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Published in:
Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes

DOI:
[10.1016/j.obhdp.2019.03.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2019.03.002)

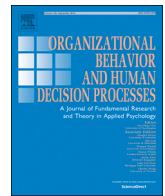
Published: 01/11/2019

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

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Please cite the original version:
Gylfe, P., Franck, H., & Vaara, E. (2019). Living with paradox through irony. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 155, 68-82. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2019.03.002>

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Living with paradox through irony[☆]

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ABSTRACT

In organizations, people have to deal with and manage a variety of paradoxes, and this may involve using discursive means such as irony. However, we still know little about the association between irony and paradox in concrete organizational interaction. Our analysis builds on an ethnographic study of journalists and producers at YLE, the Finnish public service broadcaster. On the basis of our analysis, we argue that contradictions are co-constructed with three different forms of irony: inversive, subversive, and dramatic. This leads us to develop a more general model that helps explain how irony may be used and may move discussions from one phase to another. Especially, we show how irony puts contradictions into context through management strategies called ‘connecting.’ Through ‘connecting’ management strategies organizational members give voice to, energize and embrace poles that are in opposition in contradictions. By so doing, our analysis supplies a missing piece to our understanding of how organizational members deal with paradox and adds to research on irony in organizations.

1. Introduction

Paradox has quickly become a key topic in organization and management research for good reason; life in organizations is often characterized by contradictions and ways of coping (Putnam, Fairhurst, & Banghart, 2016; Smith & Lewis, 2011) that surface on all levels of organizations (Schad, Lewis, Raisch, & Smith, 2016; Smith, 2014). Hence the recent proliferation of research has helped us understand how a paradox lens can be used in explaining a variety of organizational phenomena (Schad et al., 2016) and how tensions, contradictions, and clear-cut paradoxes are constituted in organizations (Putnam et al., 2016). Instead of concentrating on how to resolve paradoxes, the recent focus has been on how people in organizations cope with and relate to them (Cunha & Putnam, 2017; Putnam et al., 2016). One of the ways in which organizational members deal with paradox in interaction is irony (Hatch & Erhlich, 1993; Hatch, 1997; Oswick, Keenoy, & Grant, 2002; Oswick, Putnam, & Keenoy, 2004; Sillince & Golant, 2017).

However, we still know little of the association between irony and paradox in concrete organizational settings. To partially bridge this research gap, we aim to elucidate how different forms of irony may be linked with contradictions in organizational interaction. For this purpose, we argue that paradox and irony are co-constituted in organizational discourse in micro-level interaction. In this view, paradox entails contradictions that persist over time and develop into seemingly irrational or absurd situations (Putnam et al., 2016). However, our understanding of how this association between paradox and irony plays out in concrete organizational interaction remains underdeveloped. This is the theoretical conundrum that we deal with in our paper.

In our paper we follow Putnam et al. (2016) and define paradoxes as “contradictions that persist over time, impose and reflect back on each other, and develop into seemingly irrational or absurd situations because their continuity creates situations in which options appear mutually exclusive, making choices among them difficult” and contradictions as “bipolar opposites that are mutually exclusive and interdependent such that the opposites define and potentially negate each other.” In addition, we define tensions that often accompany contradictions as “stress, anxiety, discomfort, or tightness in making choices, responding to, and moving forward in organizational situations” (Putnam et al., 2016:69–72). These definitions are important as they help us to navigate the complex terrain of concepts related to paradox.

To elucidate how organizational members cope with paradoxes through irony we draw on an ethnographic study of journalists at YLE, the Finnish public service broadcaster. Using a discourse analysis of meetings and other interactions between producers and journalists, we focused on how organizational actors were able to deal with contradictions at YLE. These contradictions stemmed from different views of the scope and nature of high-quality journalism, the tensions between the key people involved (especially between managers and journalists), different ways of seeing and relating to in-depth journalistic inquiry in the organization and in the media field more generally, and fundamental differences in values and ideologies related to the journalists’ careers. In our analysis, we focused on a number of episodes where irony was used to make sense of contradictions. In this paper, we offer in-depth illustrations of two such episodes. In particular, we found that contradictions were co-constructed with three different forms of irony:

[☆] This work was supported by the Foundation for Economic Education in Finland.

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inversive, subversive, and dramatic irony. Furthermore, we demonstrate how the use of irony varied as the discussions moved from one phase to another. On the basis of this empirical analysis, we develop a more general process model that helps explain the association among types of irony and contradictions as they are co-constructed in organizational discussions.

By so doing, our analysis extends prior research on paradox by highlighting its linkage with irony, thus supplying a missing piece to our understanding of the phenomenon (Putnam et al., 2016; Schad et al., 2016; Sillince & Golant, 2017). Our analysis, and in particular our model, help explain how paradox is often embraced through irony. Furthermore, our analysis supports the view that tensions exist as an interplay between opposing poles (Putnam et al., 2016), and we suggest that irony and the use of specific responses allow organizational members to enact the interplay of opposing poles within a paradoxical context. Although there are likely to be other more complex and nuanced linkages between irony and paradox, we maintain that this model helps advance our theoretical understanding and can thus serve as a basis for future research – both theoretical and empirical. Our analysis also adds to research on irony and humor in organizations per se (Hatch & Erhlich, 1993; Hatch, 1997; Jarzabkowski & Lê, 2017; Oswick et al., 2004). This is important, because relative to its potential, the use of irony has received limited empirical attention (Oswick et al., 2004; Real & Putnam, 2005; Rodrigues & Collinson, 1995).

2. Towards an understanding of the association of irony and paradox

2.1. Contradictions as the key to understanding paradoxes

In this paper we follow the notion that contradiction is best seen as an ontological prerequisite for paradox. Contradictions are thus important building blocks for paradoxes as they contain mutually exclusive bipolar opposites that define and negate each other (Putnam et al., 2016:70). Paradoxes in turn consist of a constant interplay between the push-pull forces of opposing poles. Hence, as we study how journalists cope with contradictions, we look mainly at how journalists manage the ongoing interplay of poles in opposition.

Research on paradox contends that organizational members often cope with tensions and contradictions in three predominate ways (Putnam et al., 2016). First, they can adopt an ‘either-or’ strategy where they give primacy to one pole over the other. ‘Either-or’ strategies can be characterized by defense (e.g. Lewis, 2000), selection (e.g. Seo, Putnam, & Bartunek, 2004), or separation (e.g. Poole & Van de Ven, 1989). Second, they can adopt a ‘both-and’ strategy where they treat poles as if they were inseparable or interdependent (Putnam et al., 2016; Smith & Lewis, 2011). Third, they may construct a contradiction through ‘more-than’ coping strategies, where they move outside or situate themselves in a new relationship (Putnam et al., 2016:128) in relation to contradicting poles.

Our study focuses on how organizational members interrelate tensions and contradictions through ‘more-than’ strategies. We look at how moment-by-moment lived experiences of contradictions (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, 162) entail ‘more-than’ coping strategies that allow organizational members to spell out how contradictions are interrelated. Such ‘more-than’ strategies for tensions and contradictions highlight the importance of not merely noticing that paradoxes contain tensions and contradictions, but that the dynamic interplay between poles in opposition allows individuals to relate to paradox (Putnam, 2004:41). Irony has been identified as one form of ‘more-than’ strategy through which individuals can cope with paradoxes (Putnam et al., 2016), and it is this link that we elaborate on in this paper.

2.2. Irony and contradictions

Irony is a use of language where a speaker depicts something in a

“contradictory way, that is, it calls on the reader or recipient to interpret the message in a way that is opposite of what is said” (Oswick et al., 2004: 107). When skillfully used irony may make underlying meanings visible through humor, understatement or sarcastic commentary (Oswick et al., 2004).

Understanding the link between irony and contradiction is important for two reasons: first, irony is an important way through which organizational members can express struggles in their work and second, irony allows organizational members to set daily struggles in a broader paradoxical context. By focusing on how organizational members use irony, we can thus increase our understanding of the linked tensions and contradictions, and the strategies used to cope with paradox. Irony has been deemed as central to identifying the form of dissonance faced by organizational members (Oswick et al., 2004). Given that irony provides a deeper understanding of the underlying rationalities in clashing discourses, it seems paramount to develop insight into how it is used to improve our understanding of how tensions are related to paradox. While irony increases understanding of contradictions and tensions it is at the same time a means for organizational members to move forward. Nevertheless, although irony often has no direct ‘outcomes’ in the form of correspondences or symmetries between clashing discourses (Brown, 1977:220), it may be a way for organizational members to cope with clashes. When used, irony may provide a shock to interaction and may offer a brief escape (Oswick et al., 2004:121) from stressful clashes.

However, the association between contradictions and irony is still poorly understood. This is surprising given the fact that contradictions and paradoxes involve discursive elements identical or very similar to those included in irony. We argue that this linkage is not merely important for conceptual clarification; it may also inform us specifically about how contradictions are put into a paradoxical context and how specific forms of irony can be used to understand the links between contradiction and paradox. We acknowledge that there are many ways in which irony is connected to contradiction. In the following, however, we promote a view where specific forms of irony allow participants to relate differently to the push-pulls between poles in the contradiction. We thus investigate specifically how forms of irony are used to construct the linkages between poles. We analyze how the continuous interplay of multiple push-pulls is enacted through forms of irony.

Previous research has recognized irony as a ‘more-than’ coping strategy where organizational members engage in reflective practice and juxtapose opposites (Putnam et al., 2016:76). Some scholars have taken a humor perspective and looked at how at how irony and comic relief develop reflective practices (Hatch, 1997; Jarzabkowski & Lê, 2017). In reflective more-than strategies tensions are used to open meanings to multiple interpretations and to engage multiple voices (Barge, Lee, Maddux, Nabring, & Townsend, 2008; Huxham & Beech, 2003). However, studies to date have not unpacked how irony, in the context of paradox, works in interaction and how it ties in with other more-than approaches. Hence, it is important to understand how irony relates to other more-than responses such as: connection, which embraces and draws energy from poles in opposition (Seo et al., 2004), transcending, where opposing forces shift outside boundaries to different levels of meaning (Janssens & Steyaert, 1999; Seo et al., 2004) and reframing, where a dynamic interplay between poles in opposition forms a new whole or novel perspective (Seo et al., 2004). By understanding how irony relates to other more-than strategies we can develop the specifics how irony functions with paradox and understand how irony complements other more-than strategies. It is towards the backdrop of multiple more-than responses of coping with paradox that we posit our first research question:

Research question 1: How is irony used as a type of more-than strategy in responding to tensions, contradictions and paradoxes?

In addition, paradoxes also unfold and develop differently

depending on the phase of interaction (Jarzabkowski, Lê, & Van de Ven, 2013; Panayiotou, Putnam, & Kassinis, 2017; Haddadj, 2006). Interaction phases may vary when participants cope with tensions that contain immediate challenges, compared to moments when challenges are less pressing. Reaction to paradox may look very different when participants experience an emotionally charged situation. Thus, in some phases, interaction may be more active whilst in others more passive (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013). While phases of interaction are sometimes represented in a linear fashion, they may also unfold in a non-linear way, where participants repeatedly alternate between discourses from different interaction phases (Panayiotou et al., 2017).

By examining how irony changes as tension-based episodes unfold we can increase our understanding of how organizational members go through suppressing or adjusting phases as they cope with paradox (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013), and how they experience reframing or selecting phases (Panayiotou et al., 2017). Also, Jarzabkowski et al. (2013) argue that organizational members may choose to react through defensive phases, which in turn may lead to vicious cycles with paradoxes. An analysis of the phases that organizational members go through as they cope with tensions may shed light on how such defensive reactions unfold. Thus, in light of previous research on phases of reactions to tensions we aim to increase our understanding of the micro-interactions in different tensions phases and we thus set up our second research question:

Research question 2: How does the use of irony in response to tensions and contradictions evolve or change as a situation/episode develops?

3. Case and analytical method

3.1. Case and data collection

Our analysis is based on an ethnography of journalists working at the Finnish national broadcaster YLE. Given its relative financial independence (compared with commercial media organizations in Finland), YLE is the main producer of documentary and investigative content in Finland and employees at YLE value the relative independence enjoyed by it. YLE is funded through a public television tax in Finland and television programs are thus free of commercial advertising. However, while journalists at YLE are financially independent of commercial revenue, they remain dependent on high audience ratings. For example, TV audiences would react negatively if journalists at YLE would broadcast a low-quality documentary on prime time. The journalists thus experience a paradox where they have been granted financial independence to produce creative documentaries, but need to conform to ensure high audience ratings. In the worst case, if audiences are not pleased with the journalistic content produced by YLE they can lobby for a reduction of tax funding. Also, during the past decade YLE has gone through multiple rounds of cost-cutting; ever tighter budgets with which the journalists must operate have been the result. Since YLE is the only public service broadcaster in Finland, the journalists need to live up to constant expectations of quality. The Finnish public repeatedly casts a scrutinizing eye on what YLE is producing, asking whether YLE is doing the right things with taxpayers' money.

YLE is thus rooted in such paradoxes entailing large scale contradictions of financial independence/dependence and content driven/audience driven journalism. These two large scale paradoxes reflect back on each other since recognizing, on the one hand, that YLE is financially independent, on the other hand, implies that journalists still need to adhere to audience preferences. Such paradoxes permeate the entire organization and journalists struggle between wanting to be content focused, while at the same time valuing what audiences want to view. On the micro-level such large scale organizational level paradoxes often lead to absurd situations where options appeared exclusive and choices of how to act became difficult.

We were fortunate to gain full access to 69 meetings and discussions

of journalists and producers. This led to an intensive ethnographic study where two researchers in the capacity of non-participant observers shadowed five producers for a total of 116 h. We shadowed producers in five areas of production: fact-based programs, investigative journalism, documentaries, entertainment, and talk shows (McDonald, 2005). Shadowing involved following producers while they worked at their desks, attended and chaired meetings, made telephone calls, and chatted in corridors. The broader data set also included other material such as interviews, internal documents, and intranet discussions. These provided us with a deeper understanding of how journalists experienced the multiple contradictions in their work.

Work at YLE was characterized by tight budgets and socially important topics. The documentary journalists we shadowed focused on topics that commercial channels were often reluctant to document in detail, such as human trafficking, homelessness, environmental crime, economic crime, and health care fraud. The documentary journalists seemed stressed by having to work on such important topics with tight budgets. The documentary journalists also saw themselves as being driven by different logics than the channel managers at YLE. Channel managers were professionals who decided which program should be screened when. The documentary journalists saw channel managers as being interested in broadcasting quick and entertaining programs, while the documentary journalists regarded themselves as being involved in in-depth investigations of social issues. Thus, there were often struggles between documentary journalists and channel managers at YLE.

3.2. Analytical approach

We combined an organizational discourse analytic (ODA) approach (Fairhurst and Putnam, 2004) with ethnographic analysis. Our analysis of how organizational members experience and deal with paradox is based on an ODA approach and the view that language is constitutive of organizing. The constitutive view of language contains that language is not only a key to how tensions and contradictions develop, but that language sets the conditions for how actors appropriate tensions and contradictions in organizations (Putnam et al., 2016:77). We look specifically at discourses in the forms of text (Fairclough, 1995; Taylor & van Every, 2000) and how sociocultural contexts help us understand clashes in discourse. While our analytical steps share characteristics of both grounded theory (rich descriptions, in-vivo coding, and developing categories) and ODA (looking at patterns of discourse, careful attention to words, linking repertoires to interpretive claims) as outlined in Fairhurst and Putnam (2018), we stress guidelines from ODA as we look primarily at the patterns of discourse in the experience of paradox.

In our analysis we followed and actively iterated between six steps leading to a conceptual model. First, we identified clashes in discourses and the poles in opposition that occurred in interaction (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2018:8). Poles in opposition in the data were rooted in the ethnographic context and thus we often bridged the gap between how the journalists experienced a clash and what such clashes meant in the broader context of working at YLE. While intense expressions such as “bloody news people,” “pretty stupid shot,” and “they’re not morons” were important for analysis of poles in opposition, we used data before and after the meeting as well as our ethnographic understanding of the nature of the journalists' work at YLE to understand why discourses were clashing. As we identified poles in opposition in our data, we conceptualized them in the form of push-pulls describing the clash.

Second, we looked for tensions and contradictions in the data by analyzing diametrically opposing discourses that journalists used that revealed tensions and then examined them in light of how they related to each other in language categories. This allowed us to look at the language categories represented by poles in opposition. As we identified contradictions, we analyzed whether poles were logically interdependent and whether they negated each other, i.e. whether they were

Table 1
Definitions of key concepts.

Concept	Definition	Quote	Oppositions in play
Tension	Stress, anxiety, discomfort, or tightness in making choices, responding to, and moving forward in organizational situations (Putnam et al., 2016)	“You had time for four questions! ... I suppose this will do” (Example 1: lines 40–43)	Proud/modest: The journalists remained modest after successfully filming the President. They were careful not to be proud about their performance, given the uncertainty of the outcome
Contradiction	Bipolar opposites that are mutually exclusive and interdependent such that the opposites define and potentially negate each other (Putnam et al., 2016)	“pretty difficult to flirt with her (Example 2: line 15)”, “bloody news people!” (Example 2: line 35) “Kiss my ass!” (Example 2: line 54)	Flexible/inflexible: Journalists often viewed the channel managers as inflexible, carefully sticking to timetables, while they conceived of themselves as having a flexible attitude to the production process.
Paradox	Contradictions that persist over time, impose and reflect back on each other, and develop into seemingly irrational or absurd situations because their continuity creates situations in which options appear mutually exclusive, making choices among them difficult (Putnam et al., 2016)	“this should be OK, we’ve got interviews with two Finnish presidents now, this should be OK...” (Example 1)	A content/audience driven journalism paradox interfaced in the situation were the journalists struggled with the uncertainty of how their filming of the President would be received. On the one hand, they appeared eager about their content uttering “we’ve got... two Finnish presidents”, yet on the other hand they remained unsure about audience reception “this should be OK... this should be OK”. With this cautious remark they appeared to embraced uncertainty and appeared to remain unsure about how their filming would be received
Anticipation phase	The expression of expectations about how a situation will unfold.	“I don’t have any expectations for today, we might get some distant pictures but I don’t think we’ll get any sound.” (Example 1)	Top ratings/bottom ratings: On the morning before the interview with the President the journalists anticipated the uncertainty with regards to how ratings would turn out
Performance phase	Talk in the midst of action, or description of being in the midst of completing a specific task.	“Isn’t that the President’s car” (Example 1: line 4) “It’s got a small flag holder” (Example 1: line 5)	High rank/low rank: Journalists mocked symbols of high rank when they faced the President
Aftermath phase	Talk about recent performance and the broader implications	“I asked the President how his first six months in office had been... we [the journalists] were OK, I guess OK...” (Example 1)	Certainty/uncertainty: While we expected the journalists to be certain of the outcome of their performance at this stage, the two journalists still struggled with the uncertainty of how audiences would receive their filming of the President

mutually exclusive. Our definitions of tensions, contradictions and paradoxes are summarized in Table 1.

Third, our interest in irony guided us to focus on the repertoires of irony used in interaction. We used theory on irony (Booth, 1974; Brown, 1977; Hutcheon, 1994; Oswick et al., 2004) to help explain how poles in opposition were constructed in interaction. While irony can be used in a number of variations, the literature is dominated by three types (see Table 2 for an overview) (Brown, 1977; Oswick et al., 2004). First, irony is inversive when it flips or reverses the original meaning of an event (Hutcheon, 1994). Saying “Nice day, isn’t it?” when it is raining is an example (Oswick et al., 2004). As we analyzed inversive irony we looked for cheerful, humble and self-depreciative comments where participants played with the inversion of the original meaning of the event. Second, subversive irony uses mockery to highlight linkages between poles in opposition (Oswick et al., 2004). Irony can be described as subversive when it takes rhetorical forms (playing along with counterparts and pretending to take them seriously), is connected to manner (visual mocking and playful teasing), or is situational (playing with the ‘fate’ or ‘superhuman nature’ of the situation) (Brown, 1977; Hutcheon, 1994). Third, irony can also be described as dramatic. Dramatic irony rests on the developing narrative of the situation. In dramatic irony characters in a plot come together in a suspenseful scene that makes them accept the continuity of uncertainty and ambiguity of the situation (Brown, 1977). To illustrate the notion of dramatic effect Brown (1977) uses the example of *Macbeth*, arguing that Shakespeare’s plot line would not be dramatic if the hero would be half mad to begin with, and that suspense is created between *Macbeth*’s evil deeds and his moral condemnation of them. Dramatic irony takes some time to develop because it rests on a developing narrative; as in the story of *Macbeth*. Brown (1977:176) argues that plays or novels may need up to two hours on stage or 50 pages to articulate dramatic irony. Thus, as we analyzed dramatic irony we looked for markers of a suspenseful scene

where characters in the narrative appeared to finalize a task but held on to the ambiguity and uncertainty of the situation.

Fourth, we tied the types of irony to tensions and contradictions in our data. We compared the various uses of irony and looked at how they were used similarly across tensions and contradictions. We thus grouped inversive, subversive and dramatic irony with the diametrically opposing discourses that we had identified earlier. This allowed us to set the use of irony in the context of a tension and contradiction, which facilitated the analysis of how irony had an influence on the tension and contradiction.

Fifth, we focused on describing the role of irony as a strategy that participants used in response to contradictions (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2018). We asked ourselves the following question: How did expressions of irony alter the perception of poles in contradictions? How did participants locate and recognize the poles in contradictions? We distinguished between how the various forms of irony influenced pole perception. We particularly examined how irony enacted a more-than form of response - how irony helped with coping, moving forward, and connecting opposite poles as inevitable or both valued. All this led us to identify two extensive examples in the analysis.

Sixth, we analyzed the specific execution phase that participants enacted. We looked at the three phases: anticipation, performance and aftermath, and payed attention to differences in interaction in these phases. In the anticipation phase participants expressed their expectations of how a situation would unfold. In the performance phase the participants talked in the midst of action, or describe being in the midst of completing a specific task. In the aftermath phase participants talked about their recent performance and the broader implications it would have. Hence, we looked at how irony was used as a response to contradiction differently depending on the execution phase that participants enacted. These phases are summarized in Table 1.

Finally, on the basis of these analytical steps, we were able to

construct a more general model that elucidated the associations between organizational paradoxes and forms of irony and illustrated how they evolved in different stages of executing the event. We elaborate on the theoretical model in the section following the findings.

4. Findings

As a result of our analysis, we identified several contradictions and execution phases over the course of our analysis. These contradictions (which involve episodes of dealing with topics such as the embezzlement of funds, a program pitch, an environmental disaster etc.) are summarized as snapshots in [Appendix C](#). In our findings we illustrate two examples of how journalists lived with paradoxes in their daily lives. In these examples we show how journalists used specific forms of irony as they anticipated, performed, and lived with the aftermath of continuous struggles. The examples include multiple contradictions and reflect how the journalists used connection responses and put contradictions into a broader context.

These two examples stood out from our data because they display tasks that are central to documentary journalists (1) investigating people of high office and (2) interacting with channel managers who value high audience numbers. On the surface, the journalists' language appeared to be filled with irony and sarcasm. They often swore and told dirty jokes to their colleagues. The coarse language appeared to bind the documentary group together as they coped with the paradoxes at YLE and reflected on the sensitive topics they were handling.

4.1. Example 1: Facing the Finnish President Sauli Niinistö

Two journalists were tasked with filming and interviewing the Finnish President, Sauli Niinistö, for a TV documentary on Nordic politics. President Niinistö was giving a talk at a local school in metropolitan Helsinki on the topic of social stratification and the two journalists attended the media event along with many journalists from other Finnish news channels. The journalists prepared for the event several days in advance.

The documentary journalists could be seen as underdogs, operating on a very tight budget, and facing reoccurring cost cutting by management and increased demands regarding audience ratings, while striving to produce high-quality journalism and documenting individuals in high office. Judged by their ratings, the journalists struggled to compete with other Finnish news channels and they were also benchmarked against Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian broadcasters.

The details of the situation highlight the contrast between the Finnish President, one of the most powerful persons in the nation, and the journalists. In contrast to the President, who arrived in shiny black Mercedes to the school in Helsinki accompanied by police officers, bodyguards, and communication personnel, the YLE journalists drove a cheap white Skoda, which they had rented for the broadcaster. The journalists appeared nervous as they prepared for the event. A crowd of journalists squeezed in around the President to ask questions; the bodyguards kept them at a safe distance. The journalists were pushed shoulder to shoulder by other journalists as they physically forced their way towards the President. The two journalists were able to keep the President's attention for over half of the time that the President had allocated to the media. In this situation, being able to ask the President four questions would qualify as an excellent interview performance. The transcript of the journalists talk before and after interviewing the President appears in [Appendix A](#).

4.1.1. Anticipation: Giving voice to a successful/unsuccessful contradiction

In this phase, the journalists gave voice to a main contradiction of successful/unsuccessful. Successful refers to getting praise from top managers about the quality of the interview with the President, while unsuccessful means getting negative feedback from top managers. This main contradiction meant that even if the journalist were to make an

'excellent' performance from their own perspective, they would remain uncertain as to how it would be received by audiences and evaluated by managers. Hence, although the journalists eventually conducted a successful interview with the President, they expressed doubt about their performance before it. Would their video clip of the President be perceived as successful? How would the ratings turn out? We found that they used a 'voice giving' strategy in anticipation of ratings. With voice giving we mean that journalists were able to open up alternative meanings to their anticipated encounter with the President – they anticipated the situation not only as successful, but also as unsuccessful. The following quotes illustrate such voice giving.

The journalists experienced a top ratings/bottom ratings sub-tension in the anticipation phase as they expressed expectations about how the situation would unfold. The journalists struggled with achieving top ratings from audiences, and they were aware that their managers would eventually evaluate them based on audience ratings. One of the journalists anticipated this uncertainty with regards to the audience ratings the morning before the interview with the President with his inversive ironic comment to the first author "I don't have any expectations for today, we might get some distant pictures but I don't think we'll get any sound." The comment was an example of inverse irony as the journalist said he did not have "any expectations for today," even though he appeared to have high expectations for the day given how he spoke enthusiastically to his camera technicians in the morning, rehearsed his interview questions to the President and rushed to his car in the parking lot. His words "I don't have any expectations" seemed to flip the meaning of his enthusiastic behavior and indicate instead that he was not enthusiastic. The journalists needed excellent video clips to get top ratings from audiences, yet they played down their expectations that they would get excellent video clips when filming the President that day. Thus, instead of anticipating top ratings the journalists used inverse irony to give voice, and open up the alternative possibility of a bottom rating following their performance.

In addition, the journalists reacted to the main contradiction successful/unsuccessful by enacting a second sub-tension between proud/modest. In the sub-tension the journalists experienced a push-pull between being proud of their performance versus being modest about their work. For example, when anticipating their encounter with the Finnish President, the journalist uttered modest, self-depreciative remarks and played down his expectations to his colleague "honestly... I don't think we are going to be very successful today." Yet, this was double edged– they appeared proud and confident; they spoke loudly, propped their feet on the table at their office, and drummed their fingers to the music of Jimi Hendrix in their car while they made self-deprecating remarks that appeared as if they were being modest. Their words "I don't think we are going to be very successful" show how they humbly gave voice the unsuccessful pole in the successful/unsuccessful contradiction. Through such self-deprecating voice giving, and the anticipation of being unsuccessful, they appeared to protect themselves from failure in the future.

In another example the journalists continued to struggle with the proud/modest sub-tension through the inversive irony after successfully filming the President "I suppose this will do" (line 43). Through this remark the journalists reverse being proud about the interview and state "I suppose," making themselves modest instead. They thus avoided being overly proud about their performance and gave voice to the possibility that they might have had an unsuccessful performance that day. On the one hand they seemed proud and excited about their filming of the president: "You had time for four questions!" (line 40), but on the other hand they had only modest expectations regarding the evaluations of their performance by audiences. They remained modest about their performance by describing it in ironic terms: "Yes, I guess this will do" (line 44). Here the words "I guess" illustrate how they chose to be modest about their performance, not proud.

In sum, as journalists enacted the sub-tensions, they used inversive irony to give voice to how the sub-tension connected to the broader

main contradiction. Voice giving allowed the journalists to open alternative meanings of the situation such as unsuccessful in successful/unsuccessful and bottom-rating in top-rating/bottom-rating. Recognizing alternative ways of seeing the situation allowed the journalists to move on with their daily work; they appeared less under pressure to be successful and reach top-rating. Ratings would often appear months after they performed the actual filming, thus they needed to cope with such uncertainty as they proceeded with their daily work.

4.1.2. Performance: Becoming energized by a rich content/poor content contradiction

In the performance phase, the journalists struggled with recording rich video material of the President. Rich content/poor content referred to the difficulty of getting high quality video material and a rich interview with an individual of such high social prestige as the President. Bodyguards, communication professionals and police officers made getting close to the President difficult. The journalists used the connection response “energizing” as they experienced excitement and adrenaline from mocking the opposite poles in a sub-tension. With connection we mean that the journalists recognized that there were two poles in a main contradiction or sub-tension that were in opposition. With “energized” we mean that the journalists experienced excitement and adrenaline from mocking the opposite pole. The following examples illustrate the “energizing” response.

The rich content/poor content main contradiction surfaced in a high rank/low rank sub-tension where the journalists appeared stressed as they coped with their low rank while they teased out rich details from the President. The difference in rank between the journalists and the President appeared to be one of the aspects that made getting rich content difficult. The journalists reacted to the high rank/low rank sub-tension by becoming energized and mocking symbols of high rank through subversive irony. For example, when the journalists arrived in the parking lot of the local school and saw the president’s car parked next to the entrance, they parked at the far end, in order not to be the center of attention. They used subversive irony and remarked: ‘isn’t that the President’s car’ (line 4) and ‘it’s got a small flag holder’ (line 5). Hence, they provided a caricature to mock symbols of high rank. The difference in rank was also visible as the President arrived in a shiny, black Mercedes (high rank) and the journalists’ drove a small and dirty rental car (low rank). They laughed as they mocked the symbols of high rank and appeared excited as they walked across the car park.

The sub-tension between high rank/low rank was also enacted in how, before arriving at the school, one of the journalists explained to the first author how he refused to dress up for the President, “I can dress up any time I want, but not for him, I didn’t vote for him.” One of the journalists was wearing a rock band t-shirt and the other was dressed in an army camouflage jacket. This was in stark contrast to the presidential convoy, where everyone wore dark suits. Following the comment, the journalists appeared full of adrenaline and they quickly crossed the car park to the school building where the President would appear, carrying their heavy camera equipment on their shoulders and smoking intensely. The utterance “I can dress up any time I want” was expressed in a mocking tone, the journalist chose not to dress up for the President (a sign of low rank) while most of the other journalists at the event were dressed in suits. The journalist appeared to highlight how he refrained from trying to get rich video content of the President by dressing up. Their act of ‘dressing down’ as they faced the president could be seen as a physical example of subversive irony and them mocking the high rank of the Presidential institution through their casual clothing.

In another example, the journalists also enthusiastically mocked the high rank pole of the high rank/low rank sub-tension. For example, as the President visited the school, the situation needed to be put into order; this was visible in the President’s entourage of communication professionals, police officers, and bodyguards. In the car one of the

journalists remarked “they were giving lots of orders... you can’t film here, you can’t move there.” Through the sarcastic and ridiculing comments “you can’t film here, you can’t move here,” an example of subversive irony, the journalists mocked how the communication professionals played out high rank. Their sarcastic imitation of the communication professional, was spoken at a loud volume and they laughed heavily.

In another example, the journalists ridiculed the President’s high rank as they played with their own low rank. As they left the school they suddenly stopped their car on an almost deserted highway and parked illegally on the sidewalk to get a good picture of the school and surrounding fields. The journalist called it ‘YLE parking’, indicating that the underdogs from YLE, who were of lower rank, could sometimes park in ways that the President would not. This was an example of subversive irony as the journalists mocked the Presidents focus on high rank through their illegal parking, something the President would never do. In contrast, the multiple black cars of the Presidential convey had been parked neatly in line in front of the school. Their mockery made them filled with excitement and adrenaline, and they laughed at the illegal parking and quickly took out their video camera from the trunk of their car.

Later, in the car one journalist continued enacting the high rank/low rank sub-tension as he called his colleague and said in an excited voice “we were able to get a picture of the damn hassle around the president... the contrast between the small, dilapidated school building and the bodyguards.” Through the utterance “damn hassle” the journalists mocked the pole high rank in the high rank/low rank sub-tension by arguing that the bodyguards created a “damn hassle” in the dilapidated school building. The “damn hassle” (high rank) was in contrast with the old “dilapidated school building” (low rank) that hosted the Presidential event. The “we were able” referred to how the journalists (low rank) were able to push themselves toward the President among a dozen other journalists, while the bodyguards (high rank) kept the journalists at a safe distance. The journalist appeared excited as he spoke in a loud voice and at a quick pace on the phone in the car. Through the subversive irony and the mockery of how the bodyguards created a “damn hassle” the journalists appeared to be filled with excitement about the difference in rank between the presidential convoy and journalists who were trying to reach the President. Such difference in rank made it difficult for the journalists to know whether they would get rich/poor video content from encounters with individuals of high social prestige.

4.1.3. Aftermath: Embracing a certainty/uncertainty contradiction

In this final scene, the journalists used dramatic irony to embrace a certainty/uncertainty contradiction. Certainty refers to the journalists being confident that they would receive praise from their managers with regards to the documentary film of the President and uncertainty refers to the fact that they could never quite know how their documentary would be received. This final scene was suspenseful because we as researchers would have expected the journalists to celebrate their filming of the President, yet they remained caught struggling with an over-/underestimating sub-tension. Overestimating refers to expecting too successful evaluations on the documentary film and underestimating refers to expecting a poor reception.

For example, when enacting an over-/underestimating sub-tension the journalists were cautious about predicting the ratings and evaluations for their documentary film. In the car, one of the journalists immediately called the editing team to tell them about their success: “I asked the President how his first six months in office had been... we [the journalists] were OK, I guess OK....” On the one hand, the journalists spoke with an excited voice when he uttered “I asked the President how his first six months in office had been,” continuing with an enthusiastic account of how the interview unfolded; yet on the other hand he underestimated his performance with the quiet remark “we were OK, I guess OK.” His use of “I guess OK” revealed how he chose to

underestimate their performance in order not to be disappointed in the future. Suspense about future ratings and evaluations continued in the car and one of them remarked laconically: “this should be OK, we’ve got interviews with two Finnish presidents now, this should be OK...” The sentence illustrates how journalists were unsure if they should overestimate or underestimate their performance. On the one hand, the words “We’ve got interviews with two Finnish presidents” were uttered with great enthusiasm, but on the other hand, the repetitive use of “this should be OK” suggested that they preferred to underestimate the success of their filming. They were certain that they got “interviews with two Finnish presidents,” but recognized the uncertainty of how managers would receive their performance. The journalists appeared to simultaneously embrace a momentary certainty (the enthusiasm in the words: “two Finnish presidents”) and a continued uncertainty (the carefulness in the words: “this should be OK”).

This was an example of dramatic irony because we as researchers would have expected the journalists to celebrate their interview with the President, yet instead the journalists spoke with a cautious voice. The cautiousness and reflection in this moment of dramatic irony was apparent in the words such as “I guess” and “this should.” Through such cautiousness and reflection, the journalists embraced the fact that they could enjoy a momentary certainty of their performance, but had to live with a continued uncertainty. Although they had interviews with two Finnish presidents, the journalists realized that stakeholders may still think their film is poor. The journalists appeared to realize that certainty/uncertainty contradiction would prevail in the aftermath, and they remained cautious not to celebrate their interview with the President. The daily lives of journalists involved constant pushing and pulling between choosing to over/underestimate performance. They appeared to accept that uncertainty would persist.

4.2. Example 2: Fast news vs. slow investigation

A group of documentary journalists were planning to screen an episode on poor neighborhoods in the Nordic region on primetime. Primetime slots, as opposed to ‘graveyard slots,’ were the broadcasting times when audiences are most likely to tune in. The documentary journalists rarely got primetime screening from the news team, but now they had succeeded. Unfortunately, they had had difficulties in ensuring that a key informer in the investigation spoke the truth, and because of this, they had difficulties in delivering the program on time. The channel managers were frustrated since they needed to fill the primetime slot as planned. The transcript from when the journalists discussed their encounter with the channel managers is included as [Appendix B](#) at the end.

4.2.1. Anticipation: Giving voice to a legitimacy/illegitimacy contradiction

As the journalists anticipated their encounter with the channel managers they struggled with a main contradiction of broadcasting a legitimate/illegitimate program. Legitimate referred to a program where facts appeared valid, whereas illegitimate referred to a program where it was unclear if facts were valid. The legitimacy of the program rested on how well they would be able to ensure that one of their sources in the investigation spoke the truth. They knew that broadcasting the program without confidence that an informant spoke the truth might cause trouble, but they were unsure how they would be able to confirm that one of their sources spoke the truth before they needed to go live. The journalists appeared to be primarily focused on producing a legitimate program, whereas the channel managers wanted the program to be broadcast as quickly as possible on prime time. The channel managers continuously pushed the documentary journalists to broadcast as soon as possible.

The journalists struggled between caring/not caring (a sub-tension) about the channel managers’ demands. On the one hand, they agreed with the channel managers and cared about large audience numbers and assigned prime time slots, but on the other hand, they appeared to

not care about the channel managers’ interest in broadcasting a program as soon as possible. The journalists anticipated the complicated encounter with the channel managers and used inverse irony in the following remark: “Oh, we’ve thrown out the news” (line 9).” The utterance “Oh” was spoken at a loud voice and appeared as a signal to colleagues that the journalist wanted to flip the atmosphere from caring to not caring about the channel managers demands. The journalists appeared concerned about moving the news broadcast to another time slot “We’ve got a problem next week” (line 3), but used such inverse irony as they flipped the from caring about the channel managers and the assigned broadcasting slot, to not caring. Not caring about the channel managers’ demands of broadcasting the program as soon as possible allowed the journalist to cope with the challenge of ensuring that the program is legitimate. They continue reversing the atmosphere of the situation from caring to not caring through the following joke: “it’ll be Mats and Stefan tap dancing. (line 11),” which triggered a wave of laughter across the group. They joke that they might even have screened “tap dancing” on prime time. Through inverse irony they gave voice to the pole not caring in care/not care, opening up to the alternative that they did not have to care about the demands set by the channel managers. The journalists continued reversing the idea of caring for the preferences of the channel managers through the inverse irony in the following remark: “if we’re really nice they might even broadcast our programs (line 45).” The “if we’re really nice” (uttered in a deeply sarcastic tone) shows how the journalists found it tiring that they have to keep prioritizing the preferences of the channel managers.

In sum, as the journalists gave voice to the care/not care tension they appeared more at ease, being able to move on in the situation where they had to cope with the struggle of achieving a legitimate program (the legitimacy/illegitimacy main contradiction).

4.2.2. Performance: Becoming energized by an inflexible/flexible contradiction

As the journalists discussed how they performed with the channel managers, a main contradiction of inflexible/flexible developed. This main contradiction meant that documentary journalists often appeared to view the channel managers as inflexible, carefully holding on to timetables, while they conceived of themselves as having a flexible attitude to the production process. There was a constant struggle in the inflexible/flexible main contradiction; the channel managers were considered inflexible because they insisted on their schedules and the documentary journalists were expected to be flexible and provide high-quality content for a specific broadcast slot. In subversive irony the journalists laughed a lot, they spoke on top of each other and swore constantly.

The journalists used subversive irony to describe a sub-tension between agree/disagree. The tensions reflected the journalists’ struggle of whether they should agree or disagree with the quick broadcasting demands set by the channel managers. Occasionally the journalists seemed in agreement with what the channel managers demanded, such as in “We’ve got a problem next week,” where they appear to accept that they have a problem because they need to adhere to broadcasting slots set by the channel managers. Yet often they were frustrated with the channel managers, who appeared to have little sympathy for their efforts to ensure that all ethical standards were met and the journalists used subversive irony to mock the channel managers for focusing on inflexible punctuality at the expense of quality. The journalists uttered sarcastic comments and mocked one of the managers: ‘we never make exceptions’ (line 41) and ‘we knew it would end up like this’ (line 37). The mockery of the manager allowed the journalists to sarcastically suggest that channel managers too often advocated an inflexible approach to media production. The journalist put extra emphasis on the sarcasm in the words “we knew,” illustrating how she appeared to disagree with the channel managers who thought that they “knew” when journalists’ timetables would fail. The imitation was performed

with a wry smile and uttered with a high pitch and volume. The journalists appeared excited and full of adrenaline, they laughed at this remark and seemed energized by the caricaturing of the channel managers.

Later, the journalists appeared to become increasingly energized about their encounter with the channel managers. With increased emotional involvement the journalists waved their hands in the meeting, leaned forward in their chairs and spoke at a louder volume as they critiqued the attitudes of the channel managers. One the one hand, the journalists seemed in agreement (agree/disagree sub-tension) with the demands by channel managers stating “If this one doesn’t work we’ve got a bit, mmm, low chances of getting anything through in the future” (line 30) indicating that they needed to make sure that they remained on good terms with the channel managers; yet on the other hand they disagreed with the inflexibility of the channel managers. One journalist became very excited, used subversive irony, mocked a channel manager, and commented that it was “pretty difficult to flirt with her” (line 15), expressing his annoyance over the multiple phone calls he had made to the channel manager explaining the problems involved in ensuring the legitimacy of the program. The utterance “pretty difficult to flirt” was an example of subversive irony as the journalist mockingly suggested that they needed to flirt with channel managers in order to reach agreement. Through “pretty difficult” the journalist expressed how he was annoyed with the difficulty of reaching an agreement over a broadcasting slot with the channel managers. Another journalist continued in a frustrated voice, caricaturing the channel managers as “bloody news people!” (line 35), suggesting that they focus too much on inflexible media production. The use of words such as “bloody” suggests that they were often in disagreement concerning inflexible demands set by the channel managers. A third journalist expressed disagreement over the blame laid by the channel managers on the documentary journalists for incompetent timing with a ridiculing: “Kiss my ass!” (line 54). Through the utterances “bloody news people!” and “Kiss my ass!” the journalists appeared to become full of adrenaline; they waved their hands in the air and leaned in towards the group. The journalists became increasingly exited as they discussed their interaction with the channel managers and these remarks illustrate how they appeared to connect and become energized by the increased understanding of how inflexible channel managers were (flexible/inflexible main contradiction). They connected to the “inflexible” pole by enacting a mockery of how they were sometimes in disagreement channel managers’ inflexible attitude to media production.

In sum, the constant mockery and caricaturing through subversive irony seemed to energize them momentarily as they were able to highlight the sub-tensions agree/disagree in the context of the inflexible/flexible main contradiction. The sarcastic remarks and mockery surfaced the fact that channel managers and documentary journalists were driven by competing logics. Through such sharp mockery, the documentary group appeared to increase their affective charge as they discussed how they faced the struggles with the channel managers.

4.2.3. *Aftermath: Embracing an accept/reject contradiction*

Towards the end the meeting the situation developed into a suspenseful scene where, after heavy mocking of the channel managers, the journalists suddenly became aware of themselves and appeared cautious about their interaction with the channel managers. In the accepting/rejecting main contradiction the journalists faced the struggle of whether they should accept the inflexible broadcasting timetables set by the channel management, or whether they should reject the channel management and try to negotiate new prime time slots.

In the aftermath phase a sub-tension between fair play/foul play surfaced. Fair play referred to the journalists’ opinion that interaction with channel managers served the interests of both the journalists and the channel managers, whereas foul play referred to the idea that

interaction favored only one of the parties. On the one hand journalists were of the opinion that the channel managers’ audience focused broadcasting was a fair game that needed to be played, on the other hand journalists were of the opinion that the game was not a fair to begin with.

First, the journalists appeared to consider the game with the channel managers foul. One of the journalists commented cautiously “You mean they only got one minus point” (line 51) suggesting that the way that they counted the points in the game was problematic and arguing that the interaction with the channel managers was foul. The words “only got one minus point” reflected the view that the documentary journalists should have more to say about when their programs were broadcasted. The journalist also commented that the channel managers should get minus points in the game for their “attitude problem” (line 52) suggesting that she regard the game with the channel managers foul because the channel managers did not behave properly.

Second, the group used dramatic irony as they commented that the game with the channel managers was fair. The situation was an example of dramatic irony because the interaction became suspenseful as the journalists suddenly, after mocking and caricaturing the channel managers in the performance phase, became cautious and regarded the game with the channel managers as fair. For example, towards the end of the meeting the journalists became embarrassed and realized that they had forgotten to write the subtitles for the program, something the channel managers had strict requirements about. The producer referred to the overall situation as a fair game, where each side collected points: “the channel management got that one right so we’ll give them one point. So now the score is 0–0” (line 52–53). The producer described interaction with the channel managers as a game that had to be played (the game analogy was also identified as connection response by [Barge et al., 2008:381](#)). The words “So now the score is 0–0” was an example of dramatic irony as it represented a turning point in the narrative of how they related to the channel managers. Previously they had rejected demands by channel managers through mockery (performance phase), and now they appeared to accept and embrace the preferences of the channel managers. Now the atmosphere in the group seemed to change; the journalists stopped laughing, they spoke at a lower volume and they appeared to engage in reflection as they leaned back in their chairs. The journalists were aware that channel managers did important work and they appeared to recognize that the channel managers played fairly, as they noticed that the program was still without subtitles: “What we didn’t get, and what they were right about... we should have added subtitles to this other show.” (line 48) Through the words “they were right about” the journalists linked back to the main contradiction accept/reject and appeared to accept that the channel managers played fairly. Their words “What we didn’t get,” shows how the journalists embraced the main contradiction accept/reject and cautiously accepted that they did not always succeed. The word “get” in the utterance “what we didn’t get” suggests that the journalists remained aware that they did not always “get,” or understand, what needed to be done. The situation seemed double edged – on the one hand, they often rejected the game as foul, but on the other hand the journalists appeared to embrace the fact that they sometimes needed to accept the game as fair.

4.3. *Theorization of findings*

Our study illustrates in detail how irony facilitates connecting between tensions, contradictions and paradox. The journalists at YLE continued living with the paradoxical situation that they were in, and our micro-dynamics analysis shows how the journalists responded to struggles with main contradictions and sub-tensions in the daily interaction. Thus, we argue that the responses of irony to tensions in micro-dynamics help participants cope with the broader organizational level paradoxes. The micro-dynamic coping strategies have three implications for the organizational level paradoxes. First, the response of irony helped participants move forward amid contradictions and paradoxes.

As contradictions and paradoxes at YLE created situations in which making choices among them seemed difficult, such as following the ideal of financial independence while at the same time being dependent on tax payers funding, irony allowed the journalists to recognize such organizational level paradoxes in the daily sub-tensions, and move on with their daily work. Importantly, as journalists at YLE used irony to express micro-level tension such as top ratings/bottom ratings, they did not attempt to solve the organizational level paradox financial independence (from advertising income)/financial dependence (on tax payers' money), but instead simply noticed the overarching paradox through irony.

Second, as journalists expressed tensions and contradictions on the micro-level, they often connected to broader organizational level paradoxes in different ways. At first, as journalists used inversive irony with the connection response of voice giving, they gave voice both to the micro-level tensions between top/bottom ratings, and the organizational level paradox of financial independence/dependence. Then, while the journalists became energized by contradictions on the micro-level, this energizing on the micro-level appeared to be a result of the overarching paradox of for example content/audience driven journalism trickling down into a micro tension. An energizing micro-level mockery was thus at the same time a mockery of the broader paradoxes of YLE. Finally, through the connection response of embracing the journalists not only embraced micro-level tensions such as over/underestimating their performance, but also embraced the overarching paradox of struggling with content/audience driven journalism. The embracing of the over/underestimating sub-tension meant that they remained aware and cautious of the content/audience paradox that constantly produced such tensions at YLE.

Third, the responses of irony contributed to the sustaining of the paradoxes at YLE. Our findings suggest that through the connection responses the journalists did not aim at resolving the paradoxes but kept the organizational paradoxes in play. Through connection responses the journalists ultimately accepted that absurd tensions emerged as part of their work. For example, after successfully interviewing the President, they accepted that they still had to remain in suspense over how their performance would be received. Through micro-level irony they interfaced paradoxes such as content/audience driven journalism; paradoxes which defined the very existence of YLE. The journalists thus enacted the paradoxes that per definition were present in a tax-funded broadcasting company.

5. A tentative theoretical model: Responding to paradoxes with irony

On the basis of this analysis, we offer an inductively derived theoretical model that illustrates how organizational members lived with paradox through irony. We show how actors used irony to recognize connections between contradictions and tensions, which reflected the broader paradoxes of an organization. In particular, we suggest that three forms of irony can be used as actors cope with and manage paradoxes. First, in inversive irony actors can flip or reverse the original meanings of events and we contend that they often express such irony in a humble and cheerful manner. Second, in subversive irony actors use mockery to highlight linkages between poles in opposition. Third, in dramatic irony actors can come together in a suspenseful scene where they accepted the continuity of uncertainty. The responses to paradoxes with irony are summarized in Table 2 and visualized in Fig. 1.

Furthermore, we suggest that the use of irony can be associated with three different connection responses. First, our empirical case shows that inversive irony was associated with journalists coping with a paradox through voice giving and the opening up of alternative meanings or ways of understanding a situation. Second, the journalists managed paradoxes through subversive irony by becoming energized and experiencing excitement and adrenaline from mocking opposite

Table 2
Responding to paradoxes with irony.

Form of irony	Relation to contradiction	Examples of ironic tone	Context setting 'connection' responses.	Predominate execution phase in interaction
Inversive irony	Inverse irony flips or reverses the original meanings of events	Humble, cheerful, friendly, self-deprecative	Voice giving: Opening up alternative meanings or ways of understanding a situation	Anticipation
Subversive irony	Subversive irony uses mockery to highlight linkages between poles in opposition	Mockery, caricature, ridicule, sarcasm	Energizing: Experiencing excitement and adrenaline from mocking the opposite pole	Performance
Dramatic irony	Dramatic irony rests on the developing narrative of the situation. In dramatic irony characters in a plot come together in a suspenseful scene that makes them accept the continuity of uncertainty and ambiguity of multiple contradictions	Aware, reflective, cautious, uncertain	Embracing: Embracing the difference between opposing poles and accepting that poles co-exist	Aftermath

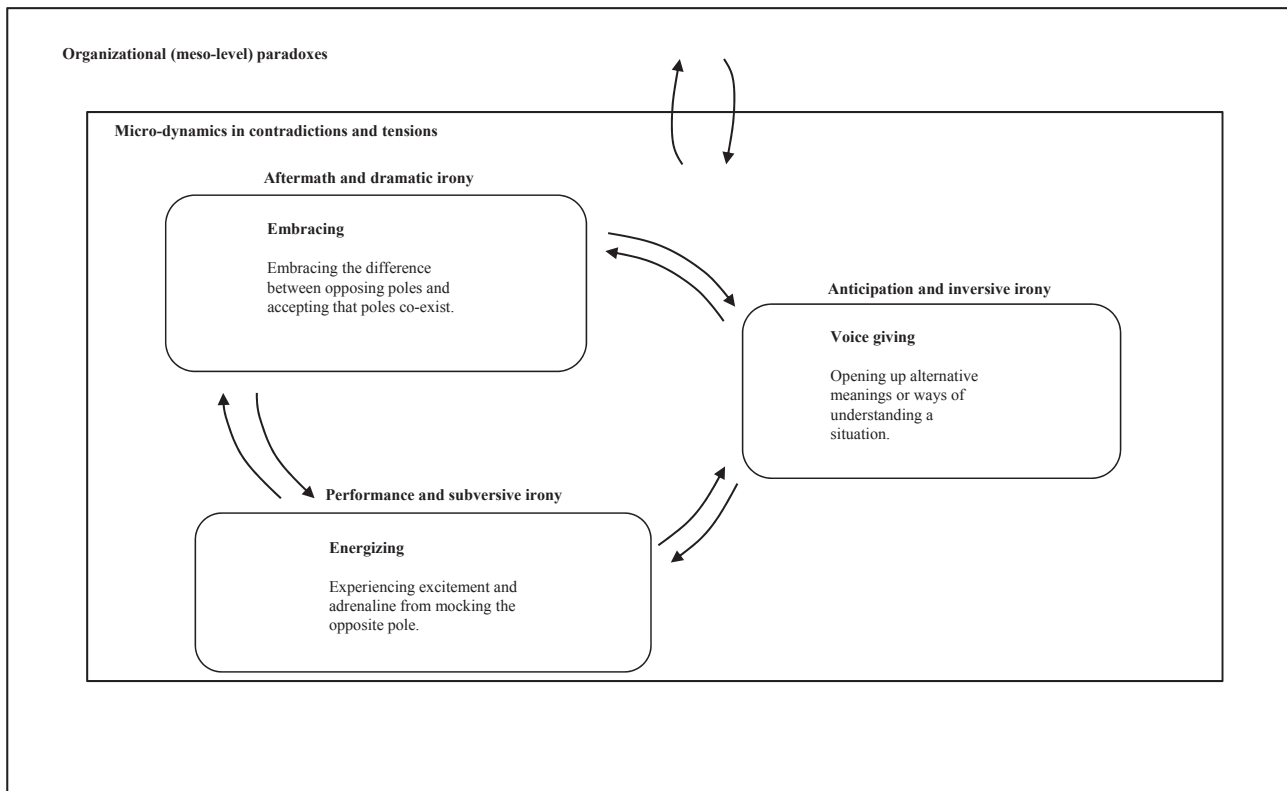


Fig. 1. Phases in coping with paradoxes, contradictions and tensions with irony.

poles. Third, when the journalists used dramatic irony to manage paradoxes they did so by embracing the difference between opposing poles and accepting that poles co-exist. Understanding how different ironies are associated with various connection responses is important because it allows us to understand how poles in oppositions can be managed through very different discursive responses.

Our interaction analysis also revealed distinct phases in how the journalists in both examples used the three forms of irony to manage paradoxes. First, inversive irony tended to coincide with a phase we call anticipation. In anticipation the participants expressed expectations about how a situation would unfold and remained humble when confronted with a paradox. Second, subversive irony was linked with a phase that we call performance. In performance, the participants talked in the midst of action, or described being in the midst of completing a specific task. Finally, dramatic irony tended to coincide with a phase that we call aftermath. In the aftermath phase the participants talked about recent performance and the broader implications of their performance. The conceptualization of such phases is important because it allows us to understand how irony is used differently when a situation evolves.

While the participants managed contradictions and tensions differently in the various performance phases, we argue that all three phases allowed participants to connect micro-level contradictions and tensions to organizational (meso-level) paradoxes. Organizational (meso-level) paradoxes defined the very existence of the organization and the careers of the organizational members. The responses to contradictions and tensions could thus be seen as micro-dynamics through which paradoxes interfaced in daily interaction. Thus, our analysis illustrates in detail how irony allowed participants to enact such micro-dynamics on a micro-level, while they at the same time coped with organizational (meso-level) paradoxes.

6. Discussion

Research has suggested that irony can be conceived of as a more-than response to paradox that conveys surprise and absurdity (Putnam et al., 2016:76). Research has also suggested that irony may be one way through which organizational members express and make sense of paradoxes associated with organizational change (Sillince & Golant, 2017). However, there remains a gap in our understanding of how paradox and irony unfold in concrete organizational settings and how they are expressed in micro-level interaction.

In this study, we show how paradoxes may be managed through inversive, subversive, and dramatic irony and how these forms of irony represent different connection strategies interlinking tensions, contradictions and paradoxes. In response to our first research question: “How is irony used as a type of more-than strategy in responding to tensions, contradictions and paradoxes?” we suggest that irony allows participants to cope with paradoxes through the more-than strategy of connection. Our analysis shows that participants use three different forms of more-than connection responses. We have outlined how through the use of inversive, subversive, and dramatic irony journalists use voice giving, energizing, and embracing as connection strategies. Connection responses are unique in that they allow journalists to connect poles in tensions on the micro-level with struggles on the organizational level, thus putting the tensions into the context of paradox. Such contextualization is not trivial; it is in fact a key means for the participants to cope with tensions in their daily work. Previous research has pointed to the importance of more-than connection responses to paradoxes (Panayiotou et al., 2017; Putnam et al., 2016). Notably Iedema, Degeling, Braithwaite, and White (2004) presented connection strategies in their account of how doctors managed incommensurate doctor-manager discourses and weaved poles in opposition together through discursive responses. Through our connection approach to paradox, we build on the view where participants embrace difference between poles and the indeterminacy of opposing views (Seo et al., 2004:101).

Our finding of the connection responses has theoretical implications for research that has looked at other more-than approaches to paradoxes. First, our connection approach shares characteristics of how a “reframing” response opens up the dynamic interplay that forms new wholes for tensions (Seo et al., 2004). Specifically, in our connection responses we elaborate on how the dynamic interplay involved ironic tones that participants used when they reframed stressful situations and connected to poles in the dynamic push-pulls. Second, by offering a micro-dynamic view on the execution phases that participants go through, our connection responses also inform research on “reflective practice” more-than responses. We present irony as form of humor and comic relief (Hatch, 1997; Jarzabkowski & Lê, 2017) that opens up meanings (Barge et al., 2008; Huxham & Beech, 2003) differently depending on the affective charge of the situation. Third, our elaboration of how the micro-dynamics of irony allows participants to connect to organizational (meso-level) paradoxes helps in understanding the mechanisms of how more than “transcending” responses allow participants to shift outside boundaries to different levels of meaning (Janssens & Steyaert, 1999; Seo et al., 2004).

In response to our second research question: “How does the use of irony in response to tensions and contradictions evolve or change as a situation/episode develops?” we suggest that participants use different connection strategies depending on the execution phase. We argue that voice giving, energizing, and embracing coincided with the execution phases of anticipation, performance, and aftermath. This, study has implications for research that has examined how responses to paradoxes develop over phases. In contrast to previous research that has focuses on how participants cope with paradoxes as organizations go through change phases (Barge et al., 2008; Panayiotou et al., 2017), we take a micro-level perspective and suggest how phases develop as important events evolve in the daily work of journalists. Thus, we add to research that has argued that participants go through phases of adjusting and suppressing paradoxes (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013), and reveal how journalists adjust to the paradoxical context in different ways depending on the affective charge of the situation. We also suggest that even though the tone (e.g. mockery) may on the surface suggest that organizational members in some phases are defensive, such phases may actually be effective in setting contradictions into a paradoxical context.

7. Conclusion

Our analysis makes two contributions. First, it extends prior research on paradox by highlighting its associations with forms of irony and by illuminating the processes through which paradox is managed, thus offering a missing piece to this stream of research (Putnam et al., 2016; Schad et al., 2016; Sillince & Golant, 2017). In particular, our analysis offers a process model that details specific linkages between types of irony used – inversive, subversive and dramatic – and outlines a more general dynamic where interactions may move from voice giving to energizing to embracing. While there are likely to be other more complex and nuanced linkages between irony and paradox, we argue that this model helps to advance our theoretical understanding about the key linkages between paradox and irony.

Second, although irony has been recognized as making underlying meanings visible through humor, understatement or sarcastic commentary (Oswick et al., 2004), we argue that there is a paucity of

knowledge on the ways in which irony is actually used in organizations (Hatch & Erhlich, 1993; Hatch, 1997; Oswick et al., 2002; Oswick et al., 2004; Sillince & Golant, 2017). Our analysis adds to this stream of research by providing a process model that opens up how underlying meanings are made visible through the specific forms of irony that organizational members use as they deal with tensions and contradictions. Importantly, our process model follows research that suggest that paradoxes are rarely resolved (Cunha & Putnam, 2017; Putnam et al., 2016), and we suggest that irony ultimately allows organizational members to keep paradoxes in play. By so doing, our paper paves the way for future research on irony in organizations.

The fact that we only developed two episodes in detail in our analysis can be seen as a limitation of this study. We have attempted to alleviate this limitation by providing a snapshot analysis of contradictions and execution phases from our empirical material presented in Appendix C. Appendix C illustrates the patterns in execution phases and uses of inversive, subversive and dramatic irony that we observed in our data. While our snapshots analysis in Appendix C does not explicate the linkages between sub-tensions, main contradictions and paradoxes for each episode, we highlight the main-contradiction that participants struggled with in each episode. The snapshots of other episodes helped us develop the connection responses voice giving, energizing and embracing, as it allowed us to go back and reflect on how specific connection responses played out in other episodes.

Our study opens up opportunities for future research on paradox and irony. First, we see additional opportunities for studying how dramatic irony operates with paradox. Given that dramatic irony rest on the developing narrative of the situation and the coming together of characters in a plot, we argue that studies could explore in detail variations in how characters can “come together” in suspenseful scenes to express dramatic irony and to increase awareness of the embedded nature of paradoxes and contradictions. For analysts, inversive and subversive irony are often easier to spot, but dramatic irony requires a deeper analysis of the organizations and societal context. Second, while we identify three different execution phases and related connection responses, research could look at how other more-than responses might be enacted over execution phases. For example, how would the responses of reframing, reflection or transcending develop, as an episode develops from performance to aftermath? Third, we recognize that irony represents a very rich linguistic toolkit in itself and hence we see ample opportunities for future work on how other forms of irony enable more-than responses to paradox. While our study presents how three forms of irony represent more-than responses, future research could expand on other types of irony. As inspiration, Hutcheon (1994) offers a typology of nine different functions of ironies and explicates their tones and effects. For example, we see potential in exploring the type of more-than response enacted when irony functions as satiric, demystifying or promotes exclusive “amiable communities” (Hutcheon, 1994:55).

In sum, we offer a novel perspective to scholarship on paradox by showing how irony allows organizational members to live with paradox in daily work. We also show how inversive, subversive, and dramatic irony entail connection strategies as events evolve through phases. Through the use of irony journalists were able to recognize poles and connect tensions to organizational level paradoxes, which journalists accepted as the building blocks that defined the very nature of the Finnish broadcaster YLE.

Appendix A. Transcript of episode “Facing the Finnish President Sauli Niinistö”

1. Journalist 1: Here it is!
2. Journalist 2: Time to boogie! [original in English]
3. [Arriving at the parking lot]
4. Journalist 1: Well, isn't that the president's car! I'm seeing a black car over there, and it's
5. got a small flag holder in the front where they can put the Finnish flag. [Laughter]
6. [Entering the school]

7. Researcher: Are you trying to get some questions with the president?
8. Journalist 2: We already tried last week. The presidential office is protecting the president,
9. they push back the media. They are the president's gatekeepers. The workers in the office
10. are like hostages. The president himself would probably be OK with answering our
11. questions. But they want to protect the presidency by making sure that the president doesn't
12. say anything stupid. They told us that he won't answer the questions that we have for him,
13. about the presidential mandate; he might in two years or so.
14. *[The journalists set up their cameras at the local school]*
15. Journalist 1: Sort out this knotted cable, please. While I'm doing the filming. [loud
16. laughter]
17. Journalist 1: Should I try to get a close-up of the President while he's walking in?
18. Journalist 2: Absolutely.
19. Journalist 1: Are you sure, but we could actually cut to the other guys' camera if we film
20. from the back.
21. Journalist 2: A great idea, I hadn't thought about that. Good thinking.
22. Journalist 2: Yeah the news channel is also filming here.
23. Journalist 1: I'll try to call them now.
24. Journalist 1: [on the phone] ...the news channel is also filming material here. Try to check
25. if you can get a hold of their shots later today, OK?
26. *[Local school host walks up to the journalist and says hi]*
27. Journalist 1: We're journalists from the national broadcasting company YLE. We're doing
28. a series on Nordic Politics.
29. Local host: Ok. Sounds good.
30. Journalist 2: The series will be broadcast on channel 5 in September.
31. Local host: Great!
32. Journalist 1: Can we move to the entrance and film the president when he comes in?
33. Local host: Preferably not. We don't want any chaos.
34. Journalist 1: So we need to stay in this area?
35. Local host: Yes please.
36. *[Local school host walks away]*
37. Journalist 1: We need to stay in this area and film. That's a boring shot!
38. *[Filming and interviewing the president of Finland]*
39. Journalist 2: Case closed!
40. Journalist 2: You had time for four questions! He wasn't quite prepared for those questions!
41. Journalist 1: I guess we've got some shots of the media convoy at least.
42. Journalist 2: Yeah. [Puffing heavily on a cigarette]
43. Journalist 1: I suppose this will do.
44. Journalist 2: Yeah, I guess it will do.
45. Journalist 1: The important thing was that at least we got him [the president].
46. Journalist 1: The shot where the president got into his car was pretty stupid.
47. Journalist 2: Smashing!
48. Journalist 1: Yeah! Blast it! [Smiling]
49. Journalist 1: Let's transfer the files and then go get some food.
50. [They get into the car]

Appendix B. Transcript of episode "Struggling with channel management"

1. Producer 1: We've got lots of opportunities and lots of threats, too.
2. Journalist 1: Oh no.
3. Producer 1: We've got a problem next week. Because our documentary program was
4. supposed to broadcast a program, a Nordic program. But now the third party is informing
5. us that they can't provide us with the show, on Friday night they let us know!
6. Journalist 2: Bad news, we've got problems with our interviewee; we need to do more
7. checks to ensure the reliability of our source. And now we've negotiated a one hour
8. broadcasting slot!
9. Journalist 3: Oh! We've thrown out the news...
10. Journalist 2: And now we don't know what we are going to fill this slot with, so I
11. suppose it'll be Mats and Stefan tap dancing.
12. Journalist 3: Oh, I'll volunteer for that show.
13. Producer 1: Again, we've got great credibility everywhere in this organization.
14. Journalist 3: I made a flirty call to Jenny at channel management this morning.
15. Journalist 4: It's pretty difficult to flirt with her.
16. Journalist 3: Well, it went OK.
17. Journalist 4: Then you'll get to do all the talking with her in the future.
18. Producer 1: We're a bit screwed with this time slot. But we're hoping we'll still get the
19. program from the third party. But it doesn't look good.

20. Journalist 3: We're supposed to be editing from Wednesday to Friday.
21. Journalist 2: Yeah, I know. But if we don't have a program to edit then we can't...
22. Journalist 3: Yeah, then it's impossible.
23. Journalist 4: Well at it least it'll be a challenge for you.
24. Producer 1: It's a bit of a pity that it went like that.
25. Journalist 4: Is there a chance that it'll work out?
26. Producer 1: There's a nano chance that it'll work out.
27. [...]
28. Journalist 5: Let's pray to all the gods that we know we'll get the program.
29. Journalist 2: We've now got a slot that we'll otherwise lose.
30. Producer 1: If this one doesn't work we've got a bit, mmm, low chances of getting anything through in the future.
31. Journalist 3: They have to understand this, how could we have avoided this?
32. Journalist 2: In the best of worlds it would be like this, yes.
33. Journalist 3: They can't!
34. Journalist 3: They must get it! They're bloody news people themselves!
35. Producer 1: It's not the news people, it's the channel people.
36. Journalist 2: We knew it would end up like this.
37. Journalist 3: They'll get it, they're not morons!
38. Journalist 2: That was a quote.
39. Journalist 3: Really?
40. Producer 1: Yeah that's what they wrote us: We never make exceptions, because it always ends like this.
41. Journalist 5: How positive!
42. Journalist 4: What a joy to keep producing high quality programs! And if we're really nice, they might even broadcast our programs!
43. Producer 1: Yeah, that's how it is.
44. Journalist 4: Unless the channel management thinks we're too much of a nuisance.
45. Producer 1: What we didn't get, and what they were right about... we should have added subtitles to this other show.
46. Producer 1: The channel management got that one right so we'll give them one point. So now the score is 0–0.
47. Journalist 4: You mean they only got one minus point for that attitude problem!
48. Producer 1: Yeah one minus points and now one plus point, so now the game with management is 0–0 again.
49. Journalist 4: Kiss my ass!

Appendix C. Snapshots of contradictions and execution phases interaction data

#	Topic of interaction	Example of a main contradiction	Sentence example reflecting contradiction	Anticipation phase – inverse irony	Performance phase -subversive irony	Aftermath phase – dramatic irony
1	Two journalists filmed and interviewed the Finnish president at a school event.	Successful/unsuccessful	Journalist: The shot where the president sat down in his car was pretty stupid.	Journalists utter humble and cheerful remarks with regards to the uncertainty of their success.	The journalists caricature and mock symbols of the presidential institution as they arrive in the parking lot.	The journalists recognize the continuous uncertainty of how they will be rated by audiences and peers.
2	Investigative journalists struggled with filling a broadcasting slot that they had negotiated with the channel management.	Flexible/inflexible	Journalist: What joy to keep producing high quality programs! And if we're really kind, they might even broadcast our programs!	Journalists cheerfully joke about the difficulty of dealing with channel managers.	Journalists mock and caricature the channel managers who are pushing the journalists to screen a program at a given time slot.	Journalists reflect over their situation with the channel managers and remain respectful about their relation to the channel managers.
3	Journalists reflected on a program pitch that they need to deliver to a funding body in two weeks.	High status/low status	Journalist: Yeah but that's where we are going! But we need to do this first.	The journalists cheerfully joke about the decision makers they are about to meet and describe them as stiff.	The journalists caricature the decision makers as pompous officials with a high salary as they imitate an encounter.	The journalists accept that they constantly need to struggle with funding officials who are of a higher status.
4	Team discusses possibility of a story about an environmental disaster in connection to a garbage dump.	Voice/silence	Journalist: I got caught up in my own stupid thoughts! I should just be able to keep my cool. Producer: Yeah, we need to pursue this story.	Journalist jokes about green liquids that emerged around a garbage dump and government officials not communicating anything.	Journalists mock government officials and are frustrated over difficulty of getting intelligence from them in meetings.	Journalists discuss that they need to accept that it is difficult to get at the truth in an investigation and that there will always be a struggle with getting intelligence from the government.
5	Team discusses potential story on the embezzlement of funds from a foundation.	High status/low status	Journalist: I need to talk to Steve about this. I'm starting to nag now. I'll get some food.	As the journalists prepare to broadcast the program they joke that the responses from foundation employees are silly.	The journalists recount their encounter with the foundation executives and caricature them as only spending time in the Caribbean.	The journalists accept that it will always be difficult for them to get information from foundation executives.
6	Discussion of an idea from the strategy department to	Useful/useless	Head of producers: It promotes physical exercise,	The head of producers jokes cheerfully that	One of the producers sarcastically remarks that when they	The head of producers comments that they need to

	document the societal value of each program.		creativity, and it offers experiences of success.	dancing programs are useful for promoting public health.	meet managers they can measure the value of anything with these criteria.	accept the struggle between producing creative content and demonstrating how it is useful.
7	Information about how the organization is being centralized and power is reduced from many producers	Clear/unclear	Director: I'm sure they can be consulted sometimes. Next question?	The director is explaining how the new centralized organization will support the efficiency strategy.	One of the producers sarcastically questions the decision, asking whether they have considered the experience and knowledge that is now going to waste.	The director indicates that they need to accept such continuous organizational changes.
8	Discussion about how to reach out to a younger audience through using new media channels.	New/old	Head of producers: Okay, okay, but you mentioned talk shows, have you got any suggestions about where we should go from here to get these young people involved? What inspires you in these observations?	One of the producers humorously expresses his concern over how they will reach young audiences.	A producer mocks and caricatures the management of being naïve about marketing the show in practice and not having any understanding of "the real world".	The head of producers urges the team to look into their own identities in order to understand how they could constantly renew themselves for younger audiences.
9	Discussion about how to get younger viewers to the talk show.	Successful/unsuccessful	Producer: Could we somehow combine the popularity of the program with the level of interest in it?	The analyst shows statistics indicating that most viewers are aged 50+, and the head of producers jokes that if it does not change, the show has to be terminated.	In a sarcastic tone the talk show host critiques how they are being evaluated, questioning the measurements that do not count views on-line, nor the fan-mail to him, and his public popularity.	They accept that they will constantly have to struggle with quantitatively measuring programs that are hard to measure.
10	Discussion about how to start implementing the strategy of planning all programs "web first"	Top-down/bottom-Up	Head of producers: Yesterday in our meeting with [top managers], it started out wrong, but you guys were really good at getting your message through! [...] I think it is important that when I ask you to do something, you actually concentrate on it and don't take up something you think top management would like you to do.	One producer anticipates an encounter with top managers and jokes that they have little insight of what is really going on at the production level.	The producer recounts and encounter with top managers and caricatures the top managers as only interested in playing power games.	The producers accept that they need to keep living with struggles between production units and top managers.
11	Discussion about making the show more critical, and less "Disney-like"	Top ratings/bottom ratings	Producer: I think combining the light entertainment and a small critical reminder will work well.	The group jokes about how audiences will receive topics such as environmental pollution, poaching of wolves etc.	The head of producers is sarcastic as they go through the details and says they have to follow the initial outline of the program, which is to offer something relaxing and entertaining on Sunday evenings	The producer suggests that they need to embrace the fact they need to care about audience ratings while making critical arguments about societal issues. He suggests that their programs always have to be a mix of both.
12	Discussion about an order that has come from top management, saying that quality has to be maintained despite cuts in resources. It would mean for instance that the journalists and producers start doing more of the filming, recording and editing work, which has been done by other professionals earlier.	Top-down/Bottom-up	The head of producers: There is ultimately nothing we can do about this now, we just need to accept it.	The head of producers jokes about the upcoming cost cutting idea and many producers cheerfully protest the cost cutting.	The group of producers caricature the top managers and mock the top managers through practical examples.	The journalists embrace the struggle that they need to integrate wishes from the top managers into their daily work. They appear to understand that clashes between the differing views with top managers will continue.

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