

This included referring to Fincorp in all communication – including informal conversations – as ‘the client’, replicating and reinforcing the traditional agency-client model found in the advertising and communications sector. This language was maintained partly through habit from those who had worked in an agency model previously; but also took on a normative element, representing a deliberate and conscious effort to shape how this relationship should work. This was captured in an interview with the Planning Director, who noted:

*‘This is something that is going to take a while to catch on. We need to do the normal client-service work: set up the meeting room in advance, get them a coffee, actually host it...people who previously worked in the bank really struggle with “serving” former co-workers, but we need to remember that we need something from them....we’re not quite on the same team anymore. We’re on cooperating teams.’*

In contrast, the bank-oriented paradigm understood CreativeHub to be, first and foremost, an extension of Fincorp’s marketing capabilities. In line with this, a large cohort of CreativeHub managers would refer to individuals within Fincorp as ‘colleagues’, in both documents and informal discourse. This was almost entirely made up of those who had previously worked for Fincorp and were seconded to the new joint-venture. As with the language used by those subscribed to the agency paradigm, this language was often used in a conversational and descriptive way, reflecting underlying beliefs about what CreativeHub was in relation to Fincorp. Occasionally however its use would be more deliberate and normative, reflecting strong beliefs about what the relationship between the two organizations should be. This can be seen in an early interaction between a CreativeHub Copywriter and Account Manager, discussing a campaign proposal:

*CW: I know it’s a bit of a bold idea, but [Art Director] and I think this is a winner.*

AM: *[Fincorp contact] and I have been colleagues for years and I just know he's going to want something a bit less punchy.*

CW: *Would you like me to sell the idea to him? Clients never know what they need.*

A second point of difference that emerged at the outset was the way in which manners interpreted and discussed success, and the form this would take for Creative Hub. Our analysis found that, as with understandings of the relationship with the bank, the bank-oriented and agency-oriented paradigms defined interpretations of success. The agency-oriented paradigm supported a notion that CreativeHub's success would be measured by the standards of the wider advertising and communications industry. This involved maximising financial growth and seeking opportunities for creative recognition. For those brought in from Commcorp or the wider communications sector, the model of success required repeated increases in revenue through winning ever larger shares of work from key clients. This was in part driven by the inherent volatility of the communications sector; as one Account Director put the matter: 'the term "retainer" is misleading, clients can and do move agencies very quickly'. From the outset, this interest in growing the revenue received from Fincorp was openly discussed by managers who had moved into the role from elsewhere in the communications industry. This was captured in an interview with the first of two Managing Directors in place during the fieldwork:

*'There will be opportunities to take a bigger slice of the global Fincorp business. So part of our job is to keep an eye on that and treat this period as an extended pitch...It's a chance to prove that this is the future of advertising; not just for Fincorp but for our whole industry'.*

Our analysis found that the agency-paradigm also underpinned a view of success tied to a reputation for high-quality creative work. This was drawn from the importance of creative recognition within the advertising and communications professions, which provided a complimentary, but distinct standard from which to view success. Creative recognition mattered in part because it helped grow an agency by attracting clients, but also because of the importance of reputation in the careers of individuals in creative industries. As one Art Director put it: ‘even in a job you’re sort of self-employed. Your career hangs less on where you’ve worked and more on your portfolio of work. Specifically, the work that has been used and recognised. It’s a long game’. This placed an emphasis on providing work that was novel, challenging and produced at a large enough scale to affect audience behaviour.

This prioritization of revenue growth and creative recognition differed substantially from the efficiency-driven model held by those who subscribed to the bank-oriented paradigm. Under this view, the primary purpose of CreativeHub was to increase the financial and operational performance of Fincorp’s marketing and communications teams. By understanding CreativeHub as an ‘extension of the bank’ (Account Manager), its success was defined on the same terms as groups within the bank. This meant focusing on cost efficiency and operational flexibility, as one Account Manager noted: ‘the bean pushers can’t really be ignored. We have to demonstrate value in pretty much everything we do’. This was reinforced by a ‘culture of resourcefulness’ (Account Manager) within Fincorp, which had emerged over the course of eight years since the financial crisis. Early interactions within CreativeHub referenced these conditions. This was noted in a meeting about an internal communications campaign, between an Account Manager and a Creative Director:

AM: *‘We have to prove that were doing more with less. Anything that looks expensive will backfire and end with us being reminded that they were bailed out by the taxpayer’*

CD: *'It's not about doing something expensive; it's about doing something properly. It's far more wasteful to spend money on half-doing this and having no impact'*

The tension between these understandings of success worked at multiple levels. The agency-oriented pursuit of greater revenue for the joint venture, and the bank-oriented focus on efficiency were underpinned by organizational pressures and expectations from the respective parent companies. However, these pressures also operated at an individual level, with industry norms setting standards that managers used as a personal benchmark of achievement.

Our analysis showed that these differences were distributed largely according to the professional background of the managers, with those who had joined the organisation from Commcorp or other advertising agencies aligning to the agency paradigm, while those who had joined from Fincorp aligning to the bank paradigm. Due to the nature of the roles and the forms of experience required, these individuals were distributed in a clearly demarked way. Managers who had previously worked for Fincorp were seconded into account handling and client service roles – including positions as Account Managers and Account Directors. Those who joined from Commcorp or the wider advertising industry were drawn into specialist roles – including the creative team (responsible for the development of campaigns and communications), the planning team (responsible for research and strategy), and the production team (responsible for the creation of content). The result of this was that, while alignment to the paradigms was not dependent on a manager's position within the company, teams in the organisation aligned to different paradigms.

#### **4.4.2. From Latent to Salient Tensions**

As fieldwork progressed, these moved from latent differences to salient, explicit tensions. Our analysis found that this occurred in situations in which financial or capacity limitations forced

managers into pair-wise choices, with the bank and agency-paradigms falling at either end of a spectrum. Discussions in these contexts brought latent tensions about the relationship with the bank and the measures of success into the open, reinforcing the dichotomy and forcing managers to explicitly confront the challenge.

This took several forms, but consistently involved either financial or capacity constraints limiting the options available to managers and forcing them to pursue a path that was either consistent with the bank or agency-oriented paradigm. This could be seen in a discussion during the third phase of fieldwork regarding the hiring of a high-profile Copywriter. Higher than usual salary expectations surfaced a tension between the agency-oriented pursuit of creative recognition, and the bank-oriented perspective that success was to be addressed through cost efficiency. This could be seen in discussions between the Creative Director and an Account Manager:

AM: *'I mean, we could hire two new people for that. At least that would solve our capacity'*

CD: [interjecting] *'-but this is what top people cost, and one experienced person who know what they are doing is more valuable for us.'*

These tensions were especially pertinent in conversations regarding pitching for 'off plan' business. Part of the agreement behind the formation of the joint venture was that would conduct an agreed quantity of work for Fincorp's marketing department under an annual fee. Work outside of this remit – including work for other Fincorp departments or large ad-hoc projects – would be competitively tendered and pitched for in the usual way. This meant that CreativeHub would occasionally pitch for additional work alongside external agencies. Doing so surfaced tensions between bank and agency-oriented understandings of the relationship with Fincorp and the nature of success for CreativeHub. As the Traffic Manager noted: 'I think

people who don't have that agency background struggle to see that winning new business is important for survival and the success of the whole operation, not just a vanity project'.

Discussions such as these began to highlight the intrinsic links between the two tensions. Prioritising cost efficiency was invariably tied to understanding that the joint venture was – in working practice if not organizational form – an extension of Fincorp. Focusing on growth and creative recognition highlighted its separateness and institutional affiliation to the wider advertising industry model. The links between the poles of the paradox and beliefs about these topics are captured in Table 2. While the two paradigms were present from the formation of the joint venture, their contradictory qualities were drawn out around through the process of organising and became salient tensions when addressing issues where their respective approaches were incompatible.

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TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

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#### **4.4.3. Early Trade-Offs and Paradoxical Thinking**

Managers did not refer to these tensions as paradoxical, yet in interviews across the joint venture they would describe their dynamics in a manner consistent with the definition of paradox. This included a recognition of the persistence of these tensions and the notion that they inherently stemmed from the nature of the organization, as a conversation with the Director of Strategy captured: 'We need to provide some resistance, but if we focus too much on our own way of doing things then none of this will exist next year'. In interviews during the first two phases of fieldwork, there was a sense that this would be dealt with through ad-hoc trade-offs. Across all levels of the organization, an early consensus emerged that this was



simply part of the dynamic of the organization: ‘I think these debates are just part and parcel of the kind of organization that we are. It’s not too hostile’. (Account Manager).

Over the course of the first half of fieldwork, however, satisfaction with this approach declined as these tensions began to undermine the ability of project teams to make decisions and progress work. In some cases, this resulted in inertia. Discussions regarding whether to physically integrate CreativeHub into the offices of the Fincorp marketing team came to an impasse. Perpetual disagreement resulted in the initiative being paused. As the Traffic Manager noted: ‘we will have to return to that at some point, but it’s not worth pushing the issue now’. In other cases, tensions persisted after decisions were made. For example, discussions regarding hiring an ‘expensive’ (Account Manager) high-profile Creative Director continued even after the opportunity to poach a particular candidate from another agency had passed. With no decision left to be made, this manifested itself in a sense of frustration from those who had supported the idea: ‘I’m annoyed that they dragged their heels so much, that would have really changed things around here’ (Creative Director). A very similar sentiment emerged following a decision not to pitch for an additional piece of Fincorp Business, with the Planning Director noting that ‘I know it was a long shot and we were really stretched with existing work, but if we’re not going to compete then this won’t last long.’

#### **4.4.4. The Emerging Salience of Temporal Structures**

By the start of the third phase of fieldwork (T3), we found that managers had developed a tendency to move away from discussions about what the *correct* course of action was to disagreements about what the *most pressing* issue was. With this came a recognition that the opposing perspective was valid, but disagreement about which approach should take priority. This was articulated clearly in an interview with a Production Manager: ‘we’re learning from each other. I know that their approach isn’t wrong, they do have a point. That said, we know

that this won't work if we just live week by week, project by project.' While there was no attempt to address the underlying paradox – with decisions continuing to be made in a sequential, ad-hoc manner – it did mark the introduction of a temporal perspective to addressing tensions.

In discussing which concerns were more urgent, and which to address first, managers drew on two separate temporal concepts. Firstly, differences emerged in the distance into the future that managers considered when discussing goals. When discussing the long-term vision for the joint venture, the bank-oriented perspective would predominantly focus on the extent to which the organization was perceived as a success by senior individuals within Fincorp. This placed a relatively short timeframe on the understanding of the future, grounded in the career cycles of individuals and framing the organization as a 'project' (Account Manager). In contrast, those with an agency-oriented perspective would focus on the longer-term industry shifts that CreativeHub could contribute to, which placed a longer-term and less clearly defined limit on considerations about the future. As the group's Planning Director noted: 'we believe this can be a new model of working and could be very attractive to the advertising industry...demonstrating that is important if we're going to attract top people'.

A second point of temporal difference concerned the frequency of points at which progress was measured. The bank-oriented perspective drew on a relatively structured approach to benchmarking based on Fincorp's review cycles. This included demonstrating improved financial performance in Fincorp's quarterly Financial Review, project by project performance reviews and a bi-annual Agency Review meeting. This created a highly structured series of short-term markers from which success was measured. In contrast, the Agency-oriented perspective relied on more infrequent points, such as the pursuit of industry awards, media recognition, winning new contracts and attracting high-profile talent. The tension between

these was captured in a discussion during a meeting between an Account Manager, Planner, and Senior Planner about the allocation of resources that was being given towards submitting case reports to industry awards ceremonies.

AM: *‘Can we prioritise the audience impact reports for [Fintech contact]? I think they’re due ahead of the D&AD [industry award] submissions.’*

P: *‘I think we’re going to have to split out the workload on that. The award submissions are due next week but we have a really good shot this time and they only come up once a year.’*

SP: *‘Yes, I think we need to block off time for that. We can’t do it properly if we’re putting out fires with Fintech all the time.’*

From our analysis, we argue that these different ways of structuring conversations about time and urgency map onto the concepts of Temporal Depth – the distance in time that managers consider – and Temporal Horizons – the moments and waypoints that segment this overall depth. Table 3 maps the manner that this temporal structure was applied to the three ongoing issues identified in Table 2, above.

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TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

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From our observations, this marked a shift in the way in which paradox was processed. In discussing which issues to prioritize – rather than which was the correct course of action – managers softened their tone and adopted a more conciliatory approach. It also introduced greater awareness amongst managers about the temporal assumptions they held. This was

noted by an Art Director during an interview, referring to the practices of those in the organization who were more aligned with the bank: ‘they are just so focused on the day-to-day needs of clients, and don’t really give us the time or space to produce good work. But I do understand that we sort of exist because we can give Fincorp that attention’. Amongst all levels of the organization, individuals became more aware of their own temporal assumptions and more sensitive to those of others.

While this nascent temporal approach did change the way in which managers discussed the paradoxical tensions, conflict persisted. This took two forms. In day to day interaction, debates continued regarding which steps were a priority. This was captured in a discussion between an Account Manager and Traffic Manager about the amount of time being dedicated to the development of a new campaign over the production of a newsletter:

AM: *‘I know it’s difficult to give this resource, but it’s important to get it out this week’*

TM: *‘Yeah I understand that it’s due soon but we also have a few big things coming up...I’ll see if I can move someone on to it for a few hours’*

Alongside this, disagreement continued about the long-term aims of the organization. The existential nature of this question meant that it would normally appear in conversation between managers who aligned to similar paradigms, but would not naturally be brought up during conflict. This could be seen in a joint interview with two Copywriters who had moved to CreativeHub from a traditional advertising agency:

C1: *‘I think we want to be known for two things: great creative work, and growing an ad agency in an entirely new way.’*

C2: *‘Yeah, but that’s hard when you’re in an environment that is geared towards benchmarking every step of the process. It’s sort of anathema to great creative work.’*

Our findings at this stage highlighted the role that the commitment to a longer, continuous temporal depth allowed those aligned to the agency paradigm to accommodate irregular and infrequent temporal horizons. In contrast, the short, sequential temporal depth of the bank paradigm accommodated regular and highly predictable horizons. These differences in temporal structure resulted in ongoing tensions. For those aligned with the agency depth, frequent and regular horizons were seen as a ‘bureaucratic’ (Creative Director) distraction from the higher aims of the organisation. For those situated within the bank paradigm, the irregular horizons of the agency paradigm appeared ‘distant’ (Account Manager) and irrelevant. This interaction between the different temporal structures of each paradigm is captured in Figure 1.

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FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

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#### **4.4.5. Addressing Paradox Through Renegotiated Temporal Structures**

These tensions persisted over the course of T3, and became increasingly salient in interviews. Managers described the ongoing dynamics as ‘frustrating’ (Copywriter), ‘challenging’ (Account Executive) and ‘tiring’ (Creative Director). An interview with the Planning Director captured the ongoing strain particularly succinctly:

*‘Don’t get me wrong, there is a clear reason for us to exist: we clearly provide value to Fincorp and Commcorp. The challenge comes from the fact that providing that benefit to both of them takes a lot of ongoing work. It looks like a black box from the outside, but on the inside it looks like a cartoon fight – a cloud with fists and legs sticking out.’*

The beginning of T4, in October of 2018, saw a change in the senior leadership team. The most notable change was a new Managing Director tasked with ‘bedding us in and providing some stable growth’ (Planning Director). This created a window of opportunity to assess the organization’s strategic priorities and provide a new sense of direction before the Annual Review, which was due in late January 2019. The purpose of this review was to evaluate the performance of the organization to date and its future approach. There was a sense amongst the management team that the timing of the review made it more significant than it had been in the previous year: ‘We’re at the stage now where we can identify what was a teething problem, and what is more systemic. I think that makes it easier to identify what we need to change. There is a bit of a mandate to reset the things that aren’t working now that [the new Managing Director] has come in.’ (Account Director). One of the central aims of the review process was to set out ‘a really well articulated proposition for what we are doing’ (Planning Manager).

There was a recognition that this process would involve a strong temporal element. As was noted in an interview with the new Managing Director: ‘we need to develop a vision of the future, a clear picture of where we are aiming. Something that people can get behind and will capture what we’re doing here’.

***Negotiating Temporal Depth.*** This temporal element was brought out particularly strongly in discussions about the organization’s strategic proposition. CreativeHub’s Traffic Manager –

responsible for managing the allocation of work within the Creative and Strategy teams – noted that ‘you have to take into account what drives people. No self-respecting Creative Director wants to focus on the day to day of running a marketing department, but it’s equally frustrating for anyone seconded from Fincorp to focus far ahead when there are so many fires to put out’.

Discussions regarding temporal depth became central to the development of the revised strategic proposition. A consensus began to emerge that those who had joined the organization from the bank would need to relax their focus on short-term results and find value in the more distant future. This was highlighted in an interview with a Senior Planner, who discussed the way in which meetings were being run: ‘they just don’t understand that we are trying to build something new here. There is an entrepreneurial approach where we don’t limit ourselves or our ambition, but they just see this as a very functional exercise.’

Simultaneously, some managers raised concerns about the way in which those with an Agency background talked about their vision for the organization. This was captured in an interview with an Account Manager when discussing a description of CreativeHub – given by the former Managing Director – as a ‘brand-defining creative agency’: ‘I mean, it’s a bit nebulous, isn’t it? It’s not just the language, it’s that it’s so ill-defined. How and when do you measure that?’

These forces contributed to a sense that a degree of compromise was required on both sides. A revised temporal depth was developed that was facilitated through an adjustment to the temporal depth held by each side. On the one hand, managers aligned to the agency paradigm took steps to shorten and define the span into the future they considered. Simultaneously, those aligned with the bank paradigm softened and extended their considerations of the future, to take in a broader span of time. These revisions to previously held understandings of temporal depth were noted in discussions and interviews throughout T4.

*Shortening and defining Agency Depth.* Over the course of T4, managers began to refer to the future of the organization in narrower ways. This was first noted in a ‘All Hands’ meeting shortly after the arrival of the new Managing Director, in which they referred to the organization as ‘an exciting project – this is something that hasn’t really been done on this scale before’. This reference to CreativeHub as a ‘project’ was echoed in subsequent conversations with senior management, including references to CreativeHub as ‘an experiment’ (Senior Planner) and a ‘new sort of venture’ (Account Director). These terms marked a significantly shortened temporal depth, limiting visions of the future to the success of the organization’s medium-term relationship with Fincorp, rather than the longer depth of agency lifespans and career reputations in the advertising industry.

This shortened temporal depth was reinforced by the use of more defined temporal boundaries by senior management, providing managers with a defined reference point when considering the future. This was captured in a meeting between an Account Manager, the Planning Director and the Managing Director about the framing of the forward vision section of the annual review.

AM: *I think when you look at other agencies, take [agency x] or even [agency y], there’s this clearly defined vision: [agency x vision]. But what we have is so vague and open ended.*

MD: *Agreed. I think it’s important to remember that the main aim when this started was to build some energy. We’re moving into a new phase now where we need to be a bit more focused.*



AM: *I think that would help with our relationship with Fincorp too. The dividers between us are very porous, so whatever we say internally will be heard by people outside too.*

PD: *Pragmatic but without throttling the ambition too much, I think that's the aim of this exercise.*

MD: [PD] – *we talked briefly about focusing on targets, but using these sort of soft targets*

PD: *Yes, I think rallying around this idea of this being a project and seeing how far we can get in the next couple of years. We don't need to verbalise actual targets, but maybe focus the mind a bit more.*

*Softening Bank Depth.* The reference to the 'experimental' nature of the joint-venture had a dual-sided function. On the one hand, it shortened the expansive temporal depth of those working with the Agency paradigm. On the other hand, it appeared to soften the hard boundaries of temporal depth used by those working with the Bank paradigm. By adjusting the depth considered from bi-annual cycles with hard limits to a broader 'vision for the project' (Account Manager), those who had previously drawn on the Bank paradigm began to use a more expansive approach. An interview with the Traffic Manager captured this: 'Part of being in a service industry is that sometimes you know what is better for your client than they do. There is a reason Fincorp didn't simply hire people to work within their marketing department, and that is that we understand how to do this in ways that they don't – they will get better results if they give us that little bit of extra slack on the lead'. Similarly, an interview with an account manager noted that: 'we are still effectively competing with external agencies. We can't simply be a print shop, we need to add more value but that takes time to develop'.

This revised temporal depth – negotiated from an expansion of the depth associated with the bank paradigm, and a tighter definition of the depth associated with the Agency paradigm – was solidified throughout the ‘forward vision’ section of the internal review document. This referred to CreativeHub as: ‘A collaborative project... introducing a new way of working’. It made frequent references to a two-year timeframe: ‘CreativeHub has had a strong start... We’re well set up to grow over the next two years; producing our best work, delivering for Fincorp, and growing an agency to be proud of.’, ‘The next two years are our opportunity to deliver something radically different’.

***Accepting Mutual Interdependency of Temporal Horizons.*** Our analysis showed that – following the negotiation of a revised, shared temporal depth – managers began to understand the temporal horizons associated with each paradigm as interdependent in fulfilling the strategic vision. In observed discussions and follow-up interviews during T5, managers drew on the revised temporal depth of the strategic vision when discussing their own horizons and those of the opposing paradigm. Managers on either side of the original paradox drew on the revised vision to come to an understanding of the necessity of acting in line with both sets of temporal horizons. This was captured in a meeting between the Traffic Manager, and Account Manager and a Senior Planner regarding allocation of time to projects:

AM: *I think [individual within Fincorp] would like the report on media ROI for the quarterly.*

TM: *Yep – [Senior Planner] needs to be in Manchester and Birmingham for the focus groups this week, plus everyone needs time to get the ideas on the (B2B Proposition) launch prepared. Maybe we coul-*

AM: *Is there any way we can get that finished any sooner?*

SP: *We can get them something, but we (the planning team) need some more data and the creatives need some more refining time to create something really compelling.*

TM: *I think [Creative Director] is putting a lot into this one. There is rumour of extra business coming up with [International Business Banking division] so we need to impress on the B2B side. [Managing Director] is treating it as a bit of a proof-of-concept of what we can do.*

SP: *I think winning [this contract] is pretty crucial to steadying things next year.*

AM: *Okay, I'll push back a little bit on [individual within Fincorp] and see if we can use other data to make the ROI point. But we do need to have a look at locking in time every few months to deliver this too.*

Tensions between the frequent, short horizons of the bank paradigm – captured in the alignment to Fincorp's quarterly reporting – and the longer, irregular horizons of the Agency paradigm – found in the pursuit of reputable work and new business – are navigated by using the revised temporal depth as a point of reference. By referring to the revised depth, the Senior Planner and Traffic Manager are able to elicit a degree of understanding from the account manager about the importance of pursuing achievements measured at horizons typically associated with the Agency paradigm, rather than with the Bank paradigm. This use of a longer temporal depth provides room for a wider range of horizons, all contributing to fulfilling the notion of 'success' captured in the medium-term strategic vision.

The revised temporal depth also highlighted the value of shorter, frequent temporal horizons to those who had previously aligned to the Agency paradigm. By moving to a medium-term, clearly defined temporal depth of two years, the value of frequent horizons at regularly spaced intervals became apparent. This was captured in an interview with the group's Creative

Director, who noted that: ‘I think we started this with a bit of hubris about what we could achieve, but we don’t really have time to deliver traditional long-form campaigns. But there is still interesting work to be done, we just need to prove that we are useful to them (Fincorp) and build from there’. Similarly, an interview with a Senior Copywriter highlighted the shift in mentality that had been brought in by more defined temporal depth:

*‘I think part of the challenge for us is finding joy in quick-turn around, smaller, projects...but maybe this project is just a whole new way of being creative – it rewards wit and clarity over big, integrated campaigns...I think that work can be exciting in it’s own way, but it’s not what we’re used to’.*

#### **4.4.6. Sustained Paradox, Mitigated Tensions**

Combined, the act of negotiating a revised temporal depth and accepting the interdependency of different temporal horizons influenced how individuals processed the paradoxical forces between the agency and bank paradigms. By negotiating a shared understanding of temporal depth, managers were able to orient around a vision of the future that necessitated working to frequent, short term horizons (such as bank quarterly targets) and moments reached at less regular and more distant intervals (including achieving industry recognition and winning new business). Managers from the Bank paradigm were able to integrate a greater variety of temporal horizons under the revised temporal depth, which was broader than their own. In parallel, by moving to a clearly defined temporal depth, managers from the Agency paradigm were able to treat milestones at regular, frequent intervals as pressing and necessary. We have illustrated this in figure two, which captures the revised temporal depth as a locus for processing both sets of temporal horizons.

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FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

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Our findings suggest that this temporal structure helped to reduce conflict between the two paradigms, while maintaining their distinct demands on the organization. An important distinction in our findings, therefore, is that the temporal horizons associated with each paradigm were maintained. The presence of a common temporal depth that is sufficiently broad yet well-defined allowed for multiple temporalities to co-exist.

This revised temporal depth played an important role in allowing CreativeHub to pursue both the frequent and regular targets of the bank paradigm and the less frequent goals of the agency paradigm. Circumstances that previously drew out tensions between the two paradigms were now processed with reference to a shared temporal depth, allowing and/ or solutions to be facilitated more easily. This could be seen in an interaction between an Account Manager and Account Director regarding the allocation of time to new campaigns and pitches for new business:

AD: *I want to try to get [Senior Planner] on the B2B campaign too. I'll speak to [Traffic Manager] this afternoon about that.*

AM: *I think [Senior Planner] is pretty snowed under with the pitch for [digital proposition] this week. Maybe we could-*

AD: *[interjecting] -ah that's a good point. I think that's pretty important for us. I'll see if we can maybe bring in [Freelancer] for the next week so we can get both moving.*

This pursuit of and/both settlements appeared across the joint venture. In discussions regarding recruiting high-profile candidates for the creative team, discussions incorporated an admission that money did need to be spent, but that it would now have to represent value for money over the next two years. This allowed requirements of each side to be met through a compromise agreement in which the criteria for a new hire were changed. This was noted in an interview with one of the Creative Directors:

*'We've sort of shifted what we're looking for. Key thing is getting people in who can have a pretty immediate impact and take on some management roles. The idea of getting a famous big name in as a sort-of 'Creative Tsar' didn't go down well, but I'm just glad that we're going to spend some money.'*

Discussions regarding physically integrating CreativeHub within the Fincorp marketing department was similarly dealt with through a both/and approach. A settlement emerged in which Managers decided to 'keep our own sense of space' (Copywriter) while simultaneously creating a sense of perceived accessibility: 'we're trying to make it feel like we're very involved consultants. We have a hot-desking space in their office, and they have one in ours. We're also going to try out short-term secondments each way' (Traffic Manager).

We have outlined an illustrative set of these cases in Table 4. These discussions previously involved ongoing tensions between competing institutional demands (Table 2) and incompatible temporal structures (Table 3). The introduction of a shared mid-length temporal depth gave managers a framework with which to accommodate the demands of the other side. This resulted in a shift towards an and/both settlement.

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TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

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Interviews further reinforced the notion that managers drew on a shared temporal depth to accommodate previously competing temporal horizons. A Planning Director noted that: ‘I may not spend my whole career here, but this is an interesting project. Making it work will need us to do what we need to do to keep Fincorp happy’. Similarly, an Account Manager noted in a follow-up interview that ‘we’ve become better at losing that day-by-day mindset and giving them time to develop. It puts more pressure on us but it’s part of the job’. By accommodating both sets of horizons, managers were able to make decisions that satisfied both parent companies, an important condition for its survival.

While managers demonstrated an ability to accommodate the horizons of each side, interviews highlighted that this did not amount to a belief that the practices and objectives of each side were necessary or complementary. Managers understood that both frequent, short-term demands and infrequent, longer-term demands had to be met within the scope of the two-year vision; but did not fully transition to understanding the paradigms of the opposing side as necessary or complimentary to their own. A Planner noted in an interview that ‘They (Fincorp) are not colleagues of ours, and I don’t think we should think of them like that. But if our survival involves creating the illusion of being on the same team then that becomes part of the job’. Similarly, an account executive claimed, when discussing the amount of time being givent to creative teams, that: ‘their projects aren’t business critical, but we have to create the space to let them do that. Otherwise [those individuals in the Creative team] will all choose to leave in a few months’. While managers did not come to understand each other’s objectives

as necessary, they were able to functionally accommodate each other's temporal horizons, and the goals associated with these, within a shared temporal depth.

#### **4.5. Temporality in Paradox – Toward an Integrated Model**

Our analysis found that managers engaged with a paradox that was initially construed as atemporal using three temporal mechanisms: temporal reflexivity, temporal work, and a mutual appreciation of temporal horizons. We argue that collectively, these processes enabled managers within the joint venture to approach the paradox from a new perspective; minimising tensions while maintaining distinct elements of each paradigm. While these mechanisms have been identified in prior studies in the temporality literature, we argue that they collectively provide new pathways for understanding how paradox can be processed. We emphasise the mutual interdependency and necessity of each mechanism in the transition from managers' initial understanding of paradox to the development of an ambitemporal solution.

The first mechanism concerns the increasing salience of temporal structures in discussions regarding paradox. As tensions between the two paradigms became persistent and debilitating, managers achieved an interpretive shift by utilizing "*temporal reflexivity*" (Orlikowski and Yates, 2002; Tsoukas, 2009) to orient discussions on their temporal assumptions. This involved a recognition of the different temporal structures within each paradigm – allowing managers to articulate, understand and interrogate the assumptions about temporal depth and temporal horizons inherent in each paradigm. While prior studies have explored the role of temporal reflexivity in helping managers address differences in their approach (Reinecke and Ansari, 2015), our model goes further by demonstrating how this emerges organically out of a paradox that is initially construed by managers with little reference to temporality. Our case demonstrates how temporality becomes increasingly salient through discussions of sequencing and long term aims: as managers discussed which tasks to prioritise and what their more distant



aims were, they helped create a framework to process each other's understanding of time and temporal pressures. This resulted in an interpretive shift (Staudenmayer et al., 2002) where initial understandings were replaced with new understandings of their differences with temporality at their centre.

This temporal reflexivity enabled a second process to take place: an iterative reinterpretation of each paradigm's understanding of temporal depth, allowing for the creation of a new renegotiated understanding. This temporal renegotiation has echoes of Kaplan and Orlikowski's (2013) notion of "*temporal work*", in which managers are able to overcome differences in understandings by "reimagining the future", "rethinking the past" or "reconsidering present concerns" (2013, 976) to reach a provisional settlement that allowed managers to overcome latent tensions. While Kaplan and Orlikowski's work focused on tensions between temporal dimensions (the past-present-future spectrum), we argue that a process of "reimagining the future" can also help in contexts in which managers are faced with multiple possible understandings of the future. The revised temporal depth inherently changed the temporal structures of the paradox, resulting in a new shared temporal depth.

This process, which focused on the coherence of temporal structures across paradigms, was complimented by a third mechanism – the *mutual appreciation of temporal horizons* (Reinecke and Ansari, 2015) – which focused on maintaining heterogeneity across paradigms. The process of developing this mutual appreciation of alternate approaches is central to the notion that, to leverage the benefits of heterogeneity, managers must transcend (Bednarek et al., 2016; Fajoun, 2015) paradoxes and find a way to maintain elements of each pole. This involves a recognition that both poles are 'inextricably linked and mutually influential' (Chen and Miller, 2011, 23) such that the dominance of one practice would only be a 'pyrrhic victory' (Reinecke and Anasari, 2013, 639). Managers recognised that addressing both sets of horizons

would allow the joint venture to fulfil its role as both a creative agency and a seamless extension of the bank, a crucial requirement for the survival of the organization.

## **4.6. Discussion**

This paper set out to explore how managers can utilise temporal structures in addressing paradoxical demands. We argue that our findings raise important implications for both the paradox literature and the study of temporality. We conclude by exploring future paths for research.

### **4.6.1. Implications for the Paradox Literature**

Our work adds to a growing body of research that seeks to capture the phenomenological and ontological complexity of paradox (Schad and Bansal, 2019; Palermo et al., 2019) by ‘switching theoretical lenses’ (Nicolini, 2009: 18) to bring new dynamics to the fore. In doing so, we go beyond the ‘salient perceived tensions’ (Schad and Bansal, 2019: 3) of the case and explore the temporal structures and understandings that reinforce these tensions. Our case has shown that focusing on this temporal interplay provides important contributions to our understanding of paradox.

*Ambitemporality and quasi-transcendence.* By leveraging an ‘ambitemporal approach’ (Reineke and Ansari, 2015, 635) – which accommodates ‘seemingly contradictory temporal orientations’ (2015: 620) – managers were able to approach competing paradigms in a manner consistent with paradox theory’s pursuit of ‘and/both’ solutions (Poole and Van de Ven, 1989; Lewis, 2000). By working through the processes of temporal reflexivity, temporal work and developing a mutual appreciation for different temporal horizons, managers were able to accommodate distinct temporal horizons aligned to two conflicting paradigms. Rather than existing in competition (Ancona et al., 2001), managers treated these temporal horizons as

constituent of the revised temporal depth. Managers were able to work towards temporal horizons that originated from either paradigm, pursuing behaviours consistent with both sides of the original paradox.

While this process allows managers to work towards ‘both/and’ solutions, it does so without the cognitive requirement of transcendence that managers ‘view both paradigms of the paradox as necessary and complementary’ (Bednarek et al., 2016: 78). Managers used the revised temporal depth to accommodate the temporal horizons of each side, without fully embracing the opposing paradigm as necessary or complementary. We argue that this ‘*quasi-transcendence*’ – in which individuals accommodate the opposing demands associated with each paradigm without understanding of each as necessary – allows managers to fulfil demands from both paradigms while mitigating tensions.

As in the pursuit of transcendence, managers were able to maintain and address the distinct paradigms of each side to fulfil their dual role (Farjourn, 2015; Jarzabkowski et al., 2015; Smith et al, 2017). By deconstructing opposing demands into their temporal structures, managers were able to develop a more nuanced approach, negotiating shared elements while keeping others distinct. Doing so allowed for a sustained interplay between demands on both sides of the institutional divide; an outcome that was not possible when managers focused on the binary surface-level tensions. In discussions regarding hiring, for example, a shared temporal depth of two-years allowed managers to accommodate both the regular, frequent budgetary horizons of the bank paradigm and the less frequent recognition-focused horizons associated with the agency paradigm. Through this, managers were able to develop a provisional settlement, while maintaining their respective interests and horizons.

We argue that, in cases where managers are unable to alter their understanding of opposing demands, an approach focused on the interplay of temporal structures can allow managers to

accommodate and pursue conflicting goals. This is particularly relevant in organizations confronting institutional complexity, where expectations are underpinned by deep institutional norms (Greenwood et al., 2011; Kraatz and Block, 2008).

***Temporal Processes in Paradox.*** Our work provides a process-led (Langley et al., 2017) model of how temporal structures become the salient lens for addressing paradoxical tensions, and the subsequent temporal mechanisms that managers use to address competing demands.

Our work shows that through a growing ‘temporal reflexivity’ (Giddens, 1990; Orlikowski and Yates, 2002; Reinecke and Ansari, 2015; Tsoukas, 2009) managers become aware of the differences in the temporal structures of each paradigm, the assumptions they hold, and their ability to contest the appropriateness of these assumptions. In our case, this emerged organically as managers began to focus on which tasks to prioritise, rather than which to pursue. Through these discussions, managers surfaced the underlying structures of temporal depth and temporal horizons. Crucially, this process resulted in managers becoming aware of the ‘potential for reinforcing and altering’ these temporal structures (Orlikowski and Yates, 2002: 698). While managers didn’t use the vocabulary of temporal structures, they were able to identify the differences in the overall span of time considered and the intervals that broke these up. This made it possible for discussions to focus on the validity and appropriateness of the assumptions they held about time. In practice, this manifested itself as discussions about the how far into the future they needed to consider, and whether immediate, regular demands were more important than less regular expectations.

We show how this temporal reflexivity enabled a subsequent process of temporal work (Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013; Weibe, 2010; Wood et al., 2019), allowing for the mutual appreciation of temporal horizons (Chen and Miller, 2011; Reinecke and Ansari, 2015). By renegotiating a strategic vision with a shared temporal depth, managers were able to appreciate

and accommodate the horizons of each side. Collectively, these mechanisms represent an ‘interpretive shift’ (Staudenmayer et al., 2002), which allows managers to explore conflicting paradigms through their complex temporal structures. The multi-faceted nature of temporal structures allows for more complex interplay than between the binary demands that exist in surface level tensions. Early in the case, discussions regarding whether or not to proceed with a course of action drew heavily on institutional understandings of what success looked like. These often resulted in binary ‘either/or’ debates, with managers supporting the course of action (or inaction) that fitted best with their understanding of success. By breaking these understandings into their respective temporal depth and horizons, it became possible to negotiate a shared aspect (in this case, a shared depth at a compromise length of two years), which accommodated both sets of horizons. Through this shared structure, it was possible for managers to resolve tensions and come to provisional settlements, while maintaining the distinct expectations of each side. This work extends research into the interplay of temporal structures in resolving tensions (Schultz and Hernes, 2019) by developing a process-driven model of the mechanisms that enable such interplay.

#### **4.6.2. Implications for study of Temporality**

*Temporal work and the interplay of temporal structures.* The processes identified in this case rely on both the interplay between different temporal structures and the reflexive ability of managers – that is, their awareness of their ‘potential for reinforcing and altering’ them (Orlikowski and Yates, 2002: 698). Our analysis found that a sustained interplay was only possible once managers had altered the underlying temporal structure. A revised temporal depth accommodated the temporal horizons of both groups, allowing managers to appreciate their interdependencies.

Several recent papers (Chen et al, 2019; Operti et al., 2019; Schultz and Hernes, 2019) have emphasised the form and interplay of temporal structures in facilitating ambitemporality. This case supports a scholarly sub-group that emphasises the role that managerial sensemaking has in shaping the interplay between these temporal structures. Managers adjusted and aligned their temporal assumptions through a process of temporal reflexivity (Orlikowski and Yates, 2002), and temporal work (Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013).

Our analysis proposes that such temporal work should focus on developing a shared temporal depth that can accommodate both sets of horizons. Consistent with Bluedorn and Martin (2006), we argue that extending a narrow and tightly defined temporal depth can provide managers with scope to incorporate a wider range of temporal horizons. We also show that replacing expansive and vague temporal depths with a strategic vision containing clearly defined limits provides managers with a structure with which to frame frequent, short-term horizons as salient and pressing. This is consistent the findings of Schultz and Hernes (2019), which found that reconceptualising organizational identity with more explicitly defined temporal depths enabled a sustained interplay with strategic horizons (2019: 129). In cases where temporal structures vary significantly, developing a mid-length shared temporal depth can allow managers to accommodate the horizons of each side, mitigating tensions and allowing outcomes at both sets of horizons to be met.

#### **4.7. Limitations and Future Research**

We acknowledge that our use of a single-site participant observation led study brings inherent limitations. Our choice of methodology for this study was intended to increase the richness of data and provide insights into the unfolding of processes over time (Nicolini, 2010). The lessons from this case are intended to be a theory-building (Lee et al., 1999) exploration of the role temporal structures and temporal reflexivity have in the processing of paradoxical

demands. In doing so, however, we recognise that we have limited the generalizability of our findings. We recognise that parts of our analysis could be furthered by research that adopts a positivist, hypothesis-testing epistemology. In particular, this could be used to solidify our understanding of the link between temporal depth and temporal horizon diversity.

Further research may be needed to establish the long-term sustainability of the temporally reflexive process outlined in our case. As detailed in our analysis above, the mutual appreciation of temporal horizons was an ongoing process of ‘reinforcing’ (Orlikowski and Yates, 2002) the fit between both sets of temporal horizons and the revised temporal depth, underpinned by the recognition that both were ‘inextricably linked and mutually influential’ (Chen and Miller, 2011, 23). Whether this ongoing process was sufficiently stable to be maintained over the long term could not be captured within the scope of this study. Further research could explore the socio-cognitive forces and processes that contribute to the maintenance of a mutual appreciation of temporal horizons.

Finally, we acknowledge that our model in this case is not exhaustive. As was discussed in the front half of this paper, research has shown that a number of additional forces can contribute to the manner in which managers process paradox. This can include organizational identity (Jay, 2013; Smith and Lewis, 2011), environmental demands (Cameron and Quinn, 1988), and cognitive frames (Hahn et al., 2014; Putnem et al., 2016; Schad et al., 2016). These forces were not observed during our fieldwork, but the extensive body of literature on these topics suggests that they could concurrently influence how the organization processes paradox. Further research could explore the interplay between the temporal mechanisms identified in this study and topics such as identity and framing on managers’ responses to the paradoxes inherent in hybrid organizing.

## 4.8. Tables and Figures

**Table 1: Latent Tensions**

	Agency Paradigm	Bank Paradigm
Nature of Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Industry reputational gains through creative recognition</li> <li>• Revenue growth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reputational gains within Fincorp – to be seen as a reliable and effective extension</li> <li>• Cost efficiency</li> </ul>
Relationship with Parent Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deliberately external to Fincorp</li> <li>• Aim to replicate a client-service relationship</li> <li>• Treatment of individuals within Fincorp as ‘clients’</li> <li>• Emphasise expertise and independence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heavily integrated secondary resource for Fincorp</li> <li>• Belief that individuals in Fincorp should be treated as ‘colleagues’</li> <li>• Emphasis on speed, responsiveness and compliance with Fincorp</li> </ul>

**Table 2: Ongoing Intra-Paradigm Tensions**

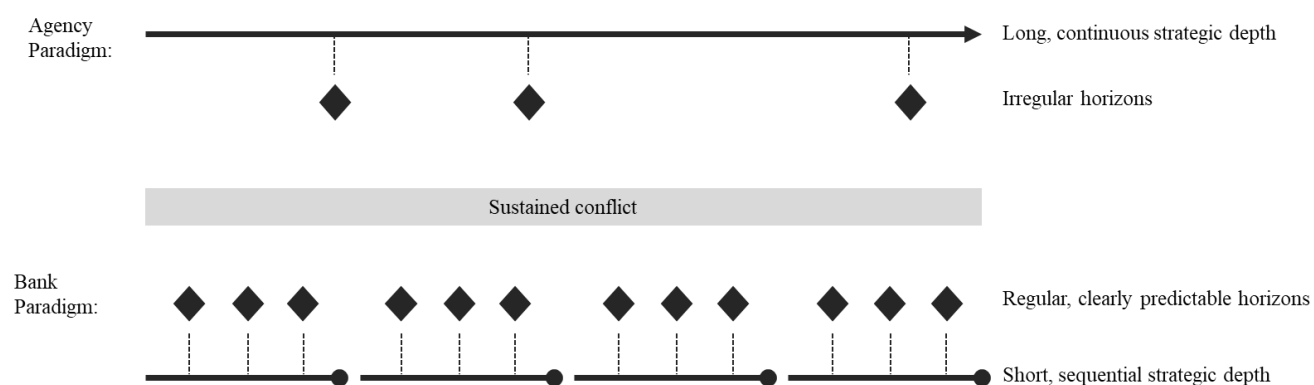
Ongoing Topic	Response
Discussions regarding recruiting high profile candidates for the creative team.	<b>Agency:</b> <i>Broadly positive</i> . Emphasis on the reputational gains that would raise the profile of Creative Hub. Prospect of further recognition through industry awards.
	<b>Bank:</b> <i>Hesitant</i> . Discussions cited the expense and the issue of efficiency in the annual reports. Emphasis on getting better value for money.
Opportunities to pitch for new work with other divisions of Fincorp.	<b>Agency:</b> <i>Positive</i> . A focus on pursuing opportunities to secure sustainable revenue. Concern emanating from the instability of the advertising market.
	<b>Bank:</b> <i>Hesitant</i> . Concern about short term capacity issues. Emphasis on fulfilling ‘primary duties’ (Account Manager) over pursuing additional work.
Discussions regarding use of office space. Frequent and ongoing discussion about greater physical integration with Fincorp.	<b>Agency:</b> <i>Resistant</i> . Focus on maintaining creative independence and maintaining the distinct reputation of the agency. Concern that greater integration would undermine the value of Creative Hub as a source of external expertise.
	<b>Bank:</b> <i>Positive</i> . Focus on an anticipated increase in responsiveness, a better understanding of the needs of Fincorp, and greater ability to deliver on



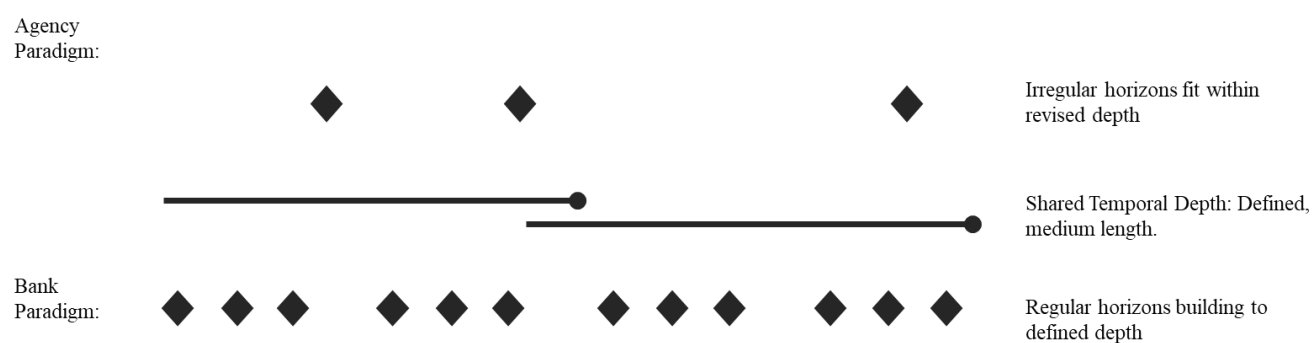
**Table 3: Ongoing Intra-Paradigm Tensions**

Ongoing Topic	Response	Temporal Depth	Temporal Horizons
Discussions regarding recruiting high profile candidates for the creative team.	<b>Agency:</b> Broadly positive. Emphasis on the reputational gains that would raise the profile of Creative Hub. Prospect of further recognition through industry awards.	<b>Agency:</b> <i>Long and ill-defined.</i> Focus on improved reputation at an undefined point in the future.	<b>Agency:</b> <i>Irregular, infrequent.</i> Markers for gains are loosely-defined and irregular. Including: positive press, awards, positive word-of-mouth.
	<b>Bank:</b> Hesitant. Discussions cited the expense and the issue of efficiency in the annual reports. Emphasis on getting better value for money.	<b>Bank:</b> <i>Short.</i> References to budgetary concerns were made with reference to quarterly financial review.	<b>Bank:</b> <i>Regular and frequent.</i> Clearly defined reporting cycles at short quarterly intervals.
Opportunities to pitch for new work with other divisions of Fincorp.	<b>Agency:</b> Enthusiastic. A focus on pursuing opportunities to secure sustainable revenue. Concern emanating from the instability of the sector.	<b>Agency:</b> <i>Medium to Long.</i> Focus on sustained growth and alternative sources for funding if existing contracts are reduced in future years.	<b>Agency:</b> <i>Infrequent.</i> Belief that most client-contracts are stable for 'a few years' Account Director.
	<b>Bank:</b> Hesitant. Concern about short term capacity issues. Emphasis on fulfilling 'primary duties' (Account Manager) over pursuing additional work.	<b>Bank:</b> <i>Very short.</i> Capacity concerns were voiced regarding the present and immediate future. Fears that existing projects couldn't be fulfilled if staff worked on pitch.	<b>Bank:</b> <i>Frequent.</i> All existing projects had short intervals and regular project check-ins.
Discussions regarding use of office space. Frequent and ongoing discussion about greater physical integration with Fincorp.	<b>Agency:</b> Resistant. Focus on maintaining creative independence and maintaining the distinct reputation of the agency. Concern that greater integration would undermine the value of Creative Hub as a source of external expertise.	<b>Agency:</b> <i>Long and ill-defined.</i> Concern regarding image and identity of the organization. Belief that Creative Hub must visibly remain 'to some degree' (Planner) independent and external to nurture this.	<b>Agency:</b> <i>Irregular.</i> Horizons are not clearly defined. Identity and reputational factors referred to during pitches, recruitment and award season.
	<b>Bank:</b> Positive. Focus on an anticipated increase in responsiveness, a better understanding of the needs of Fincorp, and greater ability to deliver on	<b>Bank:</b> <i>Short.</i> Focus on efficiencies and positive reviews in in quarterly and annual reporting.	<b>Bank:</b> <i>Regular.</i> Focus on improved reviews from Fincorp in quarterly and annual reports.

**Figure 1: Interplay of Temporal Structures**



**Figure 2: Interplay of Distinct Horizons with renegotiated Temporal Depth**



**Table 3: Application of revised Temporal Depth to Ongoing Discussions**

Ongoing Topic	Temporal Depth	Temporal Horizons	Settlement
Discussions regarding recruiting high profile candidates for the creative team.	Tightly defined, shared temporal depth of two years.	<b>Agency:</b> <i>Irregular, infrequent.</i> Markers for gains are loosely-defined and irregular. Including: positive press, awards, positive word-of-mouth.	Concession that any hire needs to represent ‘value for money’ in the space of two years. Recognition that a senior hire would represent an investment. Recruitment moves from ‘high profile’ to ‘experienced’ hires with additional responsibilities.
		<b>Bank:</b> <i>Regular and frequent.</i> Clearly defined reporting cycles at short quarterly intervals.	
Opportunities to pitch for new work with other divisions of Fincorp.		<b>Agency:</b> <i>Infrequent.</i> Belief that most client-contracts are stable for ‘a few years’ Account Director.	Ambition to jointly pursue new business pitches without compromising existing projects. Efforts include increasing capacity by hiring short-term freelancers and developing workflow plans that create sufficient slack for new
		<b>Bank:</b> <i>Frequent.</i> All existing projects had short intervals and regular project check-ins.	
Discussions regarding use of office space. Frequent and ongoing discussion about greater physical integration with Fincorp.		<b>Agency:</b> <i>Irregular.</i> Horizons are not clearly defined. Identity and reputational factors referred to during pitches, recruitment and award season.	Movement from physically integrating Creative Hub within the Fincorp marketing team to maintaining separate space while increasing perceived integration. Steps taken include account managers working in Fincorp marketing teams and secondments from Creative Hub to Fincorp.
		<b>Bank:</b> <i>Regular.</i> Focus on improved reviews from Fincorp in quarterly and annual reports.	

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## 5. Concluding Remarks

The three papers that make up this thesis have sought to understand the form and interplay of frames and temporal structures in managerial efforts to make sense of complex and multifaceted change. A central thread through this work is an exploration of how multiple, often conflicting perspectives within firms interact, and the impact these have on organizational-level outcomes. This heterogeneity can take the form of differences in frames held (paper one), temporal orientation (paper two), and temporal structures (paper three). A finding central to each of these pieces of research is that such heterogeneity can not only be maintained, but in some cases leveraged to help organizations cope with the competing demands that accompany change.

I hope to continue this research into intra-firm frame heterogeneity in my new position as a Research Fellow at the Saïd Business School, University of Oxford. In this role, I will focus on further developing papers two and three, with an aim to publish this research in leading journals. I will also continue to pursue two (early stage) projects that I hope will expand on the research developed in this thesis.

The first project explores the role of frames and framing in the UK Cabinet Office during an ongoing effort to radically transform the structure and operating model for much of the Civil Service. I have been conducting participant-observation based research since July 2019 with the Strategic Frameworks team, who report to Number 10 and are responsible for coordinating and leading change efforts across government. I plan to continue fieldwork over the next year. I hope that the various data sets from this project will provide a rich basis for understanding how managers in large, complex organizations understand and process

radical planned change. My analysis from the data I have collected so far focuses on how bottom-up framing and top-down sensegiving are used to enact and maintain a form of constructed ambiguity. Initial findings suggest that such a practice is useful for both lower and upper levels of management, allowing managers to commit to change projects while also providing a basis for flexibility as political priorities change.

My second project explores managerial responses to fast-changing market conditions in early-stage firms. The research is conducted in conjunction with the Creative Destruction Lab, an early-stage incubator for organizations developing novel applications for machine-learning technologies. Of particular interest with this project is the framing mechanisms that managers use in contexts where the nature of the market is fundamentally unknown. Early analysis has explored the impact different framing approaches have on the ability of the organization to adapt and pivot as new information is taken on board.