Chapter 7
Managing the Standardization Knowledge Codification Paradox:
Creative Experience and Expansive Learning

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ABSTRACT

In a connected society and organizations working with digitized business models, standards will have more important roles than ever in shaping activity systems content, structure, and governance. While the standardization conformity/innovation duality has received great attention in literature, little research has been done on the role of managers in managing the tensions of knowledge codification required during ISO 9001 standard implementation. By utilizing Danone's Networking Attitude experience as a case study, the authors address this gap by exploring how managerial skills and practices were used to overcome the cognitive and emotional tensions related to internal knowledge codification, transfer, and use. The main contribution is to elucidate the role of managers in resolving these paradoxes and creating innovation capabilities. Further, they demonstrate the mutually beneficial relationship between knowledge codification and innovation if knowledge management is approached more as an evolving pragmatic knowing than a technical means that may create rigidity and resistance.

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INTRODUCTION

In a connected society and organizations working with digitized business models and knowledge management processes, technical and management systems standards will have more important roles than ever in shaping innovation strategies and activity systems content, structure and governance. In organizations the challenge of managing standardization - i.e. implanting and maintaining a standardized system to continuously improve strategic process (Asif & DeVries, 2015) - relates to the management of tensions and paradoxes that emerge in activity systems during the implementation of standards. The paradoxes and tensions occur when the routines of an established system collide with the standard's new requirements, and where the actors' know-how is challenged with external new knowledge.

Managing an organization's paradox that oscillate between stability and innovation has become a central concern for business improvement and routines' evolution (Smith et al., 2017; Engeström, 2015; Lewis & Smith, 2014). Management system standards are considered key instruments to manage business ambidextrous orientations as they are conceived to achieve simultaneously standardization through the codification and exploitation of good practices (GP), and innovation through the exploration of new knowledge and innovation opportunities (Hamdoun et al., 2018; Brunsson & Jacobsson, 2005; Lambert & Loos-Baroin, 2004). In practice, the implementation of standards' requirements is a knowledge management process (Serhan, 2018; Asif & De Vries, 2015; Saulais & Ermine, 2012; De Vries & Van Delden, 2006; Jashapara, 2004). These include acquiring new knowledge, learning and applying it for process improvement, identifying and codifying internal operational good practices, and diffusing and sharing the new procedures throughout the organization to promote organizational learning. These practices create cognitive and emotional tensions in organizations and between employees. These tensions can lead to an implementation failure, or, can be used as opportunities to create new organizational capabilities that create and maintain stability and creativity (Smith et al., 2017; Engeström, 2015; Takeuchi & Osono, 2008). The success of a manager in charge of implementing improvement tools in activity systems and leadership to enable strategic paradoxes (Smith et al., 2011) can depend upon their style and dynamic managerial capabilities (Helfat & Martin, 2015).

Researchers have long studied and responded to the dual role of exploitation/ exploration related to the standardization effort in organizations (Ahmad, 2017; Evangelos et al., 2013; Lambert & Ouedraogo, 2009; Lambert & Loos Baroin, 2004). However, there is no research exploring the combined benefits of these paradoxical strategies and the role of managers in confronting and managing the tensions of the knowledge codification paradox inherent in the ISO 9001 standard requirement to simultaneously achieve stability and long-term sustainability (Smith et al., 2011).