

Fostering Creativity through Paradoxical Frames:

A Multilevel Perspective

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Creativity management in organizations is rife with tensions and paradoxes, requiring employees and teams to integrate conflicting agendas and contradictory demands. Product development teams, for example, have to consider cost issues and follow specifications when developing new ideas; and employees have to find creative solutions to problems that can be implemented given organizational constraints. We propose that the adoption of paradoxical frames - mental templates that foster the recognition and embracement of contradictions - increases individual and team creativity. In four studies using different creativity tasks and different manipulations for eliciting paradoxical frames, individuals and teams that adopted paradoxical frames were more creative than counterparts who did not. Our findings also shed light on the psychological processes through which paradoxical frames enhance creativity. Paradoxical frames elicit a sense of conflict and enhance complex thinking. These processes in turn increase creativity and the ability to meet contradictory task demands. Furthermore, our results suggest that simultaneous promotion of contradictory demands is more likely in teams than in individuals.