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Introducing Dialogic as a Research Methodology

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Abstract

This paper aims to illustrate how the methodological approach that researchers apply has implications not only for theory-building, insights, and theoretical conclusions but also for practices. The paper proposes French philosopher and sociologist Edgar Morin’s (e.g. 1990; 1992; 1997; 2005; 2008a; 2008b) methodological approach *dialogic* as an alternative and sophisticated approach to study and understand the complexity of opposing forces like tensions, paradoxes, and contradictions in organization, leadership and management research. By applying the dialogic approach, the researcher is able to comprehend the antagonistic and the complementarity mechanisms of opposing forces simultaneously. The dialogic approach is proposed in the context of the oft-applied dualistic and dialectical research perspectives. To support the purpose of the paper, self-management as a research subject is used to illustrate the implications for applying different research methodologies.

*Keywords*: research methodology, opposing forces, dualistic, dialectic, duality, dialogic, Edgar Morin, self-management, complexity, order-disorder
Introduction

The methodological approach that researchers apply has implications not only for theory-building, insights, and theoretical conclusions but also for practice. This paper proposes the methodological approach *dialogic* as a sophisticated perspective to study the complexity of opposing forces like tensions, paradoxes, and contradictions in organization, leadership and management research. Three decades ago, Poole and Van de Ven (1989, p. 562) called for an increased attention to “…the opportunities offered by tensions, oppositions, and contradictions among explanations of the same phenomenon” in order to stimulate “…the development of more encompassing theories” [Poole and Van de Ven, (1989), p. 563]. Research in organization, leadership and management studies have been occupied with studying the embedded opposing forces as they are expressed in e.g. tensions, paradoxes, dilemmas, and contradictions (e.g. Clegg et al., 2002; Dutta, 2012; Ford and Backoff, 1988; Lewis, 2000; Poole and Van de Ven, 1989; Putnam et al., 2016; Smith and Lewis, 2011). Researchers have pertained to opposing forces such as autonomy and control (Fairhurst, 2001), power and resistance (Mumby, 2005), routines and change (Feldman and Pentland, 2003), competition and cooperation (Dutta, 2012), and stability and change (Farjoun, 2010) among others in organization, leadership, and management studies. However, despite being on the rise (Fairhurst and Putnam, 2018; Farjoun, 2018), paradoxes and contradictions are still under-explored (Collinson, 2014, 2020).

There has been an ongoing discussion about how to address opposing forces in order to avoid making narrow conclusions, which blinds researchers to see nuances, neglects important issues, and leads practitioners astray to believe that complex mechanisms are simple. This paper seeks to contribute to this debate.
Elbow (1993) suggests that researchers choose between five basic options of dealing with binaries, whereas Knights (1997) draws up a typology of four distinct approaches to dualism. Their categorizations range from polarizing and dichotomizing approaches, which keep the poles of the opposing forces separated hence pertaining to dualistic thinking, to integrating and transcending approaches, which address the interrelation and interconnectedness of polarities, hence pertaining to dialectical thinking. Dualistic thinking, in particular, has been criticized its dichotomizing nature, because it neglects the relatedness of opposing forces (e.g. Grint, 1997; Reed, 1997; Knights, 1997; Fairhurst, 2001; Fairhurst and Connaughton, 2014; Collinson, 2014; 2020). As a response, dialectical perspectives have been promoted as more encompassing ways of studying opposing forces (e.g. Giddens, 1984; Knights, 1997; Smith and Lewis, 2011; Collinson, 2014; 2020; Farjoun et al., 2018), because they encompass mutual interdependence of apparent polarities (Farjoun et al., 2018). Dutta (2012) utilises Hegel’s dialectical approach to explain the paradox of why firms engage in competition and cooperation in turbulent environments. Most recently, Collinson (2020) emphasized the value of critical dialectical forms of analysis as a way to overcome dichotomization in the study of contradictions, tensions and paradoxes in leadership.

With a view to contribute to the ongoing debate on how to study opposing forces in organization, leadership, and management studies, the objective of this paper is twofold. Firstly, it accounts for dualistic and dialectical research perspectives, which for heuristic reasons are here categorized as two broad categories, which seek resolution of opposing forces respectively through separation and integration. Secondly, it proposes Morin’s concept of dialogic as an alternative methodological perspective, which embraces the antagonistic and competitive nature of opposing forces as well as their complementarity and union without compromising their separation and individual distinctiveness.
The paper argues that dialogic as a research methodology can contribute to dialectical perspectives in particular by capturing the less orderly state of an apparent opposing force, and instead of seeking resolution provide an understanding and acceptance of the uncertainties and ambiguities that the world as an open system is made up of.

The accounts for the dualistic, dialectical and dialogic perspectives are followed by an illustration of the analytical implications it has when each methodological perspective is applied to study opposing forces of a specific study object. Self-management is chosen as a vignette for this purpose, because research on self-management displays clear opposing forces like autonomy and control.

It is not the purpose of this paper to judge between the methodological perspectives, but to elucidate the implications it has for the analysis and for drawing up of conclusions when the individual methodological perspective is applied. It is argued that applying dialogic makes the researcher able to avoid being reductionist, to grasp complexity, wholeness and interconnectedness, and to accept uncertainty and ambiguity as givens in a complex system of opposing forces.

**Methodological perspectives to study opposing forces**

As accounted for in the introduction, there seems to be a turn towards dialectical perspectives. This, however, does not mean that the dualistic perspective has been discarded. Polarization and marginalization of one side of a tension, contradiction, and paradox are still recurring ways to seek resolution in much research (Knights, 1997; Elbow, 1993). Collinson (2014; 2020) even states that there has been an over-reliance on dichotomization and polarization in leadership studies. In the following, the two broad categories of dualistic and dialectical thinking are accounted for.
**The dualistic perspective**

When dualisms are defined as dichotomies, they refer to mutually exclusive choices like in a dilemma (Elbow, 1993; Smith and Lewis, 2011). Dualistic thinking keeps the opposing forces apart through polarization, dichotomization, and marginalization (Collinson, 2014). It privileges one side of an apparent polarity, while overstating the negative features of the downplayed other side, which is then marginalized and treated as the ‘other’ (Collinson, 2020). Hence, the confrontation of opposing forces is used for choosing or privileging one side of an opposition making the other the antithesis (Lewis, 2000). In this way, it is a deterministic perspective in a hierarchical sense because one side is selected over the other as the better choice (Knights, 1997). Derrida (1978) uses the term ‘logocentrism’ to describe the process where a narrative, which does not comply with the dominant logic, is marginalized. Such dominance of one type of reasoning have among others given privilege to masculine, order, and rational logics reducing and marginalizing the opposite logics as nonpreferred and inferior ‘others’.

Albeit defined in contrast to, and therefore dependent upon each other, the selected part is the only one getting the analytical attention as the true representation of reality. There is not interaction or acknowledgement of any relation or connection between the poles, wherefore it is most often described as an either/or logic (Elbow, 1993). Collinson (2020) shows that mainstream leadership research is replete with such dualistic thinking as distinctions are often treated as ‘either/or’ and mutually exclusive dichotomies.

The dualistic perspective is criticized for being the easy and simplistic choice for the researcher - Grint (1997) ironically calls it the ‘bi-polar shopping list approach’- because it simplifies and rejects significant insights and discards of difference and diversity (Knights, 1997; Collinson, 2020). Many researchers have been particularly critical of the dichotomization of opposing forces in dualistic thinking (for example Grint, 1997; Reed, 1997; Knights, 1997; Fairhurst, 2001; Fairhurst and Connaughton, 2014; Collinson, 2014; 2020). As it does not
include the possibility that opposing forces are interconnected in any way, it distorts the insights (Collinson, 2014). When there is no reasoning between the poles, only deterministic choices are made about one being superior to the other, without even taking the other into consideration. In that relation, researchers inside and outside of organization studies find questionable these polarized approaches contesting with one another for priority and recognition. Knights (1997) (as did Giddens, 1984; and Derrida, 1978) problematizes the way that dualistic theorizing by privileging one side over the other provides ‘closure of meaning’ and leaves nothing unreconciled. Thereby, it commits to what Knights (1997) calls ‘misplaced correctness’.

**The dialectical perspectives**

The dialectical perspectives are here for heuristic reasons presented as one category, however, as will be clear in the following, dialectical perspectives make up a broad category with varied versions, which are the result of organic developments over time. Some dialectical perspectives even have overlaps with dualistic thinking.

**Hegelian and Marxist dialectics**

Despite its long history in philosophy and early social science (Collinson, 2014) with Hegel and Marx among the forerunners, dialectical thinking gained ground in theories of society (Giddens, 1984; Bhaskar, 1993; Latour, 1993) and later in organization studies (Bartunek, 2006; Morrell, 2012; Mumby, 2005; Putnam, 2003; Seo et al., 2004), leadership studies (Collinson, 2005, 2014, 2020; Fairhurst, 2001) and management studies (Bodrožić and Adler, 2018; Dutta, 2012) among others. Opposite to the dichotomization of dualistic thinking, the dialectical perspectives tend to focus more on the interrelation of opposites (Knights, 1997).
The dialectical method can be traced back to the philosophies of Hegel and Marx (Collinson, 2020). Hegel conceived of dialectic as the tendency of a notion to pass over into its own negation as the result of conflict between its inherent contradictory aspects. The dichotomous state between A (thesis) and non-A (anti-thesis) is sought resolved into a third state, a synthesis (Bencivenga, 2000; Hegel, 2018). Notably, Dutta (2012) utilized Hegel's dialectical approach to attend to the paradox competition and cooperation. The creation of a synthesis is, however, criticized for not recognizing the value of the opposing forces as separate units (Elbow, 1993). Instead, each unit is perceived as contingent upon the other in order to alter into a novel construction. The Hegelian dialectic is, in other words, a matter of deconstructing and undoing oppositions and creating a third state. As Elbow (1993) puts it, synthesizing strives to eliminate differences in the name of unity, purity, order, and hierarchy, which he considers problematic and undesirable because it discards the distinctiveness of the parts.

The Marxist dialectic builds on the logic that everything contains two mutually incompatible and exclusive but nevertheless equally essential and indispensable parts. The tension is sought resolved through battle resulting in a dominance of one side of the opposition (Conze, 1935). In this way there is an overlap with dualistic thinking insofar as Marxist dialectic seeks to displace those in dominant positions in society, with their opposites, i.e. replacing capitalists by the proletariat and making it the dominant side. In contrast to the dualistic perspective, however, the battle between the opposites is central in the Marxist dialectic. This is one of the significant differences between Marxist and Hegelian dialectic. For Marx the goal was to make revolution by overthrowing the capitalist system, giving power to the proletariat, and creating a classless society. Of course, it can be claimed, that the Marxist perspective has one side determined as the better (the proletariat), however, it was only by becoming aware of the polarities in the capitalist logic that workers would be able to make the revolt and liberate themselves through a struggle for power and change the existing social order (Littlejohn,
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1992). Therefore, the polarization is needed for the revolution to happen. Maintaining the polarization between the opposing forces during the combat between them, is therefore a precondition in the Marxist dialectic. The Hegelian dialectic uses, in contrast to the Marxist dialectic, the confrontation between opposites to alter the conflicting status quo and integrate the opposing forces into a novel construction, and is therefore not oriented towards conflict and struggle, but rather towards compromise and unity as the resolution.

Marxist dialectic constitutes the familiar turf of critical theory (e.g., Horkheimer, 1937/1976). A common feature in critical theory is its drive towards revealing suppressive forces in social settings aiming at change and emancipation (Horkheimer, 1937/1976). Nested within this frame, critical research has revolved around an implicit logic that for example privileges emancipation over mechanisms of power and control (Deetz, 1992; 1995; Mumby, 2005). Such an approach “... has the dual effect of reifying the preferred pole and subsuming the deferred pole beneath that which is privileged” [Mumby, (2005), p. 20]. Mumby (2005) recognizes, however, that studies relying on Marxist dialectics sometimes fall prey to blindly attack capitalist forms of workplace control rather than attempting to explain the mechanisms by which they are produced, resisted, and accommodated.

The duality turn in dialectics

In later developments of the dialectical thinking, opposing forces are analysed as “... contradictory yet interrelated elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time” [Smith and Lewis, (2011), p. 382]. Giddens (1984) was with his development of the structuration theory a forerunner for this turn, which he coined ‘duality’. It unites structure and agency as interconnected and mutually dependent forces. In studies of organizational contradictions, the coexistence of competing and complementary elements is equally highlighted (Ashforth and Reingen, 2014; Clegg et al, 2002; Eisenhardt, 2000; Farjoun, 2010; Mumby, 2005; Sewell
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Collinson (2020) shows how opposing forces can act both mutually reinforcing and in tension. It follows from the duality view that opposing forces are interrelated and may interpenetrate one another “*such that adjustments in one directly impact on the other*” [Putnam et al. (2011), p. 36]. In this way, change happens in an interplay between the opposing forces. Accordingly, the duality-based dialectical perspective attend to the interconnected, simultaneous, and dynamic nature of opposing forces and recognize their complementarity and competing properties.

In contrast to the Hegelian and Marxist dialectics, the duality-based dialectic does not seek deconstruction of polarities, rather the two states are considered important because change and development emerge from their interrelation (Eisenhardt, 2000; Farjoun, 2010). In this way we can see that they are simultaneously constraining and enabling (North, 2005).

Authors within varying fields have proposed ways to address the duality-based approach. Smith and Lewis (2011) developed a dynamic equilibrium model of organizing to manage paradoxical tensions. It contains a management strategy, which is to confront the tension via iterating responses of splitting and integrating, which involves choosing A, then choosing B (splitting), and then accommodating the integration of A-B. This happens in a dynamic flow of continued splitting and integrating aiming to create a dynamic equilibrium of the tension. On a similar note, Nonaka and Toyama (2002) argue that in a dynamic organizational system, the role of leadership is to support opposing forces and harness the constant tension between them, enabling the system to not only survive but to improve continuously.

Fairhurst and Putnam (2018) developed a proposal for an integrative methodology for studying opposing forces by aligning grounded theory techniques with organizational discourse analysis. Most recently, Collinson (2020) proposed critical dialectical perspective as an alternative way of addressing contradictions and paradoxes as simultaneous forms, which interconnect in ways that are often mutually reinforcing but sometimes in tension. Collinson
(2020) proposes the critical dialectical perspective as a better way to reveal the importance of otherwise neglected issues and contributes with an enlarged view of seemingly binary issues.

Hence, the development of the duality-based perspective has expanded dialectical thinking with a strategy to attend to competing positions simultaneously while affirming both poles as equally true, necessary, important, or correct – even if they are contradictory and in conflict. Moreover, the duality-based perspective is because of its recognition of the interdependence of opposites able to grasp dynamic shifts over time and provide change and transformation (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002; Collinson, 2020). It can thus be considered a representational move away from the (n)either/(n)or logic of synthesizing towards a both/and construct. Resolution of the opposing forces in this perspective does not imply an elimination of the tension, rather it includes finding a means of meet competing demands or consider divergent ideas simultaneously. Thus, whereas synthesizing transcends opposing forces and develops a new orderly form, the dualistic-based perspective seeks resolution through deconstruction and reconceptualization of the tension into a more harmonious integrated state what recognize the distinction of the parts (Smith and Lewis, 2011).

The application of each of the reviewed methodological perspectives has varied analytical consequences and leads to distinct theoretical conclusions and practice implications. It is a central aim for the above perspectives to resolve either by nullifying one pole (dualistic perspective), by embracing both poles either in a synthesis, or by integrating into a whole while simultaneously maintaining the parts (dialectical perspectives). Despite their different approaches to study opposing forces, they all seek to accommodate the human grain to find some kind of harmony, order, or unity through resolution either by separating and selecting one side or by integrating the polarity.
Dialogic as an alternative methodological perspective

Notwithstanding the great value of the dualistic and the dialectical perspectives, they may lead researchers to focus either on the *parts*, thereby neglecting the additional knowledge we can get from their interrelation, or to focus on the *whole* thereby losing sight of the distinctiveness of the parts. Montuori (2006) is especially critical of what he calls the (pseudo-) holistic approaches, which synthesize and transcend the distinctiveness of the parts. Morin (2008a) is equally critical of attempts to address wholeness and interconnectedness. He argues that they are rarely able to grasp the complexity of the whole and contributes with what he presents as a more complex way of understanding. Morin’s (e.g. 1990; 1997; 2005; 2008a; 2008b) methodological approach, *dialogic*, is here proposed as an alternative way to understand the complexity of opposing forces, as it contributes with even more complexity to the understanding of the interrelatedness of parts and with the whole. As will be apparent from the following account of the dialogic perspective, it builds on the same logic as the duality-based dialectics of attentiveness to the distinctiveness of the parts while recognizing their interrelation.

The principle of system

Dialogic is founded on Morin’s (2008a) principle of system, which builds on the old formula from systems theory that the whole is more than the sum of its parts. However, Morin (2008a) breaks with classical systems thinking in a crucial way. He argues that as systems theory reacted against reductionism and proposed holism, it merely brought about yet another reduction as it reduces the properties of the parts to the properties of the whole. In contrast, according to Morin, the complex knowledge of the whole and the parts lie in their union and in their context, not in each of them in isolation. The dialogical approach makes it possible to grasp this. Morin’s (2008a) construction of the system principle turns the researcher’s attention to
connections and linkages of parts in a whole, which makes it possible for the researcher to conceive of an opposing force simultaneously in its micro-dimension (e.g. individual, employee) and in its macro-dimension (e.g. collective, organization).

**The principle of dialogic**

With the dialogic perspective Morin (e.g. 1990; 1992; 1997; 2005; 2008a; 2008b) proposes a way of thinking that expresses the fusion of two or more different, or even opposite logics, in a complex entity where competing properties continue to function. The concept of dialogic thus refers to the fact that two or more logics can be reconciled without losing their duality (Bouchet, 2010). Hence, the dialogic approach allows us to simultaneously unite, relate and keep separate rather than to either separate or integrate or do both it in a flow of events as Smith and Lewis (2011) suggest in their equilibrium model. Accordingly, applying the dialogic perspective enables the researcher to embrace the antagonistic and competitive outcomes of dichotomous relations as well as their complementarity and union without compromising their separation and individual distinctiveness (Morin, 1992). In Morin’s own words, his method “…relinks that which is disjointed and compartmentalized” and respects diversity as it recognizes unity, and tries to discern interdependencies” [Morin and Kern, (1999), p. 130]. The organization of unity and diversity can be illustrated by the dynamic recursive loop as shown in figure 1.

--- FIGURE 1 INSERTED HERE ---

**Order and disorder**

Order and disorder are central terms in the explanation of the dialogic approach. Morin (2008a) suggests that the researcher should focus on the interaction between disorder (e.g. dispersion, disruption, disintegration, inhibitions, collisions, disorganizing, and irregularity)
and order (e.g. integration, control, union, laws, regulation, stability, and organized cycles).
The dialogic approach is thus not just a matter of separating or integrating opposing forces
with an eye to resolve disorder into order. It is also a matter of nurturing order and disorder
and of understanding how order and disorder act antagonistically and complementarily
(Morin, 2008a). It is in the interaction of order and disorder that the organization of a system
emerges. Organization without disorder leads to a sterile, homogenous system where no
change and innovation is possible. Complete disorder without order, however, precludes or-
ganization. It is the interaction of order and disorder that causes the organization to remain
open to change, growth, and new possibilities (Morin, 2008a). Hence, a tension should in this
light not be sought resolved.

A narrative of the opposing forces, control and resistance, from a blue colour worker at
the French automobile factory Rénault (Mothé, 1959) illustrates how dialogic as a research
methodology can grasp the complex interrelation of orderly and disorderly interventions and
their productive interplay. The narrative illustrates how an informal, secret and clandestine as-
sociation had developed in the organization and came to manifest the workers’ resistance
against a very rigid workplace. As a direct result, this resistance helped the workers to gain
some personal autonomy and freedom. This would be the expected observation from a dual-
ity-based dialectical point of view. However, unexpectedly and complementary to this antago-
nistic reaction that the resistance represented, the secret association between workers con-
strued a much suppler workplace. Seen from a management control perspective, the emerged
resistance represented a disorderly behaviour that worked antagonistically to managerial con-
tral mechanisms.

From a dualistic approach, the resistance - control relation would be considered irrecon-
cilable, wherefore resistance would be seen as an inhibitor of control and vice versa. A choice
would be made between which side should be addressed in order to overcome the other. From
a management perspective, control would be the obvious choice. An implication for practice would then be that resistance should be defeated in order to re-establish control. In contrast, a researcher analysing the same narrative with a dialectical based approach would focus on the integration and complementary of the control-resistance relation and search for synthesis, equilibrium, or integration of the opposition in order to reconcile the tension. It would recognize both parts, however, the focus would be on their interplay, not their distinctive nature.

Applying the dialogic approach, the resistance behaviour could be understood as directly helping the workers to gain some personal autonomy and freedom. The supple organization that developed from the resistance, could from a dialogic approach be explained as the effect that resistance was collaborative to the rigid organization because it was due to the resisting behaviour that things worked out more effectively than if the workers had obeyed the rigid organization (Mothé, 1959). Antagonistic behaviour thus complemented rigid strategies.

Had there not been control, resistance would not have evolved, and the suppler organization not developed. Through the dialogic approach, we are able to understand how e.g. resistance can work complementary to formal rules and regulations and not just be understood as an opposing force hindering an orderly end, but as an enforcement to its opposition. Order emanates from disorder and vice versa (Morin, 2008a). Taylor (2003, p. 121) explains it in the following way “disorder does not simply destroy order, structure, and organization, but is also a condition of their formation and reformation”. Because of complementarity and the variation it brings to homogeneous systems, it is according to Morin (2008a) of paramount importance to nourish disorders such as rivalry, gossip, and conflicting behaviour. In an organizational context, therefore, we may from a dialogic approach, consider informal networks, collaborative resistances and autonomies as necessary ingredients for a viable organization. It is therefore not the intention of dialogic to resolve disorderly mechanisms. In the case of the above narrative from Renault, where there is a circular process between the
distinct forces of resistance performed by the workers and the rigid interventions implemented by the management. The dialogic perspective enables us to see how the interrelatedness of such disorder and order produce a suppler workplace. In the following the concept of circular causality that lies behind this logic is further elaborated.

_Circular causality_

In contrast to most other approaches to the study of opposing forces, the dialogic approach does not seek resolution but defines a recursive circular causality between order and disorder that neither solves nor dissolves the tension but encompasses the complementary and antagonistic forces of the tension. Dialogic is the process that runs inside the recursive loop between order and disorder, between cause and effect (Gomez, 2008) as shown in figure 2.

--- FIGURE 2 INSERTED HERE ---

The circular logic of causality logic replaces a linear logic of causality (Morin, 2005) that we see for example in synthesizing, but also in duality-based logics, where stability, order and equilibrium are the focus of the dynamic process between complementary ends. The recursion between antagonistic and complementarity mechanisms in the dialogic process produces a plateau or an incidence in a continuous spiral of knowledge. By emphasizing the causal circularity and recursive nature of dialogical understanding, we are able to obtain spiral or helical knowledge as each tour in the loop lifts our intelligibility to a higher level of comprehension. The illustration in figure 2, thus, shall be understood as a spiral that, for each round, moves the researcher to a higher level of understanding. It is a helical process that does not reach a final level of insight or ends in a separation or an integration. Rather the process provides a continued source of intelligibility that cannot be managed because it is part of an open system where order emanates from disorder and vice versa (Morin, 2008a).
**Auto-organization**

Contrary to the assumptions in the dualistic and dialectical perspectives that opposing forces can be resolved via an exterior intervention, e.g. the researcher in analysis or the manager in practice, Morin (2008a) contents that opposing forces are self-organizing systems, which means that order emerges “(...) out of spontaneous interaction in response to disorder” (p. xxxv). Morin uses the term auto-organization about this process. Through auto-organization we are able to not only accept the idea of the autonomy of systems, but we are also able to comprehend the uninterrupted process of reorganization or regeneration between order and disorder, between parts and whole that maintains the system. Accordingly, it makes no sense to plan for a resolution of a tension through separation or integration. One of the key aspects of auto-organization is the creation of order out of uncertainty, ambiguity, and chaos. The order out of disorder emerges in an open system’s interaction with its environment, which causes it to be subject to fluctuation and thereby constant change and instability. The more complexity in the system, the more uncertainty and ambiguity, and the more fluctuation. This why the organization between order and disorder is always re-auto-organized (Morin, 2008a).

**Exploring different methodological approaches to self-management**

In this section, I use research on self-management as a vignette to illustrate the analytical differences when the diverse research methodologies are applied, though with an emphasis on dialogic. Self-management is not a new term and the section will not provide a thorough review of self-management research. The illustration is based on tensions, which are manifest in self-management research, namely *emancipation - disciplining*, and *autonomy - control*.

On the one hand, research has emphasized the empowerment and emancipation of the employee as central objectives and outcomes of self-management, hence focusing on and advocating for e.g. freedom, autonomy, self-control, self-rationality, and individuality (e.g.,
Harley et al., 2005; Knights and Willmott, 2002; Manz, 1986). From this stance, critical scholars have discussed whether self-management is the road to ‘industrial democracy’ and ‘well-being’, or if it simply entails a strategic manipulation of workers by producing “the illusion of making decisions by choosing among fixed and limited alternatives designed by a management which deliberately leaves insignificant matters open to choice” [Braverman, (1974), p. 39]. Scholars have indicated the inabilities of a company to regulate employee behaviour (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002) and others have been concerned with the hegemonic elements of these self-inducement practices (e.g., Barker, 1993; Deetz, 1992; 1995; Deetz and Brown, 2004; Kunda, 1992; Mills, 1983). Accordingly, it has been discussed whether self-management practices are actually increasing autonomy and genuinely distributing authority or if it is merely a cover-up for a covert and in some cases even more rigid disciplining (e.g., Barker, 1993; Deetz, 1992; Deetz and Brown, 2004; Dunbar, 1981). Oft cited works by Mills (1983) and Barker (1993) have provided evidence that self-managing systems, which are not regulated by a formal structure, will develop rules and regulations. These will in some cases act even more rigidly than the rules that controlled and disciplined the employee in the hierarchical system, which a more autonomous system based on self-management was supposed to subvert. These critics primarily have a bias towards more emancipation and autonomy, and less control and discipline. Thus, self-management is, on the one hand, criticized for not genuinely empowering subordinates and instead covertly bringing discipline and control back. The result is an imbalanced and tension-filled relation between disciplining and emancipation; between control and autonomy.

On the other hand, other lines of research have explored how to increase the efficiency of self-management and how to structure the management of self-management. Scholars have argued that managing self-management requires external reinforcements like facilitation, guidance, training, coaching, feedback, learning, evaluation, and selective recruitment (Kerr
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and Slocum, 1981; Manz and Sims, 1980; Thoresen and Mahoney, 1974). These techniques are proposed as mediators to structure and lead self-management in order to ensure that self-managing employees are aligned with organizational interests (Bertelsen et al., 2004). Value-based management, in particular, has been mentioned as a way to discipline employee behaviours and prevent anarchy (Bertelsen et al., 2004). Other research on self-management has studied how to foster and nourish motivation and commitment in the organization through self-management (Likert, 1967; Manz, 1986; Manz and Sims, 1987; 1989; 1993) in order to increase organizational creativity, innovation, and competitive advantage (Hackman, 1986; King and West, 1985; Mohrman and Cummings, 1989; Monge et al., 1992; Oldham and Cummings, 1996; Politis, 2003; Walton, 1985). Accordingly, this line of research has investigated how the management can affect and influence the behaviours of the self-managing employees in a direction that is beneficial and profitable for the organization. Hence, the focus has been on how to ensure managerial control and efficiency, when management is delegated to the subordinates.

Both lines of self-management research elucidate the opposing forces of control-autonomy and emancipation-disciplining, however from different sides. One line of work considers control and discipline as erroneous and disturbing mechanisms to the ideal of self-management where emancipation and autonomy are the driving force for its success. The other line of work considers autonomy and emancipation as potential triggers of anarchy that needs to be restrained and taken control of to prevent failure. These tensions provide the ground for the following discussion of how the dualistic, dialectical and dialogic perspectives could approach them.
**The dualistic approach to tensions in self-management**

Being a matter of choosing one side over the other, the dualistic approach will focus on the tensions in self-management from one pole either to marginalize or elevate it. Several studies have focused on showing how control mechanisms inhibit emancipatory forces in self-management (Barker, 1993), and how organizational control processes tend to interpret worker resistance as relatively ineffectual in transforming everyday relations of power (Mumby, 2005). While early critical studies focused almost exclusively on organizational processes of control and domination, more recently the pendulum has swung more toward a focus on—perhaps even celebration of—possibilities for employee resistance (Mumby, 2005).

This line of thinking would not consider the possibility of simultaneous disciplining and empowering of the self-managing employee. Therefore, any manifestation of managerial intrusion or authority would potentially be considered to be in conflict with the empowerment and autonomy ideals of self-management.

**The synthesis-based dialectical approach to tensions in self-management**

Applying a Hegelian dialectic approach, researchers would focus on the dialectic relation between e.g. employee empowerment (thesis) and management discipline (anti-thesis) and integrate them into a third consensus state, where both positions are accommodated for in a synthesis that nullifies the dialectical parts (thesis and anti-thesis). The synthesis could, for example, be expressed in the development of a new management concept that ascribes employees with extended authority in some areas, such as e.g. team self-management, value-based management, super-leadership, or management evaluation forms like employee development conversations and 360-degree leader evaluations, while still maintaining some management driven disciplining.
The duality-based dialectical approach to tensions in self-management

Exploring self-management from a duality-based dialectical approach, research would emphasize the equal importance of both poles of the tension and attend to these demands simultaneously. It would therefore from this perspective be plausible to argue that even if it from a moral stance makes perfectly sense to celebrate individualism and democracy in the organization on the one hand, it is just as plausible from a managerial standpoint to limit and guide autonomous behaviours in the company. Over-emphasizing either logic risk resulting in unintended consequences no matter how legitimate they might seem individually. Both parts, therefore, would be taken into consideration simultaneously and knowledge of their interrelation would be a central research purpose. The self-management practice could from a duality-based approach very well be approached as a structuration process (Giddens, 1984), focusing on how one pole presupposes the other towards a common integrated order. In that way, it emphasizes the complementarity of e.g. emancipation and disciplining, and nurture the quest for interrelatedness.

The dialogic approach to tensions in self-management

As the dialogic principle contests binary thinking and argues for circular causality between simultaneously antagonistic and complementary forces, it does not make sense to approach opposing forces such as emancipation and disciplining as expressions of disorder that needs to be resolved through separation or integration. Instead, the dialogic approach would lead the researcher to explore the complementarities and conflicting antagonisms, hence explore how the opposing forces mutually cause and compete with each other. Consider the development of normative control mechanisms in self-management such as Barker (1993) accounted for. Dialogic would like the other methodological approaches emphasize the conflict between the intended autonomy of self-management and the antagonistic development of rigid normative
control mechanisms and rule-following. The normative control appears antagonistic and disorderly to the autonomy ideal of self-management. However, combining the antagonism of this autonomy-control relation with an understanding of its complementarity, we simultaneously grasp the orderly version of the relationship without dissolving the disorderly and conflicting state of the opposing forces of the relationship. Thus, we would see, that it is because of normative control that there is a sense of autonomy, and that the autonomy creates the normative control. Then autonomy and control maintain and gain from each other.

Thus, by exploring the complementarity between opposing forces such as control and autonomy in self-management, we may find evidence that normative rules and control mechanisms actually accommodate the self-managing persons’ or teams’ needs for rules and regulations in order to reduce their uncertainty. The individual’s search for formalization and acts of rule-seeking behaviour has been described by Bennis and Shepard (1956), Smirchich and Morgan (1982), and Giddens (1984) as a natural mechanism that develops when a person or a group is left without structure and leadership. In such situations, they state, leadership emerges in a natural and spontaneous manner to structure the experiences of the individuals in a meaningful way. Rule-seeking behaviour and the need for structure lead us to understand that control, for example performed through structural bindings like rules and regulations, is not necessarily antagonistic to an empowerment of the individual. Thus, through the dialogic approach, we see that control mechanisms can act complementary to employee empowerment and does not only assume an antagonistic position to autonomy and emancipation. It is the development of these normative rules and regulations that makes self-management function in a suppler way. Likewise, autonomy would from a hierarchical point of view be perceived antagonistic to the management of self-management. Though, from a dialogic approach it can be considered complementary to management because an autonomous behaviour may be more flexible to unexpected developments because the employee is able to act promptly without too
much consideration of rules and regulations. Stohl (2004) even showed that rule-breaking behaviour sometimes makes participative work processes more effective.

Further, research on work-life balance has been concerned with the amount of stress that self-management risks to foster for the individual (Randrup and Grandjean, 2006). Primarily, work-related stress is proven to be attributable to unclear work limits, flexible work hours, increased autonomy, unclear job demands, and varying work tasks, and expectations placed on the individual to take initiatives (Pedersen, 2009). Hence, when an individual is attributed autonomy, responsibility, and freedom it may have unintended consequences expressed e.g. in feelings of being lost and alone. Thus, if research and practice reinforce autonomy and push for less control and command, the individual’s need for structure and guidance is neglected. From a critical perspective, there is a tendency to discard managerial control and command interventions because they inhibit individual freedom and autonomy (e.g. Deetz, 1992). But following the perception that control and autonomy can be complementary, which is elucidated through a dialogic approach, the possibilities that lie in control and discipline mechanisms to enable emancipation and autonomy is lost if control and disciplining is inhibited. Thus, if we only see control and management involvement as antagonistic to employee empowerment and emancipation, or if we only see autonomous behaviour as antagonistic to management control and structure, it limits our understanding of self-management as a research object. The understanding that and how control actually can enable autonomy would be missed. From a dialogical approach, these opposing forces would through the circular causality process be recognized for their complementarity and from which it would follow that control enables autonomy, which enables control which enables autonomy etcetera creating an internal order, while their antagonistic relation is kept intact as the disorderly side of the relation.
The idea of the auto-organization mechanism in the dialogic approach explains why and how a self-managing team may develop normative control mechanisms, which were even more rigorous than in hierarchy system (e.g., Barker, 1993; Mills, 1983). It follows from the principle of auto-organization that if for example structure in the form of control mechanisms is removed from the system, the parts will self-re-organize and regenerate a new structure to replace it. Through circular causality, we can grasp how a unit actively self-produces elements and effects that are necessary for its (re)generation. For example, a self-managing person reproduces the organization, e.g. by reproducing its values and rules even when they are not present, because these values and rules are the precondition of the self-managing person’s professional existence. This regenerating process is not controlled by any external force, but auto-organised in a circular process between the parts. Therefore, when we understand the circular interdependence between opposing forces as auto-organized, it enables us to explain why a push for autonomy may simultaneously lead to an increased dependence on authoritative forces or a replacement thereof created by the individual him- or herself. The employee depends on his or her employing organization, which at the same time makes his or her autonomy possible. And like we see in Giddens (1984) structuration between agency and structure, the same mechanism goes for the employing organization, which at its turn is dependent on the employees who at once reproduce and challenge its order. Thus, a dialogic approach to self-management can show that the autonomous person can only exercise his or her authority by adhering to structural bindings. We need the idea of auto-organization to understand why rules and regulations are often re-established in a system where they were removed (e.g. Barker, 1993). To put it briefly, through the dialogic approach, we come to understand that autonomy is antagonistic to control, and that autonomy is complementary to control, and that these two mechanisms are auto-organizing in a circularly causality between them.
Comparing the perspectives

It is clear from the above accounts that the presented methodological perspectives converge and diverge at several points. Some perspectives have emerged as a reaction against another (dialectical reacts against dualistic perspectives, as does the duality-based dialectic against the synthesis-based dialectic), while other perspectives are organic developments of the other (dialogue has clear traits of the duality-based dialectics). Key features of the dualistic, dialectical, and dialogic perspectives are summarized in figure 3.

--- FIGURE 3 INSERTED HERE ---

It is apparent from the schematic presentation of the perspectives, that there are overlaps and differences. Given that the purpose of this paper is to propose dialogic as an alternative research methodology to the study of opposing forces, an account of the distinctiveness of dialogic in relation other perspectives is presented below.

The contribution of Morin’s methodology should be understood in the same line of thinking as Collinson (2020) proposed just recently with the critical dialectical perspective, namely as a better way to reveal the importance of otherwise neglected issues and to contribute with an enlarged view of binary issues. Despite conceptual overlaps with duality-based dialectics, dialogic has some distinctive features that separate it from the other perspectives.

Synthesizing can be seen as a problematic way to capture the whole, as it eliminates differences in the name of unity, purity, order, and hierarchy (Elbow, 1993). It has been considered problematic and undesirable by several authors as a response to the Hegelian dialectic (Elbow, 1993; Knights, 1997; Collinson, 2014; 2020). Despite their different approaches to resolving a tension or a contradiction, the dualistic and dialectical perspectives both seek to accommodate the human grain to find some kind of harmony, order, or unity through resolution either by separating and selecting one side of a polarity or by integrating and finding an equilibrium for the polarity. That is, being attentive to either the part or the whole.
A key dimension in Morin’s work is that it recognizes chaos, ambiguity, and uncertainty as inescapable dimensions of any system. According to Morin, we should accept and embrace the inevitable presence of uncertainty as a fact of inquiry. When there is uncertainty and ambiguity, resolution is not a possibility such as dualistic and dialectic perspectives attempt. Instead, an acceptance of the ambiguity of complexity is necessary for the researcher. Even if we capture a more complex and encompassing version of reality through dialectics, it is still with the attempt to resolve and capture the whole picture, an endeavour that is not possible from Morin’s perspective. Therefore, the dialogic analysis is presented as a circular causality that does not have an end in the form of a whole picture and a resolved dichotomy. Morin (2008a) urges the researcher to befriend the unexpected and the uncertain and to understand that the human world is not ruled by one overarching order, and that freedom, spontaneity, surprise, and the unexpected and ambiguity are the order of the day. This is in sharp contrast to the dualistic perspective that provides ‘closure of meaning’ and leaves nothing unreconciled (Knights, 1997) and against the nature of the human being who seem to be uncomfortable with what is unreconciled or incompatible (Elbow, 1993). Despite its recognition of the distinctiveness of polarities, the primary driver and focus of the duality-based dialectics is resolution even if only temporary because of dynamics in the system. For example, Smith and Lewis’ (2011) dynamic equilibrium model of organizing, which aims to manage paradoxical tensions via iterating responses of splitting and integrating. Likewise, Collinson’ (2020) proposed the critical dialectical form of analysis to leadership studies because it more effectively attends to the interconnected, relational and dynamic nature of leader–follower dynamics, hence, focusing on a more holistic form that recognizes the interconnectedness of apparent poles. Again, despite recognizing the value of the distinctiveness of the parts, the aim is to capture an orderly version of their connectedness in the duality-based perspectives.
As have been noted, the dialogic perspective has overlaps with Giddens (1984) structuration theory. However, Giddens (1984) is also primarily oriented towards the orderly union of the units, towards describing the order of society. To Morin, seeking resolution of a tension reduces the complexity of our thinking and understanding, because it does not recognize the uncertainties and ambiguities that are embedded in any system.

The discussion about resolution or not, is connected to the dialogic being based on an open system and auto-organizing logic. The order out of disorder emerges in an open system’s interaction with its environment, which causes it to be subject to fluctuation and thereby constant change and instability. The more complexity in the system, the more fluctuation. Therefore, it makes a difference of we address the complex relation of an opposing force as part of a closed or an open system. If we believe, that the system is closed, it is possible to manage and regulate the parts in the system, like we see in Smith and Lewis’ (2011) model. The dialogic perspective does not consider interventions in the system as a possibility, because it is open and replete with chaos, uncertainties and ambiguities.

Conclusion
Across time and scientific fields, there has been a recurring discussion about how to address opposing forces. This paper seeks to contribute to this debate. The ultimate aim for any methodological approach must be to avoid making narrow conclusions, which blinds the researcher to see nuances, neglects important issues, and leads practitioners astray to believe that complex mechanisms are simple. Morin’s concept of dialogic is proposed as a way to study and grasp the complex state of opposing forces in order to accommodate to this ultimate aim.

In order to put dialogic into perspective, the paper first accounted for some of the most commonly applied methodological approaches to explore opposing forces represented by the
dualistic and dialectical perspectives. Dualistic perspective polarizes and dichotomizes opposing forces and seek resolution of a dualism by privileging one side of an apparent polarity, while marginalizing the other and overstating the negative features of this downplayed other. Many researchers have been particularly critical of the dichotomization and deterministic nature of dualistic thinking, because it does not recognize the distinctiveness of the parts or consider the possibility of any connectedness between the polarities. The dialectical perspectives are based on a deconstruction of the opposing force, which is done in varying ways across the dialectical perspectives. One line of dialectical research commits to dissolve the parts into a third state, a synthesis, hence, to resolve the conflict. Later dialectical perspectives, however, have opposed to synthesizing because it eliminates the distinctiveness of the parts and does not consider their interconnection. A duality-based dialectic has gained ground and represents a more encompassing way of attending to opposing forces, because it recognizes the interrelatedness and complementarity of the parts. This provides a more nuanced picture of the complex linkages between apparent opposing forces.

The dialogue perspective, which has clear references to the duality-based perspectives, is proposed as an alternative methodological perspective to embraces the simultaneously antagonistic and competitive nature of opposing forces as well as their complementarity and union without compromising their separation and individual distinctiveness. The paper argues that dialogic as a research methodology can contribute to the dialectical perspectives in particular by also capturing the less orderly state of an opposing force. And instead of seeking resolution, the dialogic approach provides an understanding and acceptance of the uncertainties and ambiguities that the world as an open system is made up of. Though, reduction and resolution are commonly used mechanisms to inhibit uncertainties and to increase order, the principle of dialogic shows that disorder is equally important and indispensable to grasp the complexity of opposing forces. It may seem appealing to strive for complementarity in order to
capture the balancing, harmonizing, integrating, and equilibrating effects of opposing forces and transcend the messy and disorderly parts of a tension. Morin argues however, that if we only strive for order, we risk prioritizing consensus, consistency, and compromise at the expense of conflict, controversy, anarchy, resistance and other disorderly forces causing important knowledge about their potential to remain uncovered. Accordingly, by means of the dialogic approach, this paper proposes that researchers as well as practitioners in organization, leadership, and management studies should not perceive of opposing forces as binary ambiguities or as pathologies in need of resolution. Rather they should take into account the dialogical nature of these opposing forces to stimulate the development of more encompassing theories and nuanced practice understandings, which are not primarily concerned with establishing harmonious states or promoting orderly mechanisms while inhibiting the disorderly ones. The introduction to Morin’s dialogic principle can hopefully open spaces for grasping complexity and accept uncertainties and ambiguities as necessary and important mechanism, which are able to provide new insights in organization, leadership, and management research.

It has not been the purpose of this paper to judge between different methodological perspectives, they all bring value in their own right. Rather, the purpose has been to elucidate the implications it has for analysis and for the drawing up of conclusions when the individual methodological perspectives are applied. The methodological perspectives should not be understood as reifications with an agency of their own or practice instructions. They are figuratively speaking elucidated as filters that shed light on certain elements of a phenomenon in the same way that Morgan (2006) does with his eight metaphors to analyse diverse images of organizations.
References


Introducing Dialogic


Morin, E. (2008b) The Reform of Thought, Transdisciplinarity, and Reform of the University, Academic Press.


Figure 1

*Recursive organization of diversity and unity*

[Diagram showing recursive organization of diversity and unity]

Figure 2

*Circular causality of order and disorder*

[Diagram showing circular causality between order and disorder, with antagonistic and complementary forces mentioned]
**Figure 3**

*Key features of four methodological approaches*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methodological approaches</th>
<th>Dualistic</th>
<th>Synthesis-based dialectic</th>
<th>Duality-based dialectic</th>
<th>Dialogic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key features</strong></td>
<td>Choose between opposing poles</td>
<td>Synthesize into a third state</td>
<td>Attend to competing demands simultaneously</td>
<td>Comprehend simultaneously antagonistic and complementary mechanisms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Researchers position</strong></td>
<td>Biased towards one pole</td>
<td>Both poles are nullified</td>
<td>Juxtapose, transcend and establish equilibrium</td>
<td>Accept complexity and uncertainty and understand mechanisms of order and disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intervention of external</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing strategy</td>
<td>Resolution through separation</td>
<td>Resolution through deconstruction and reconceptualization</td>
<td>Resolution through iteration of separation and integration</td>
<td>Auto-organization</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Objective</td>
<td>Deterministic selection of one pole</td>
<td>Harmony through synthesizing</td>
<td>Equilibrium, clarity through integration</td>
<td>Complexity through dialogic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logic</td>
<td>Either/or Neither/nor/but</td>
<td>Both/and</td>
<td>Both/and, Neither/nor/but</td>
<td>Neither/nor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>