

## A BUDDHIST APPROACH TO PARADOXICAL TENSIONS

In management studies, tensions have been considered a negative source of conflict that managers try to mitigate or eliminate. Paradox scholars, on the other hand, take a different approach to tensions, arguing that tensions can create positive dynamic synergy and stimulate creativity and harmony. For tensions to be seen as paradoxical, managers must first recognize that two contradicting elements reflect opposing categories of experience, and then label them accordingly. After the two elements are separated, managers should seek to understand the interconnections among the salient dimensions, often at a higher level of analysis. Such a paradoxical perspective has been applied to numerous tensions, including exploration and exploitation, commercial and social goals, and Western and Eastern management systems.

We were motivated to further understand the cognitive aspects of this paradoxical perspective, so we decided to situate our work in a Korean Buddhist temple, where the tensions between the sacred and the secular are stark. Korean Buddhist temples have been experiencing deep tensions with the rise of mid-20th century capitalism, urbanization, and anti-religious movement in East Asia. The macro changes have required Buddhist temples to raise money through business, yet making profits arouse social discomfort and moral controversy from a broader general public. With such context, we specifically asked: (1) what tensions do Buddhist monks exactly face, relevant to the sacred and the secular? and (2) how do Buddhist monks cognitively manage tensions in their organizational life? By answering these questions, we contribute to the paradox literature by offering a new way of seeing and organizing for tensions.

The method we chose was participant ethnographic research because we wanted to gain deep insights into cognitive tensions, which required us to personally experience the tensions from a Buddhist perspective, not just observe them as an outsider. We conducted our fieldwork in two stages. In Stage 1 (participant observation from May 1 to July 31, 2015), the first author shadowed the monks' daily life, listening to their voices directly, and experiencing the personal and organizational tensions K-temple monks face in their monastic life. In Stage 2 (in-depth discussions in July 2016, January and September 2017, and March 2018), the first author sought to validate and deepen the emerging insights with senior monks and Korean Buddhist scholars.

Our early fieldwork in K-Temple revealed findings that were consistent with the paradox perspective in the organization literature. We found that monks separated the sacred from the secular in the way they organized their work: business monks focused exclusively on business activities, whereas meditation monks focused exclusively on meditation activities. The clear-cut separation between business and meditation monks ensured that the secular and sacred also remained separated; yet, when needed, the two groups interacted to generate positive outcomes.

It was only as we deepened our knowledge of monks' monastic life that unique insights emerged. We found that meditation monks' approach to tensions departed significantly from the paradox literature. While business monks chose to cognitively draw a clear boundary in the way they organized their sacred monastic life and secular life, meditation monks sought to remove all cognitive boundaries, questioning the ontological reality of categories and boundaries. Whereas a paradox perspective seeks to categorize and then separate tensions, the meditation monks neither categorized nor sought to eliminate categories, so did not need to separate tensions. As we sought to gain a deeper understanding of meditation monks' approach to tensions, we immersed ourselves in Buddhist philosophy and developed a Buddhist approach to paradoxical tensions.