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Individual-level Paradoxes and Employee Performance Outcomes: Testing Sufficiency and Necessity Conditions across Croatian Organisations

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Abstract: *Research within organisational paradox theory has garnered increasing attention in recent decades, yet studies from an individual-level perspective remain limited. Due to the limited empirical evidence on the relationship between individual-level paradoxes and employee performance, this study employs a multimethod, time-lagged, multisource research design in Croatian organisations. It aims to examine five theoretically and practically relevant individual-level paradoxes (individual ambidexterity, coopetitive personality, human capital paradox, job demands-resources fit, and paradoxical mindset) and explore their distinct connectedness with employee performance. To determine which individual-level paradoxes serve as sufficient and necessary conditions for employee performance, we applied Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression and Necessary Condition Analysis (NCA). Our study's findings indicate that individual ambidexterity is sufficient for enhancing employee performance. Conversely, the job demands-resources fit emerges as a necessary condition for achieving higher employee performance, supporting the notion that balancing job demands and resources fit is essential for optimal employee performance.*

Keywords: individual-level paradox; employee performance; sufficiency; necessity; Croatian organisations

JEL classification: L2, M19

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Introduction

Research on organisational paradoxes has gained significant momentum in recent decades. It refers to persistent contradictions within organisations that cannot be resolved by choosing one option over another; instead, they must be managed (balanced or navigated) simultaneously to sustain performance. While much of this research focuses on organisational-level tensions, it also extends to the important yet underexplored micro level—that is, the individual or employee level (Berti *et al*., 2021, p. 43). Within this established academic field (Braun & Lampel, 2020, p. 83; Cunha & Putnam, 2017), an increasing number of scholars are exploring managerial challenges (Smith & Lewis, 2011) and framing organisational strategies through a paradoxical lens (Bednarek *et al*., 2021, p. 130). Following a bottom-up approach to navigating paradoxes, the research focus shifts from top-level strategies to the lived experiences of employees who actively engage with paradoxes in dynamic, situated contexts within their organisational units. Typically, modern workplaces are becoming increasingly complex, filled with conflicting demands that employees must navigate daily. While traditional approaches focus on resolving tensions, paradox theory suggests that employees, as frontline responders (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2024, p. 2), can embrace contradictions, thereby enhancing their performance. Therefore, having a paradoxical personality or exhibiting paradoxical behaviour can help employees perform better within their units. Since unit managers are responsible for allocating tasks and responsibilities to employees, as well as monitoring their growth and performance at both the organisational (Sutherland & Smith, 2011) and individual (job or employee) levels (Shen *et al*., 2018), it is crucial to understand the dynamics between unit managers and employees (Besharov & Mitzinneck, 2021, p. 40) in order to design more effective single-level practices (Englmaier *et al*., 2018). These unit manager–employee interactions are not only operationally significant but also provide a key context for individual-level paradoxes to emerge. Indeed, individual-level paradoxes are often experienced in relation to others within the organisation, as employees frequently encounter paradoxical tensions through their interactions with unit managers, teammates, and other teams (Cunha *et al*., 2021, p. 39).

It has been noted that many individual (employee) level perspectives remain underexplored, with several key questions still unanswered—such as how employees can navigate opposing challenges (Berti & Simpson, 2021), which strategies support effective paradox management (Schad *et al*., 2016), whether this can enhance performance (Krautzberger & Tuckermann, 2024), and how employees should behave in paradoxical situations (Bakker, 2015; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Understanding the strategies that enhance employee performance requires a clear grasp of individual-level paradoxes, which enable employees to adapt their behaviour and navigate challenges effectively, ultimately leading to peak performance (Quinn, 1991, p. 13). In practice, employees do not encounter individual-level paradoxes in isolation; instead,

they confront multiple, co-occurring paradoxes simultaneously. The simultaneous interplay of these paradoxes is increasingly recognised as crucial for gaining a deeper understanding of employee performance (Braun & Lampel, 2020, p. 171). However, there is limited understanding of how any given individual-level paradox—whether it involves balancing competing tasks, roles, or values—is connected to employee performance. Further research is needed to uncover the underlying mechanisms that drive these effects. In some cases, the connection may be unclear or imperceptible, while in others, the relationship may be either positive or negative. This suggests that certain individual-level paradoxes may not be directly linked to performance outcomes or may not necessarily result in improved employee performance. Gaining insights into how specific individual-level paradoxes affect employee performance is essential for evaluating the effectiveness of diverse strategies that provide multifaceted responses to managing organisational tensions (Achtenhagen & Melin, 2003).

To date, empirical research examining the interconnection between individual-level paradoxes and employee performance remains insufficient. Scholars have identified multiple paradoxes at the individual level (Jarzabkowski *et al*., 2013; Miron-Spektor *et al*., 2018); however, researchers have yet to explore most of them empirically. Beyond theoretical assumptions, empirical knowledge remains limited regarding how individual-level paradoxes—such as tensions between tasks, personalities, skills, behaviours, or demands and resources—are linked to employee performance. Moreover, studies testing which individual-level paradoxes serve as sufficient or necessary conditions for employee performance outcomes remain scarce (Hernaus *et al*., 2024). More precisely, what remains unclear is which individual-level paradoxes have the most significant impact on employee performance and which have a limited impact. Without a better understanding of which paradoxes employees should prioritise—and which can be reasonably set aside—there is a risk that employees will invest time and energy in managing tensions that yield little or no return in terms of performance outcomes.

Therefore, building on Janssens and Steyaert (1999), this study identifies two prevalent categories of paradoxes at the individual level: strategic and people management paradoxes. The strategic category is represented by individual ambidexterity. In contrast, the people management paradox category includes the coopetitive personality, the human capital paradox, the job demands–resources (JD-R) fit, and the borderline case of the paradoxical mindset. This study focuses on five particularly salient individual-level paradoxes selected for their theoretical relevance, practical frequency, and conceptual diversity. These 'Big 5' individual-level paradoxes are well established in the scholarly discourse on paradox theory, offering robust conceptual foundations for empirical investigation. They frequently manifest in contemporary workplaces, reflecting the complex and recurring tensions employees navigate in daily practice. Collectively, these five individual-level paradoxes span behavioural (e.g., individual ambidexterity), cognitive (e.g., paradoxical mindset), and contextual (e.g.,

JD-R fit) domains, enabling a multidimensional understanding and influencing employee performance through diverse mechanisms. Their continued relevance underscores the need to understand their impact more deeply, informing the development of targeted HR, leadership, and organisational strategies that aim to enhance employee performance outcomes.

Individual-level paradoxes

Research on *individual* (employee or job) *ambidexterity* as a strategic paradox is still in its early stages of development (Melkić, 2025) and has not been sufficiently explored (Chang *et al*., 2016; Good & Michel, 2013). It refers to an employee's ability to simultaneously balance between operational (exploitative) and innovative (exploratory) tasks through cognitive and behavioural capabilities (Mom *et al*., 2015; Raisch & Birkinshaw, 2008). This dual capability requires employees to dynamically shift between routine efficiency and adaptive learning behaviours, depending on situational demands. This concept emphasises how employees balance their tasks, roles, and responsibilities to be both efficient and innovative, leveraging available resources and knowledge (Caniels *et al*., 2017). Recent studies suggest that the more ambidextrously employees behave, the more effectively and responsibly they perform job tasks and contribute to achieving team and organisational goals (Mom *et al*., 2019).

Within many diverse people management paradoxes, *a coopetitive personality* represents a contradiction between the personalities of cooperative and competitive employees (Berti *et al*., 2021, p. 91). Highly cooperative employees are more likely to collaborate, consider others' perspectives, and enjoy working with others. Highly competitive employees exhibit achievement-focused behaviour, tend to outperform their peers, tap into their full potential, and are less tolerant of failure (Lu *et al*., 2012). While cooperation is essential for organisations to grow, competition serves as a driving force that motivates employees to strive for personal and professional growth (Chen *et al*., 2011). Emerging theory suggests that employees with both cooperative and competitive personalities in dynamic work environments may foster adaptive performance (Luo *et al*., 2006). However, it is still not empirically proven whether coopetitive personality may positively or negatively affect employee performance.

Another people management paradox, *job demands-resources (JD-R) fit,* arises from the interplay between job demands and available job resources, shaping employee motivation, well-being, and performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). While work autonomy and social support can enhance job satisfaction and affective commitment, excessive job complexity and job interdependence may lead to mental overload and strain (Chung-Yan, 2010). This paradox highlights that employee performance occurs when job demands and resources are balanced—too few challenges lead to

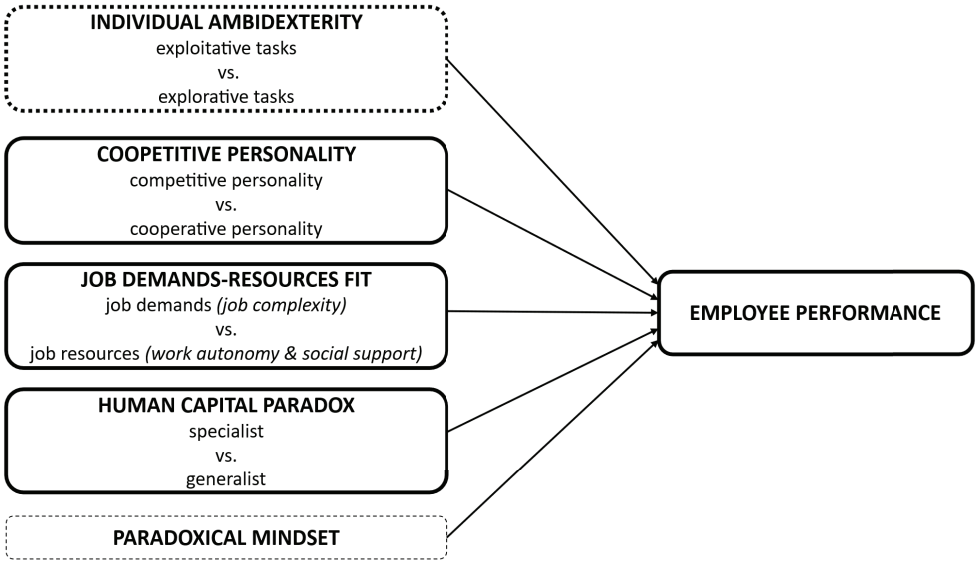
disengagement, while excessive demands lead to burnout (Chung-Yan, 2010). In line with the JD-R theory, employee performance is higher when high job demands are met with commensurately high levels of resources, such as supervisor support, task control, or developmental opportunities (Bakker *et al*., 2007). Therefore, understanding JD-R fit is crucial for effectively managing employee performance.

On the other hand, the *human capital paradox* reflects the polarities between being a specialist and generalist, where employees may either possess deep, domain-specific expertise and occupy specialised, narrowly defined roles or adopt broader, boundary-spanning positions requiring cross-disciplinary knowledge and a diverse skill set (Kang & Snell, 2009; Kelly *et al*., 2011). This paradox highlights the tension between developing highly specialised skills for efficiency and expertise, versus cultivating a more adaptable, versatile skill set for dynamic, complex work environments. However, there is still no definitive answer on how the human capital paradox affects employee performance, as the outcomes of specialization and generalization can vary depending on context and individual circumstances (Souitaris *et al*., 2023).

Although set as a borderline paradox for this study, the *paradoxical mindset* is an individual-level phenomenon (Gaim *et al*., 2022) characterised by confrontational acceptance, where employees acknowledge and embrace paradoxes rather than seeking to resolve or eliminate them. It reflects the extent to which employees feel comfortable with and energised by contradictory demands, enabling them to develop paradoxical practices (Bednarek *et al*., 2021, p. 198; Miron-Spektor *et al*., 2018, p. 38). This mindset predisposes employees to perceive contradictions as inherent to reality rather than obstacles (Miron-Spektor *et al*., 2018). A paradox-friendly mindset, incorporating "more than one identity" (Cunha *et al*., 2021, p. 186), can be a positive attribute that fosters adaptability, creativity, and improved performance.

As illustrated in the conceptual research model (Figure 1), this study aims to examine the relationships between previously defined, distinct yet conceptually relevant individual-level paradoxes (independent variables) and employee performance (dependent variable). Accordingly, the following research questions are addressed: RQ1: Which individual-level paradoxes serve as sufficient conditions for enhancing employee performance?, and RQ2: Which individual-level paradoxes serve as necessary conditions for achieving high employee performance?

Figure 1: Conceptual Research Model



Methodology

Building on the paradox theory that highlights how employees function within complex systems and structures that influence individual-level outcomes (Shen *et al*., 2018), this study examines the interplay among individual-level paradoxes and their impact on employee performance. A multimethod research design was employed to examine one-way connectedness through two (separate, unit and individual levels) questionnaires, collecting time-lagged multisource data.

The research team initially contacted organisational representatives, who assisted in recruiting participants for the survey using a snowball sampling strategy. Individual-level data were collected from unit managers (strategy or organisation design professionals) who are key in navigating paradoxes within their units (Schad *et al*., 2016), as well as their employees. The sampling criteria recommended selecting five units per organisation, with five employees chosen from each unit. As a prerequisite for inclusion in the study, each participating organisation was required to provide at least 2 complete and valid responses (Jansen *et al*., 2016).

Organisational representatives provided us with email addresses for unit managers and their respective employees. The study gathered online survey data from 250 employees and, separately, from their 86 unit managers, all of whom work in 19 large private organisations across various industries in Croatia. On average, each organisation had 15.16 respondents, while each organisational unit had 3.03 respondents, indicating variability in response distribution across units. Employees first completed

a self-evaluation of their paradoxical behaviour at Time 1, followed by unit managers assessing supervisor-rated performance data for multiple employees who participated in the research at Time 2, with a three-month temporal gap between the two assessments (Miller *et al*., 1997). By incorporating diverse data sources and multiple time frames, we strengthened our ability to draw causal inferences while intentionally mitigating the risks of single-informant and standard-method bias. Each manager assessed multiple employees, and the responses were analysed at the individual (employee) level, enabling us to proceed with a single-level (individual-level) analysis.

Online survey data were collected via questionnaires in Croatian, carefully developed using the translation-back-translation method to ensure accuracy and consistency. Both surveys assessed perceptions using five-point Likert-type agreement scales, ranging from 1 ("disagree entirely") to 5 ("completely agree"). We used established scales to collect self-reported measures of the variables of interest, capturing the observed individual-level paradoxes. In the study, the examined paradoxes were measured by computing the product of distinct orthogonal constructs (Hayes, 2022; Ricciardi *et al*., 2022), with the corresponding paradoxical dimensions derived from the averaged ordinal manifest items.

Specifically, the strategic paradox of *individual ambidexterity* was evaluated using an eight-item construct, with four items measuring exploitative tasks (e.g., "Activities of which much experience has been accumulated by yourself.") and four items measuring explorative tasks (e.g., "Activities requiring you to learn new skills or knowledge.") Schnellbächer *et al*. (2019) adopted this construct by measuring two polarities.

The people management paradoxes—such as coopetitive personality, job demands-resources (JD-R) fit, the human capital paradox (specialist vs. generalist), and a borderline, paradoxical mindset—were assessed using a range of variables. The paradox of *coopetitive personality,* encompassing both cooperative and competitive personality, was assessed using a seven-item construct developed by Lu *et al*. (2013). We measured competitive personality with a four-item scale (e.g., "Being outperformed by other members in the group annoys me."). Moreover, we evaluated cooperative personality using a three-item scale that captured affective responses to collaboration (e.g., "Working with team members makes me happy.").

Job demands-resources (JD-R) fit was computed as the product of manifest paradoxical dimensions using four variables developed by Morgeson and Humphrey (2006). Job demands were measured through job complexity (four-item scale, e.g., "The job requires that I only do one task or activity at a time.") and task interdependence (six-item scale, e.g., "Other jobs depend directly on my job."). Meanwhile, job resources were assessed using work autonomy and social support (each measured with a three-item scale, e.g., "The job allows me to make many decisions on my own.").

The *human capital paradox,* balancing specialist and generalist skills, was assessed using a six-item construct adopted from Subramaniam and Youndt (2005) and

Kang and Snell (2009). Specialist expertise was measured with a three-item scale (e.g., "I am highly skilled in a very particular knowledge domain."), while generalist capabilities were captured using another three-item scale (e.g., "I am an expert in my particular jobs and functions.").

Finally, completing the quartet of a borderline one, the *paradoxical mindset* developed by Miron-Spektor *et al*. (2018) comprises a nine-item scale designed to assess an employee's comfort and engagement with contradictory demands (e.g., "I feel energised when I manage to address contradictory issues.").

Besides these key individual-level paradoxes, which serve as independent variables in this study, *employee performance* was measured as a dependent variable using a four-item scale adopted from Liden *et al*. (1993). Employee performance was assessed as a mean score and evaluated by multiple unit managers. An example item from the scale includes: "The overall level of performance that I have observed for this employee is outstanding.".

Building upon the research design proposed by Hernaus *et al*. (2024), this study employs a dual-analytical approach to explore the connectedness between each individual-level paradox separately and employee performance. Specifically, we utilise ordinary least squares (OLS) regression to examine the direct effects of predictors on employee performance. In contrast, we applied necessary condition analysis (NCA) to identify factors that serve as essential preconditions for high performance. More common regression analyses allow us to assess the extent to which job characteristics predict creativity and innovation (LeBreton *et al*., 2013). Introduced by Dul in 2016, NCA is a relatively recent data analysis technique designed to identify necessary conditions within data sets (Dul, 2016; Dul, 2023). If a particular factor is missing, organisations cannot achieve the desired level of employee performance, regardless of other paradoxes, because a necessary condition cannot be substituted or compensated for (Hernaus *et al*., 2024). Our approach enables us to determine which strategic and people-management paradoxes are both sufficient and necessary for achieving optimal employee performance, and to identify those that drive high performance. Both analyses were conducted in R. For NCA, we employed the NCA software package (version 3.2.0) within R to ensure precise and robust assessments.

Results

Table 1 displays the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the key variables in this study. Notably, only the individual-level paradoxes of individual ambidexterity ($r=0.21, p<0.1$) and JD-R fit ($0.27, p<0.1$) exhibit positive associations with employee performance. In contrast, a paradoxical mindset, a coopetitive personality, and the human capital paradox are unrelated to employee performance.

Table 1: Means (M), standard deviations (SD), and correlations

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Job demands-resources (JD-R) fit	14.40	3.38	-	0.16*	0.21**	-0.06	0.18**	**0.27****
2. Individual ambidexterity	11.90	3.20	0.16*	-	0.16**	0.07	0.15*	**0.21****
3. Paradoxical mindset	3.25	0.51	0.21**	0.16**	-	0.3**	0.23**	**0.02**
4. Coopetitive personality	8.15	2.86	-0.06	0.07	0.30**	-	0.04	**0.07**
5. Human capital paradox	14.50	4.47	0.18**	0.15*	0.23**	0.04	-	**0.07**
6. Employee performance	4.05	0.75	0.27**	0.21**	0.02	0.07	0.07	-

Notes: N = 250; *M* = Means, *SD* = Standard deviations; *p < .05; **p < .01

Multiple regression analysis results

The regression analysis reveals that individual ambidexterity and JD-R fit are the strongest predictors of employee performance (*see* Table 2). Specifically, individual ambidexterity shows a significant positive correlation with employee performance ($B = 0.05$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that employees who can manage conflicting demands between exploratory and exploitative tasks tend to perform better. JD-R fit also significantly impacts employee performance ($B = 0.06$, $p < 0.001$). This supports the JD-R framework, which posits that adequate resources (i.e., work autonomy and social support) enable employees to handle job demands better (i.e., job complexity, task interdependence), thereby improving their performance (Bakker, Demerouti, & Verbeke, 2004). The coopetitive personality exhibits a marginally significant positive relationship with employee performance ($B = 0.03$, $p = 0.06$), suggesting that switching between cooperative and competitive personality types may enhance employee performance; however, further research is warranted. A paradoxical mindset exhibits a negative yet marginally significant association with employee performance ($B = -0.19$, $p = 0.06$), suggesting that specific cognitive approaches to addressing paradoxical demands, such as intensively reflecting on tensions, may be associated with lower performance on average. However, this does not imply that a paradoxical mindset is inherently detrimental; instead, its effects may vary depending on contextual factors such as job characteristics, cognitive load, or the availability of adequate resources and support (e.g., JD-R fit), which can moderate the relationship between mindset and performance outcomes. On the other hand, the human capital paradox showed no statistically significant effect on employee performance ($B = 0.00$, $p = 0.86$), indicating that balancing between being a specialist and a generalist is not a key factor in determining employee performance.

Table 2: OLS regression results

Variable	*B*	*S.E.*	*t*
Human capital paradox	**0.00**	0.01	0.17
Coopetitive personality	**0.03**	0.02	1.88
Individual ambidexterity	**0.05****	0.02	2.93
Paradoxical mindset	**-0.19**	0.10	-1.89
Job demands-resources (JD-R) fit	**0.06****	0.02	4.19

Notes: *p < .05; **p < .01; *B* – unstandardised regression coefficients; *S.E* – standard error; *t*-test statistic.

NCA results

We conducted a necessary condition analysis to complement the regression analysis and determine whether any predictors function as necessary conditions for employee performance. We began visually inspecting data dispersion (Dul *et al*., 2023). NCA identifies necessary conditions by analysing scatter plots, which detect empty spaces and draw a ceiling line to separate areas with and without observations. Figure 2 displays scatter plots in which the x-axis represents individual-level paradoxes and the y-axis depicts employee performance as the outcome. The scatterplots illustrate a clear ceiling zone in the upper-left portion of the graph, where high levels of employee performance do not occur when JD-R fit falls below a certain threshold (approximately 3.0). This visual blank space signifies that a minimum level of JD-R fit is a necessary condition for achieving high performance. In other words, employees with low alignment between JD-R fit are structurally constrained from reaching top performance levels, regardless of other factors. This finding empirically supports the idea that JD-R fit is a sine qua non condition—a foundational prerequisite without which high performance cannot manifest. Therefore, contextual support through adequate resources is not merely beneficial but essential for enabling superior individual outcomes.

This visualization is further supported by calculated NCA parameters (*see* Table 3)—the effect sizes and significance levels, which indicate that only JD-R fit demonstrated a (medium) necessary effect on employee performance (*ce_fdh = 0.10, p = 0.003; cr_fdh = 0.08, p = 0.002*). This suggests that while the JD-R fit does not fully determine performance, a minimum level is essential for employees to achieve higher performance.

Figure 2: Scatterplots for the relationship between individual-level paradoxes and employee performance

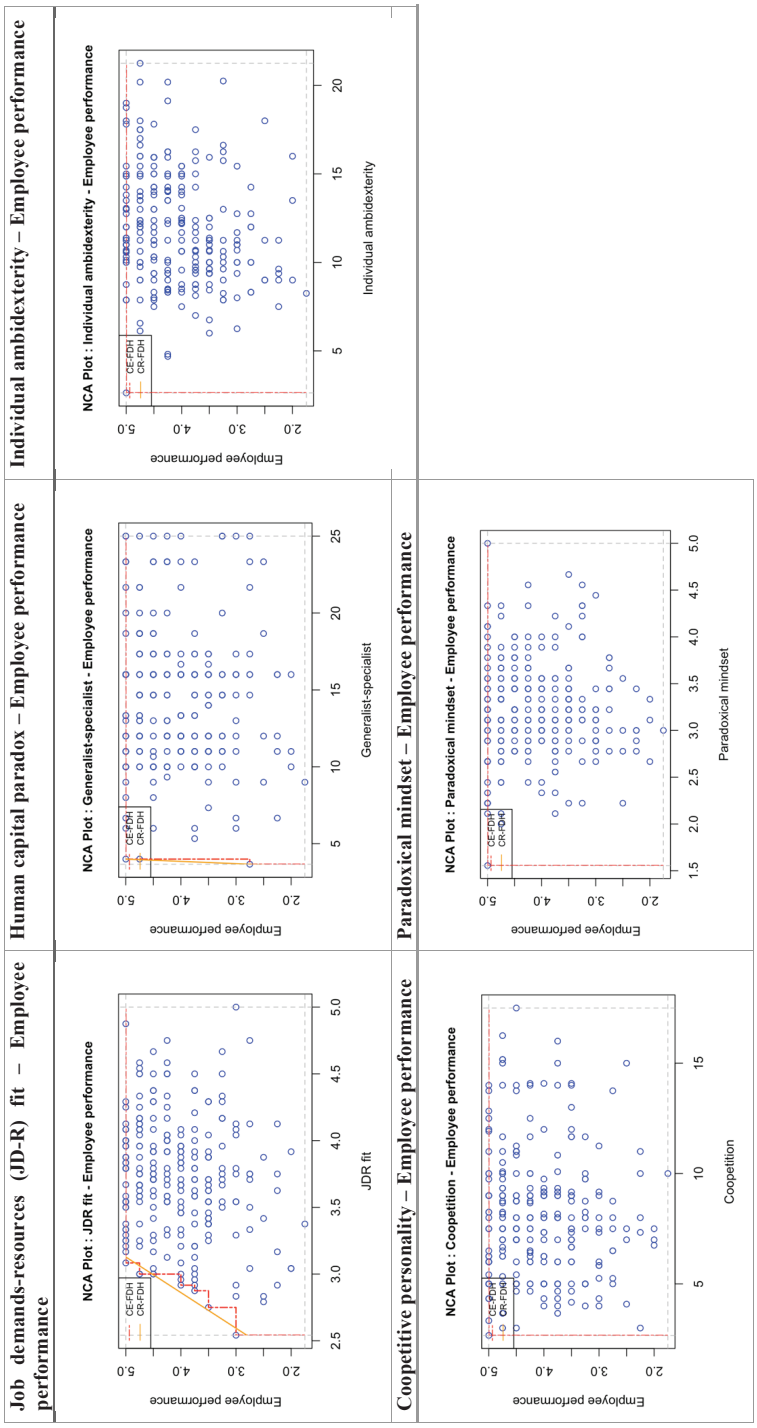


Table 3: NCA parameters of the necessary conditions for employee performance

	Employee performance			
	CE-FDH		CR-FDH	
	d	p-value	d	p-value
Human capital paradox	0.01	0.572	0.01	0.588
Coopetitive personality	0.00	1.000	0.00	1.000
Individual ambidexterity	0.00	1.000	0.00	1.000
Paradoxical mindset	0.00	1.000	0.00	1.000
Job demands-resources (JD-R) fit	**0.10**	0.003**	0.08	0.002**

Notes: *d* – effect size.

We conducted an in-degree bottleneck analysis to examine the JD-R fit paradox and identify the critical levels of JD-R fit necessary to achieve high employee performance (*see* Table 4). Findings show that the JD-R fit is not crucial for low-to-moderate employee performance (below 40%). However, the required JD-R fit level increases as performance expectations increase. To achieve a medium-to-high level of employee performance (70-80%), the JD-R fit must be at least 21.6%; for peak performance (90-100%), it must reach at least 22.1%.

Table 4: Bottleneck table of the necessary conditions ("in degree") for enabling employee performance

Condition / **Outcome**	***Job demands-resources (JD-R) fit***
Employee performance	NN
0	NN
10	NN
20	NN
30	NN
40	4.2
50	4.2
60	4.2
70	21.6
80	21.6
90	22.1
100	27.5

Notes: CE_FDH ceiling zone was applied; NN was not necessary.

This means that a minimum of 22.1% of the theoretically possible JD-R fit must be present for an employee even to have the potential to perform at peak levels. In

other words, without this threshold level of fit between job demands and resources, achieving top performance is impossible, regardless of other favourable conditions. This highlights the role of JD-R fit as a necessary condition for peak performance rather than a factor that incrementally contributes across all performance levels. These findings suggest that organisations aiming to enhance employee performance should offer suitable JD-R fit, particularly for those tasked with high-level performance. Failure to ensure adequate JD-R fit makes attaining superior performance more challenging.

Discussion

Conclusion

The study enhances our understanding of a range of individual-level paradoxes related to employee performance, contributing new insights to paradox and JD-R theory at the individual level of analysis. It provides a roadmap for exploring workplace dynamics to advance research on the emerging paradox-performance linkage. Results demonstrate that two individual-level paradoxes (JD-R fit and individual ambidexterity) are strong predictors of employee performance. JD-R fit emerges as a necessary ("must-have" or "*sine qua non*") condition, while individual ambidexterity represents a sufficient ("nice-to-have") condition that complements JD-R fit. That suggests that while individual ambidexterity enhances employee performance, as previous research has shown (Jyoti & Choudhary, 2024; Kao & Chen, 2016; Mom *et al*., 2015), it is not a strict requirement. In contrast, without JD-R fit, employees cannot achieve high-performance levels, regardless of their ambidexterity. Even if the JD-R fit remains too low, employee performance cannot be optimised regardless of other factors (Dul, 2021; Hauff *et al*., 2021). In contrast, the coopetitive personality yielded theoretically ambiguous and inconclusive results, highlighting the need for re-examination given its inconsistency with earlier research (Raza-Ullah *et al*., 2014; Ritala, 2012; Tidström, 2014). The human capital paradox and borderline paradoxical mindset exhibit limited or context-dependent effects. Consequently, this study raises the assumption that a paradoxical mindset universally benefits employees, yet it does not significantly enhance their performance. These findings highlight the conditional nature of certain individual-level paradoxes, emphasizing their dependence on specific job demands and contextual factors.

The study adopted a dual (OLS and NCA) analytical approach, which enhances causal inference and advances knowledge accumulation (Dul, 2016). This novel method introduces a fresh logical perspective, enabling us to test theoretical propositions, contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the topic of interest, and advances disciplinary knowledge (Ding & Kuvaas, 2025). This study mitigates com-

mon method bias by employing time-lagged, multisource data, using separate questionnaires for unit managers and their employees. By having managers assess multiple employees and employees assess their managers, the design reduces self-report bias and enhances the validity of findings. This approach provides a robust and reliable dataset for individual-level analysis, particularly valuable for paradox research.

From a practical perspective, the study suggests that employees should prioritise balancing high-impact paradoxes, such as individual ambidexterity and JD-R fit, while avoiding overinvestment in paradoxes that offer limited value for their performance. Conversely, unit managers (strategy or organisational design professionals) should act as supporters and be motivated to create conditions that enable their employees to perform at their best, thereby reflecting in the organisation's success. Unit managers should empower employees by delegating tasks that encourage both efficient and innovative behaviour in their daily work. To support employees in becoming top performers, unit managers need to equip them with the necessary resources, enabling them to manage complex tasks more effectively and reduce excessive task interdependence. This implies that unit managers should provide employees with sufficient autonomy at work (e.g., addressing frequent overtime through time management training, and reducing frequent interruptions by limiting micromanagement) and enough social support (e.g., supporting complex problem-solving with mentorship programs, and managing workplace conflicts with resilience training), even by tailoring it for each employee by ensuring that they are neither overwhelmed nor under-stimulated in their job. Since a paradoxical mindset is not a significant predictor of employee performance, managers should reconsider the one-size-fits-all approach and instead strategically form teams based on employees' individual preferences or coopetitive personality. Although organisations often promote balance in formal messaging, these ideals frequently clash with day-to-day practices and workplace realities (Berti *et al*., 2021, p. 87). Achieving optimal performance in such paradoxical environments requires more than rhetoric—it depends on strategically aligning individual capacities with contextual support systems. This highlights the vital interplay between personal adaptability and structural enablers in navigating complexity.

Research limitations

This study analysed individual-level paradoxes in isolation despite their dynamic interplay in real-world settings. Consequently, the study adopts a correlational approach, limiting causal inferences. As a result, the research design aligns more closely with theoretical assumptions than practical organisational realities. Since we conducted the empirical study among Croatian private organisations across various industries and organisational sizes, the findings may have limited generalizability when discussing the connectedness between each individual-level paradox and em-

ployee performance. Beyond limited cross-industry representation, self-report survey items may still introduce common-method bias.

Future research

Despite the relatively rare integration of OLS and NCA methods in paradox research (Hernaus *et al*., 2024), there is a need for more studies to employ these methods to examine the sufficiency and necessity conditions of a broader range of individual-level paradoxes and their impact on various performance outcomes. Integrating objective performance measures, such as financial key performance indicators (KPIs), could reduce reliance on subjective performance ratings and potentially alter the results by introducing new theoretical perspectives. Additionally, these approaches need to be examined with respect to a few knotted individual-level paradoxes (Sheep *et al*., 2017) to gain a deeper understanding of how to effectively navigate ("surf") them collectively rather than perceiving them as dysfunctional or unsustainable (Berti *et al*., 2021, p. 98).

Following the study's results, future research should empirically explore the interplay between individual ambidexterity and JD-R fit as 'nice-to-have' drivers of employee performance, using methods such as fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA). More specifically, researchers should investigate whether individual ambidexterity mediates the relationship between JD-R fit and employee performance. Understanding this linkage could clarify how alignment between job demands and available resources enables employees to balance exploratory and exploitative tasks effectively, thereby driving higher performance. While the findings indicate that a coopetitive personality may function as a marginally sufficient predictor of employee performance, further empirical validation is necessary. Rather than treating the paradoxical mindset as a standalone individual-level paradox, given its borderline nature, it may be more appropriate to examine its potential role as a moderator influencing the relationship between other individual-level paradoxes and employee performance.

By adopting a paradoxical lens, researchers should investigate whether each pole within individual-level paradoxes is sufficient to support employee performance. For example, if ambidextrous behaviour in task execution is found to be sufficient for achieving employee performance, it becomes essential to determine whether both exploratory and exploitative behaviours are independently sufficient, which one is necessary, and how they should be balanced. The same applies to examining which JD-R fit pole, recognised as a necessary 'must-have' condition, contributes more directly to higher employee performance. In line with JD-R theory, it is worth exploring gain spirals related to job performance (Lesener *et al*., 2019)—for example, the possibility that improved performance enhances personal resources, which in turn fosters greater work engagement.

Following research limitations, novel research building on these theoretical concepts could further investigate which individual-level paradoxes function as sufficient or necessary conditions by incorporating control variables such as job type (e.g., manual worker, administrative worker, professional – specialist or expert, lower-level manager or middle-level manager), education (e.g., secondary school diploma, college degree, university degree, univ. specialist or PhD), gender (male or female), and job tenure (years of tenure in current job position or organisation). Considering that specific employee roles or job types may inherently favour one pole of a paradox, such as exploration over exploitation or autonomy over control, could provide deeper insights into how individual-level paradoxes manifest and impact performance.

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Conflicts of interest/Competing interests

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

Availability of data and material

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Code Availability

The computer program results are shared through the tables in the manuscript.

Authors' Contributions

Sara Melkić: Investigation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing
Nikolina Dragičević Rogge: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Data curation
Matija Marić: Supervision, Review & editing
All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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