

Essay

A Reflection on Paradoxes and Double Binds in the Workplace in the Era of Super-Diversity

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Abstract: Occupational health and safety (OHS) is a largely technical field, still guided by a biomedical model of health that seeks to isolate factors that cause injury. Despite a growing literature on organisational and managerial factors influencing occupational health, their full integration into the OHS concept has been slow. A broader understanding is still needed to recognise the restructuring of work and the link between well-being at work and management style. In the context of a rapidly changing world of work, increasing workforce diversity, and inequality, OHS needs to take account of the social sciences and humanities to broaden its reductionist vision. Occupational illnesses, distress, and suffering, especially in relation to relational or organisational issues, have no initial cause or specific ontology; they result from a long-standing process or repetitive relational pattern that needs to be exposed and understood in greater depth, considering contextual factors and dynamics. Using the authors' anthropological backgrounds and the basic principles of the double bind theory developed many decades ago by Gregory Bateson and his colleagues at the Palo Alto School of Communication, we propose a reflection on pragmatic paradoxes or double bind situations in the workplace (which can be briefly defined as the presence of contradictory or conflicting demands or messages), their potential impact on workers' health and well-being, and how to resolve them. This paper sought to explore the world of pragmatic paradoxes and double binds by discussing different categories, types, or forms of paradoxes/double binds that occur in the context of occupational health and their underlying mechanisms. It also includes a discussion of the possible link to the concept of super-diversity, as it too is associated with migration channels, employment, gendered flows, and local systems. Finally, we discuss the practical implications of this understanding for health professionals, researchers, and policymakers, from a perspective of promoting more holistic and context-sensitive interactional approaches to occupational health.



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1. Introduction

1.1. *The Context of Occupational Health and Safety*

In the complex field of occupational health and safety (OHS), many interacting determinants and factors influence physical and mental well-being. During the latter half of the 20th century, research in the field of OHS made significant advances, drawing on a wide range of disciplines: toxicology, epidemiology, industrial relations, management, ergonomics, occupational medicine, rehabilitation sciences (physiotherapy and occupational therapy), industrial psychology, biomechanics, engineering sciences, and so on. The social sciences also entered this complex, multi-disciplinary universe, notably the sociology of organisations, clinical sociology, the anthropology of work and health, management studies, communication sciences, and industrial relations. The growing influence of the social sciences in areas previously reserved for the medical and health sciences began in the mid-1970s with the introduction of the “biopsychosocial approach” in psychiatry by the

internist and psychiatrist George L. Engel and the “ecological systems theory” by the psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner [1] before spreading to other areas, where it influenced the conceptualisation of the model of social determinants of health [2]. This conceptualisation was then adopted by the World Health Organization in 2011 and adapted by many public health authorities around the world, which recognised, among other things, multifactorial workplace factors, such as job security, income, working conditions, inclusive practices, and access to health services and assistance in the event of an occupational injury. These models share a common concept of health based on the multidimensionality of risk or protective factors and the importance of context (cultural, social, relational, economic, climatic, geopolitical, etc.) in shaping the well-being and quality of life of individuals and entire populations. They moved away from a rigid biomedical or narrowly pathological approach.

Although these models have been widely accepted in many areas of intervention and research in health and social services, and although they have sought to emphasise the interdependence between individuals and their physical, social, and cultural environment, it was not always clear how they related to each other [3]. Despite this epistemic flaw, such models—often called holistic—provide valuable frameworks for understanding the complex systems that influence human development and interactions. Such models inspired the development of work disability prevention models to address the interplay and complementarity of workplace issues, insurance system issues, health care system issues, medico-legal issues, policies, etc. [4–6]. Systemic conceptualisations of health and illness have also made it possible to develop models of social inequalities in health focusing on social stratification and socioeconomic disparities [7], sometimes corresponding to ethno-racial disparities and the unequal distribution and recognition of cultural capital [8–10]. These more population-based approaches, useful in public health for planning interventions in prevention and health statistics, have taken little interest in the subjective experience of individuals and interpersonal interactions, whether at work or elsewhere.

Returning to occupational health and safety, work organisation and even management approaches and leadership styles began to be scrutinised and studied as possible structural or organisational factors affecting health and well-being at work, alongside the more conventional risks associated with chemical, biological agents, or ergonomic hazards [11]. The integration of organisational factors in the framework of occupational safety and health is not without its difficulties, and the recognition of illnesses resulting from such factors, essentially psychological in nature, can be laborious and puzzling. Paradoxical situations and double binds in workplaces would fall into this category of organisational factors involving management commitment, communication, blame culture, job satisfaction, task definition, interpersonal relationships, reward systems, etc. [12]. Before proceeding further, it should be briefly specified that “paradox” is understood here as a pragmatic paradox [13], a situation involving conflicting demands, messages, or expectancies within an organisation, and managing this paradox poses adaptive challenges for people involved in it. Paradoxes become double binds when conflicting demands or expectations seem irresolvable and cannot be responded to in any way, creating “no-win” situations for individuals. This will be described in more detail in a later section. Considering the problem of paradox and double binds in the workplace in the category of occupational risks has been slow to take root, and as a result, these phenomena may remain nearly invisible, like the “dark side” of organisations [14]. Perhaps the multi-dimensional nature of paradox and double binds makes it more difficult to address or identify, or such a conceptualisation becomes too compromising or threatening for an organisation that seeks stability or refuses to question its operating procedures. It is easier to blame a single individual for resisting change and failing to be flexible. Drawing on the work of French sociologist Vincent De Gaulejac [15], organisational paradox and double binds open the way to more existential considerations, like the manifestation of suffering as well as politico-ideological considerations (management ideology) and macroeconomic considerations (the transformation of contemporary capitalism and neo-liberal globalisation), which is likely to link the inner world and socio-historical processes. In brief, neoliberal globalisation refers to an economic and political

ideology that emphasises free market capitalism, deregulation, reduced government intervention, and the promotion of global trade and investment. It often involves the removal of barriers to international trade and the primacy of market forces in shaping economic policy on a global scale [16].

In a world where global health challenges are becoming increasingly complex, understanding the nature of paradoxes and their systemic nature is crucial to making informed decisions and promoting genuine, sustainable well-being in the workplace. It is important that we examine these intriguing paradoxical situations and double bind and delve into their effects on human health. To avoid confusion, we will use only the term “double bind” in the remainder of this paper (except when we cannot do otherwise). It should be understood as a pragmatic organisational paradox that offers no easy way out.

The aim of this theoretical paper is to explore the typology of paradoxes and double binds and to analyse their potential impact on the overall well-being of workers and, more specifically, in relation to the functioning of organisations and workplace dynamics. It also aims to provide insights into the potential association between exposure to paradoxes and double binds and certain types of employment and power dynamics within organisations, especially in relation to the concept of super-diversity.

The reflections presented in this article are based on and inspired by a collection of studies and theoretical essays covering a vast interdisciplinary field: anthropology, sociology, management, public administration, industrial relations, communication, organisational psychology, occupational medicine, social work, labour law, ethnic studies, gender studies, public health, ergonomics, occupational therapy, and their subdisciplinary variants.

1.2. Expanding the Concept of Occupational Health and Safety

OHS is generally based on a rather narrow conception of the risks relating to health and safety at work: biological, chemical, physical, mechanical, and ergonomic risks, including psychosocial risks. Risks are defined in terms of exposure to various specific hazards and protection against these hazards. However, it is more difficult to define a level of risk when the hazard in question relates to a set of human factors, rooted in production processes and principles of work organisation and management. The further we move from industrial hygiene and occupational medicine in the strict sense [17], the more laborious and contentious the recognition of occupational injuries can seem. Occupational illnesses, particularly those relating to relational or organisational issues, have no initial cause or specific ontology; they arise from a long-standing process or repetitive relational pattern [18]. The effect of certain atypical or precarious forms of employment (e.g., temporary or on-call employment, multi-party temporary work, or irregular working hours) is now recognised by international bodies such as the ILO as posing a risk to workers' psychological health [19]. It is difficult to demonstrate beyond any doubt that these forms of employment may be connected to some form of pathogenic contextuality. The haziness surrounding managerial or organisational paradoxes is a striking example, as they fall into the category of the impalpable, unrevealed, or unnamed, and they are not generally perceived as a 'paradox'.

Various paradoxes may exist within organisations. They are difficult to uncover, sometimes go undetected, and have a direct influence on well-being and quality of life at work. Despite a growing knowledge of the various determinants of health at work, attributing the decline in workers' health to the organisation of work (the allocation and definition of tasks, achievement of objectives, etc.) is still far too uncommon a practice. While the 'organisational factor' does not always lead directly to occupational injuries or compensation claims, it severely alters the psychological balance and functional capacities of the people affected. This factor is subtle, operates at several levels, and can go unnoticed, just as its impact can be minimised or reduced to the individual level (mental, behavioural, or emotional). Emotional responses, often labelled as adjustment disorders (sometimes referred to as burnout), can be a camouflage or smokescreen for much more systemic

factors that alter the health and well-being of individuals and the ability of organisations to function and fulfil their mission [20,21].

1.3. General Overview of the Paradox and Double Bind Theory

A double bind is often compared to or associated with a catch-22 situation or defined by the statement “damned if you do, damned if you don’t”. It does not allow for an appropriate or satisfactory response because the individuals can be blamed or considered wrong no matter what they do. This is why the question of the paradox and double bind is important in the context of diversity and, more specifically, the “super-diversity” proposed by the anthropologist Steven Vertovec about fifteen years ago [22]. The notion of super-diversity aimed to capture the complexity and interplay of various social positions and their intersections, revealing multiple asymmetries and power imbalances in the process of social structuration and health inequalities [23,24]. Super-diversity not only refers to national origin (ethnicity and language), culture, and religion but also embraces broader notions of diversity that include migration trajectories and networks, access to employment, location, gendered flows, and response to local authorities. This vision is based on the premises of equality, equity, access and human rights rather than classical identity-based markers [22], to which an entire range of vulnerable situations (housing, transportation, geographical isolation, racism, etc.), including many dimensions of precarious employment, might be added [25].

Gregory Bateson’s systemic theory helps us to better understand the dynamics of work within organisations, their possible dysfunctions, or deleterious effects and to identify solutions to remedy them [26]. Bateson believed it was necessary to focus on relationships, forms, and patterns in human communication, looking for processes beneath structures [27]. To do this, we need to develop a typology of organisational paradoxes and double binds, a term originally introduced by Bateson to describe certain patterns of dysfunctional communication within families. Both concepts involve conflicting demands or contradictory elements, often leading to emotional and psychological tension. Drawing up such a typology is essential because it is the only way of identifying solutions adapted to an organisation’s specific features and power dynamics. This same organisation must then endorse the idea of the paradox/double bind and open up to dialogue, which is no small feat.

Bateson’s paradox and double bind approach was part of the development of the Palo Alto School’s approach to communication [13,28,29]. It was mainly used in systemic family therapy, although a new line of research and intervention developed later in the field of clinical sociology and management studies [14,30–33]. These concepts can only be considered within the framework of systems thinking. They are to systems thinking what a gene is to DNA.

Before going any further in the discussion, we will now provide a quick reminder of the elements of a double bind situation:

1. The presence of conflicting demands or messages (a primary injunction and a secondary opposing injunction, which is sanctioned if disregarded) [28,34];
2. An asymmetrical power relationship between at least two people (one of them is in a position of authority) [13];
3. An absence of a safe space for open communication and dialogue (revealing or addressing the issue at stake in the paradox could be seen as insubordination) [14].
4. There is no way to escape this paradox, given the characteristics of the workplace and the (abusive or authoritarian) power relationships that underlie it [28].
5. Double bind situations are repeated experiences, forming an interactional, relational, or organisational pattern [28,29,35].

It is now recognised that a paradoxical injunction can come from the organisational framework and not necessarily from a person. This will be seen in more detail later. Conflicting messages or demands are not ordinary contradictions; otherwise, it would be possible to choose which of the two demands to prioritise. Both demands have their own legitimacy. Two registers, layers, or sets of logic are intertwined in the same production

process, and achieving one involves compromising the other. It is not that the requests in themselves are senseless or contradictory but that each request leads to an action that does not produce the expected results. The first is linked to the personal work ethic or the ethical code of the profession involved, while the second is linked to a management style or approach (being productive, meeting quotas) or externally bound to complex institutional relationships and bureaucratic management [36]. As an example from the world of occupational health, safety, and rehabilitation, the paradox can be seen in the dilemma of applying a patient-centred approach versus a mechanism-oriented approach [6].

Workers are placed in a position of failure for every decision or choice they make, yet at the same time, they are held responsible for their inability to respond to the demands placed upon them [33] or accountable for their misguided decisions [14] while mistakenly feeling that they had a choice or full autonomy [37]. This makes it easier to enforce or justify disciplinary action from a management perspective [21]. For example, a worker may be pressured to produce more engine components for transport vehicles, even though the company has high quality standards. Increased or faster production may compromise the quality of production. This can lead to more frequent product returns or other complaints, which, in a double bind situation, puts the blame solely on the employees' skills and competence, with consequential sanctions or penalties against them [38].

Bateson also specified that it is not necessary for all these elements to be present in a double bind; individuals have generally learned to perceive their environment in the form of a double bind such that they have incorporated the "norm", and the contradictory injunctions can emanate from themselves without being explicitly asked for or required by a person in a hierarchical position [28]. The contradictory message comes from within, after incorporating a general standard of performance or service delivery that runs counter to a personal work ethic or professional deontology [6,39,40]. In situations of this type, some authors speak of a shift from the direct to indirect exercise of power. The mechanism of domination is transmuted into "subjectification" [14,30], shaping a "sense of self and identity" [30] and possibly a sense of duty, if not a work ethic, that provides a feeling of coherence. However, as Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson pointed out in a ground-breaking work, this coherence has its limits in an incoherent system or context [13].

Communication theory generally identifies three main types of paradoxes: logical-mathematical, paradoxical definitions, and pragmatic paradoxes [13]. Our topic relates specifically to pragmatic paradoxes and especially to the organisational pragmatic paradoxes that arise in the world of work and organisations. Pragmatic paradoxes refer to situations in which the practical implications or uses of a particular demand, request, or injunction lead to a contradictory or paradoxical outcome that can represent a major challenge in terms of adjustment and adaptation. Pragmatic paradoxes stem from interpersonal or social interactions and human communication in general. While this places us at the confluence of an anthropology of work, health, and organisations, we also monitor considerable theoretical developments and trends in the fields of management studies, industrial relations, applied communication, industrial psychology, and clinical sociology [31]. An interdisciplinary approach is needed to tackle the complexity underlying the notion of paradox in the workplace. In this paper, paradox means a pragmatic paradox by default.

1.4. Paradoxes and Double Binds: How Do They Differ?

Pragmatic paradoxes and double binds are closely related concepts that may seem interchangeable but in fact have distinct meanings and implications. Here we define paradox as a statement, a contradictory or conflicting message, and/or a demand that may impede the achievement of and satisfactory completion of one's tasks. The double bind arises from this unbearable lose-lose situation since there is no easy way out or clear option for escaping the contradictory or conflicting messages, in turn leading to confusion, frustration, tension, and emotional distress or despair. The double bind occurs precisely when the regulatory function within the organisation ceases to work [21]. The "oppositional tensions" inherent in any kind of pragmatic paradox no longer allow for the exploration of

new solutions or creative thinking [41]. At this point, the 'victim' feels permanently trapped, paralysed, with no alternative, and eventually sinks into a state of intense emotional distress [41,42]. This should not lead us to believe, however, that the double bind is an effect or a product of a paradoxical organisation. Things are not that simple. As Bjørn W. Hennestad, an economist and organisational behaviour specialist, clearly explained several decades ago [31], a double bind situation "has an influence both as cause and effect [...]. It is a product of a certain anti-communicative situation. It is a producer because it breeds more double binds" (p. 273). In other words, double bind organisations are systems of meaning and action, making communication and interaction possible, much like the all-encompassing but somehow cumbersome notion of "culture" [43–45]. Double binds are not easy to grasp for those who are immersed in them and live them on a daily basis, such that the "system" as a social construct is not thought of as a "system", but as "self-evident", almost natural, as a matter of common sense or "taken for granted" [46,47]. The same is true of corporate or organisational culture. It requires taking a step back and maintaining a degree of centration and reflective practice. These are not always possible in organisations with double binds or a certain level of dysfunction or pathology "as they undermine individual self-efficacy and well-being, as well as deteriorate organizational capabilities", in the words of Berti and Simpson [30] (p. 5). Fixing the problem may require both external reflexivity and reflectivity to mirror the internal failures, disruptive experiences, and debilitating processes [41].

1.5. Documenting Double Binds in the Workplace

This section discusses our review of case studies that describe paradoxical or double bind situations in the workplace or propose a typology based on field observations. It presents a summary of our main findings, specifying the sectors of activity concerned, the national context, the paradoxes identified and their impact in the workplace, the approach to diversity (when documented), the disciplines involved (first author), and the proposed avenues for research and action. To our original question, we could add: from these situations, can we extract categories, types, or forms of paradoxes/double binds, and how do they differ or complement those that may already exist? Depending on the category, type, or form of paradoxes/double binds, what are the effects on workers' health and well-being? What work contexts make people more likely to find themselves in paradoxical situations? We will look at whether precarious workers are more vulnerable to paradoxical situations and try to untangle the paradox issue in relation to the challenges of super-diversity. Finally, we propose avenues for future research and possible interventions to support workplaces.

We begin with an exploration of the different categories, types, or forms of paradoxes/double binds that emerge in the context of occupational health. We will try to understand the underlying mechanisms and how these equivocal situations can have unexpected effects on our bodies and minds. Finally, we will discuss the practical implications of this understanding for health professionals, researchers, and policymakers, with a view to promoting more holistic and informed approaches to occupational health.

2. Discussion

We will now discuss the different types of double binds as well as their possible effects in organisations and on certain categories of workers. We will also try to unravel the conceptual link between the double bind and super-diversity. Then, in light of the literature reviewed, we offer reflections on ways to correct double bind situations to develop resilient and healthier work environments. Finally, we propose future directions for research and avenues for action in the Section 3.

2.1. Types of Double Binds

What Do We Already Know about Typologies?

It is relevant to identify types of double binds in the workplace and group them into categories, classes, or families in order to better define the level at which they operate, their dynamics, mechanisms, and emergence and reinforcement patterns. For example, can a specific double bind pattern influence or cause another type of double bind? Some recent writings on double bind theory and organisational paradoxes suggest an interesting view of double binds and power in organisations [14], their effects on the paradox experience [30], and types of paradoxes according to their managerial or organisational dimension (which may relate to the level at which the double bind is played out) [48].

In an interesting attempt to schematise the mechanisms of double bind, Berti and Simpson [30] and Julmi [14] have proposed a two-fold axiology based on the “episodic” or “systemic” nature of the power exercised over individuals and the direct or indirect nature of the exercise of power [49]. Whereas the episodic exercise of power seems to refer to more discrete strategies based on the way of being of specific actors who play out their own personal interests, systemic power is more embedded in an organisational culture, its practices, and its mode of organisation [49,50]. Four main mechanisms are defined: domination and coercion as the direct exercise of power, and manipulation and subjectification as the indirect exercise of power. Coercion and manipulation may be episodic forms of power, while domination and subjectification relate instead to a systemic form of power. Coercion is visible and involves the limitation of available resources or assets to influence the actions of others; power acts are explicit. Domination is also visible; the institutions and system in place are accepted and perceived as natural or taken for granted; and hegemonic values are imposed with no safe space for expression without fear of reprisals or disciplinary action. Manipulation and subjectification are invisible. The former has the effect of limiting what can be discussed, debated, or negotiated within the organisation, thus limiting possible outcomes, while the latter reflects the psychological process by which a person integrates or internalises the paradoxical demand to make it their own practical and operational requirement, “shaping sense of self and identify” (p. 55). Manipulation patterns may also be part of “paratoxic” leadership (a contraction of paradox and toxic), as formulated by Julmi [34]. In this case, manipulation (or any kind of psychological abuse) may be seen as deliberate or purposeful [34].

All these double bind patterns create “paradoxical tensions” and disempowering effects. Blocking actions, curtailing speaking-up, delegitimising questioning, limiting access to decision-makers, or reproducing a climate of silence (be it active silencing or self-censoring) are examples reported by Berti and Simpson [30]. Berti and Simpson described domination as characterising a Kafkaesque organisation, while these authors linked subjectification to Orwellian doublethink [30]. The doublethink concept appears in George Orwell’s dystopic novel *1984* to describe the indoctrination process that leads to the acceptance of two opposing points of view simultaneously, putting any critical thinking on hold. The analogy between the writings of Franz Kafka (see *The Trial*) and those of George Orwell (see *1984*) is interesting because each work depicts in its own way an absurd, anxiety-inducing universe through the manipulation of language and truth (as in *1984*), or through dehumanising and labyrinthine bureaucracies (as in *The Trial*), with both creating feelings of fear and helplessness, hopelessness, and despair in the face of a seemingly inescapable life-course or situation. While these fictions are very dark and gloomy, real life gives reason for hope, as we shall see below.

The mechanisms of power exercised over individuals involve a language of guilt and individual responsibility. The “victims” question themselves, feel powerless or disempowered, depreciated, anxious, fearful, sometimes dazed, confused, and vilified, take the blame and doubt their own abilities, or even feel guilty [34,37,39,48,51]. This “There is no one to blame but yourself” paradigm can leave workers feeling very lonely, for they can see no other way to analyse the situation they are caught in. In addition, even if there were a real possibility of speaking out, it is symbolically defused through the mechanism

of subjectification mentioned by Berti and Simpson [30] and Julmi [14]. The individual recognises themselves fully in their work activity and in the way they give it meaning, and all the demands seem legitimate and coherent to them. The desire to conform to the organisation's expectations and to carve out a place within it stems from what Parrilla calls a self-referential paradox at the heart of structuring or shaping a sense of self and identity [52]. Neither metacommunication nor reframing the managerial demands is possible. Both speaking out and not speaking out have consequences: "damned if you do and damned if you don't" [39].

While these types of pragmatic paradoxes refer to dimensions of power and their hindering effects, other scholars, such as Evenstad, have proposed a typology of paradoxes based on organisational or managerial patterns that are mainly intended to control the production process to achieve optimum performance and output [48]. Focussing on operational efficiency, 'double bind organisations' as described by Evenstad reflect an operational duality that makes equilibrium unlikely, as is the case for the "change–stability paradox", "exploration–exploitation paradox", "acceleration–deceleration paradox", "intensification–quality paradox", and "autonomy/flexibility–control paradox" [48,53]. Some of these oppositional dualities may be embedded within the organisational strategies and corporate logics, while others are rooted in the sphere of daily operations and work management and in the control and evaluation of the production process and performance. The most obvious duality seems to be the intensification–quality paradox since it can reach the largest audience, who are asked to produce more with the least possible input (human resources, time spent, expenditure, etc.). This duality may undermine quality output and the individual's own work ethic, bearing in mind that manufacturing defects or shortcomings in production can occur more frequently. In public services, particularly in health care, neoliberal trends and the streamlining of services means a reduction in the services offered, a standardisation of processes, and a quantification of tasks in the wake of the New Public Management (NPM) approach [16,39,54], which emphasises cost control, results measurement, and performance incentives [55]. It also involves hierarchical supervision, the standardisation of work processes, and the measurement of results with an increasingly centralised system of operational management, a mechanistic approach to service delivery, and a divisional model of organisational structure [56]. The paradoxical effect of this type of management system has been reported in some studies on the health sector [55]. This is also described as a "failed paradigm" [54], prioritising ethics of effectiveness, efficiency, and economy at the risk of communication and relational ethics [57].

This is what anthropologist Linda Hunt meant when she said that "quality metrics reduces clinical work to quantifiable outcomes [...] prioritizing financial goals and managerial logics above the needs of individuals" [58]. This conflicting demand, often connected to medical Taylorism [59], is unbearable for many health practitioners [60]. It may also be in line with the autonomy–control paradox, in which workers are asked to be creative and innovative and to use their independent judgement while being constantly scrutinised, controlled, or monitored [32]. The acceleration–deceleration paradox is an organisational double bind in which workers are asked to maintain a relatively fast work pace and make decisions quickly despite the highly bureaucratic organisation, with its lengthy chain of command and procedural decision-making process, while the autonomy–control paradox operates, making them wait for their supervisors' approval and validation. Evenstad sums up this paradox as a "demand to work fast in a slow organization", referring to "ineffective organizational process, bureaucracy, and 'digital Taylorism'" [48] (p. 3). Digital Taylorism is defined as standardised administrative systems and procedures [48] (p. 8).

Other organisational paradoxes revealing other propositional dualities have also been identified in the literature. These include organisations that advocate a long-term vision while maintaining short-term measurement of results [32] and those that encourage initiative while applying rigid rules and having little tolerance for failure [32,53]. In line with NPM, some organisations introduce decentralised management while maintaining highly centralised performance indicators or seek to reduce operating costs while committing to

high-quality services [53]. A paradox between cooperation and competitiveness has also been reported [53].

In a paper on flexible working, sociologist Heejung Chung introduced the idea of a flexibility paradox [61], which combines the mechanisms of work intensification [48] and coercion [14,30]. In the flexibility paradox, coercion is itself paradoxical, since it takes place in a context in which an individual has perfectly integrated the values and ideology of the capitalist system of performance, competitiveness, competition, profit, individual responsibility, etc. This assimilation of values is congruent with a process of the intensification of work, which is also characterised as a process of “self-exploitation” since the injunction comes from oneself [61]. Here, the dimension of power stems from the ‘work of culture’ seen as an ideological system and a mechanism of power and control [62]. This is similar to the mechanism of subjectification [30,34] in that the integration of norms affects individuals in such a way that they believe that they alone are to blame for their failures [61]. As a result, they become more vulnerable to manipulation by managers who wish to sweep aside any criticism of their management style, “delegitimising questioning” or “curtailing speaking-up” [30]. Although Chung does not use the term double bind, we can see that the paradoxical situations described can develop into that. Just as one type of paradox can lead to another, so too can an accumulation of paradoxical situations or conflicting demands make it more likely that paradoxes will be transformed into double binds. This hypothetical avenue must be explored further.

An overview of recent writings on the double bind paradox in relation to OHS in its broadest sense provides further insight into work-related suffering and the symbolic violence that is exerted through various mechanisms or dynamics of power [63]. From its early beginnings in labour medicine and industrial hygiene, OHS was set up as a primarily technical field influenced by a biomedical model of health and illness [63]. Reducing OHS to the prevention of accidents and illnesses is no longer tenable in view of the new issues of psychological health, well-being, and quality of life at work, not to mention the complex issues of diversity and social inequalities [64,65]. Systems that fail to recognise this and to broaden their understanding of OHS issues are doomed to create paradoxical situations and double binds for employees who have nevertheless integrated a broader perspective of the issues.

We have seen that different dimensions of power exert varying effects that limit workers’ ability to act to mitigate the effects of paradoxical situations. The paradoxical effects appear more visible when work environments become dysfunctional or when the tension regulation function no longer works [21]. To address the types of constraints present, we need to identify the different levels of injunction that can create dissonance and possibly a double constraint. This is no easy task, as it requires both researchers and workplace representatives to discern the different levels at which injunctions and their interactions are played out and, more specifically, to identify the ‘invisible’ or implicit injunctions that take the form of the integration of some managerial norm, value, or ideology, which each worker absorbs and regards as legitimate (e.g., the idea of performance, innovation, creativity, or autonomy). Then, in the second stage, it is necessary to identify the way in which these norms, values, ideologies, or managerial principles clash with or hinder the implementation of other equally legitimate principles (e.g., relational ethics, adapting the service according to needs, flexibility, empathy, and reflective listening). In some areas, the client-centred approach has become the standard of good practice, which is anchored in a humanistic or holistic view of care that tends to contradict corporate logic or policy-based patterns of intervention. This is what the medical historian Charles Rosenberg called a “mechanism-centered understanding of disease” in his reflections on the paradoxes of disease specificity (nosological tables and protocols) as it relates to “bureaucratic imperatives” [36] (p. 253). The obligation to be accountable from a strictly statistical or quantitative point of view (number of cases handled, number of documents produced, etc.) with no regard for the complexity of certain cases or the time and resources required to do quality work is an example of a paradox that makes work meaningless [66]. In some areas, the

client-centred approach has been the standard of good practice for many decades, but its implementation seems nowadays to oppose the corporate logic or policy-based patterns of intervention [54,57–59,67,68]. This position is untenable for conscientious, ethical practitioners [68,69]. There is much food for thought in the staggering amount of disenchantment in certain professions such as health and education, even if these untenable paradoxical situations do not automatically translate into sick leave or occupational injuries. From a medical point of view, given disease specificity, this would be very difficult to demonstrate [70] or even to take seriously [30] without considering the double bind (and its emotional correlates) as a legitimate response to organisational tensions [30].

Similarly, the mantras invoking creativity, leadership, and innovation sometimes hit roadblocks in organisations in which hierarchical control is strong or there is little room for change, adaptation, and transformation of practices. In this case, the type of change–stability or exploration–exploitation paradox involved can lead to the autonomy–control managerial paradox evoked by Evenstad [48]. In the healthcare sector, the principle of professional autonomy runs up against the full force of these performance and profitability injunctions dictated by the global economic demands and competitiveness of companies or the various regional departments of ministries or government agencies that follow the same model of competition espoused by the neo-liberal economy [54,59,71]. The longer and more hierarchical the chain of command is, the more constraints can arise, according to the acceleration–deceleration model identified by Evenstad [48].

Administrative bureaucracy can interfere with the autonomous decision-making and speed of execution that employees would be able to ensure if they were in full control of their work [69]. A variant of this autonomy–control paradox can be found in the decentralisation–central control duality proposed in Bollecker’s study of French public administration and the application of new public management principles [53]. It is thus important that we continue analysing the logical links and interrelationships between the types of double bind paradoxes and their respective effects. That said, we know that to achieve this fully, a multi-level analysis is needed to take into account patterns that are not only interpersonal but that may also involve extra-organisational links and situated relationalities [72].

In short, identifying the types of paradoxes is important for developing appropriate solutions that reflect an organisation’s structure, power dynamics, management model, and vision of productivity and performance. This typology is summarised below (Table 1).

Table 1. Types of paradox or double binds and corresponding dimensions.

Dimensions	Type of Paradox or Double Bind
Power dynamics and patterns	Coercion Manipulation Domination Subjectification
Performance and productivity	Intensity–quality paradox Flexibility paradox
Management and (self-)regulation	Autonomy–control paradox and variation in decentralisation–central control paradox Acceleration–deceleration paradox
General orientation and mission	Change–stability paradox Exploration–exploitation paradox

These dimensions may intertwine as in the flexibility paradox, involving the dimension of performance and productivity and the dimension of management and (self-)regulation. The great challenge and task for researchers is to connect these types and dimensions with specific effects and responses in the individuals exposed to them.

2.2. *The Effect of Paradoxes and Double Binds on Certain Categories of Workers*

2.2.1. Type of Employment: Precariousness and Other Contexts of Vulnerability

The development of OHS research on precarious work contexts and social inequalities in health over the last two decades has shown that certain categories of workers are exposed to a greater risk of sustaining occupational injuries and experiencing various obstacles related to the declaration of an injury, coverage by a third-party payer, and the rehabilitation and return-to-work (RTW) processes [73–75]. Workers in vulnerable situations are more often those with precarious employment status that offers little social protection and career prospects; temporary workers; or workers who are recent immigrants, racialised, or temporary foreign workers [6,76–80]. Precarious workers rarely have the space to express their OHS concerns and often prefer, albeit reluctantly, to remain silent and endure a dangerous situation or pain rather than risk reprisals or losing their jobs [76,81,82]. However, these operating conditions, arduous work, and intense physical demands of a job are not synonymous with paradoxical situations, even if theoretically they can create them. If precarious workers face major OHS issues, are they also more likely to experience organisational paradoxes and double binds?

The existing data do not support the conclusion that precariousness fosters double bind situations; precarious jobs may be a matter of reckless exploitation and abuses of any kind, but there is nothing paradoxical about them in a capitalistic context [64]. On the other hand, paradoxical systems could amplify the effect in precarious people because of overlapping vulnerabilities and precariousness [83]. Regular workers have more scope to express their disagreements, especially if they are union members, whereas temporary workers, on-call workers, and those who lack sufficient command of the language of the workplace and who are unfamiliar with their rights do not have the same power relationship [25]. The degree of familiarity with the functions of public institutions has been identified as a barrier to inclusion and to the full enjoyment of civil rights, including those relating to access to health care and the prevention of workplace injuries and disabilities [77].

To our knowledge, studies on organisational paradoxes do not specifically identify situations of job insecurity. However, it is important to point out that if issues of disempowerment are present when double binds are present, more precarious workers within the same collective may be more inclined to conceal the situation for the same reasons as mentioned above. It is not the precarious situation that induces or facilitates the genesis of the paradox, but this precariousness undoubtedly influences the possibilities of extricating oneself from it. Other questions that need to be addressed are whether the process of interactions leading to the double bind may also be a gendered process; whether the effect of the organisational paradox may be amplified in a context of significant social and structural inequalities; and how it may affect ethnic or racialised minority workers differently, including the way in which court judgements about racist violence in the workplace are handed down [84]. Racism in the workplace has also been addressed from a clinical sociological perspective [85], in which a paradox of the democratic ideal and self-censorship has been reported, highlighting the fact that some people feel the need to work harder in order to be fully valued and respected by co-workers from the ‘national majority’ [85]. Faced with the pressure of performance, racialised people may thus prefer to ‘tolerate’ micro-aggressions, racist comments, and jokes rather than speak out against them to avoid being perceived as “playing the victim” or unproductive [85]. The same pattern of silencing and self-censoring was also identified by Berti and Simpson [30], who showed the disempowering effect of these patterns, although they did not focus on racism.

2.2.2. Type of Organisation: Power Structure and Management Model

Does the effect of the double bind paradox affect certain categories of workers more than others? The question remains open, although the scientific literature seems to point towards an analysis of paradoxical situations based on the organisation’s power structure. More specifically, this would involve, on the one hand, describing and analysing the management model, leadership style, and decision-making process used in an organisation and

on the other, describing and analysing the double bind mechanisms that apply depending on the characteristics of the organisation (structure, purpose and mission, values, division of work, size and scope, operations and process, communication, and ethical and social responsibility, among other things). Do certain mechanisms and power structures favour the genesis and development of double binds, and if so, what is the specific nature of these double binds? Are they upstream from interactional dynamics, or do they operate in conjunction with them? Many variables have yet to be understood.

2.2.3. When Paradoxes Strengthen the Stigma Effect

Stigmatisation is a powerful and pervasive phenomenon that occurs when individuals or groups are unfairly or negatively judged, stereotyped, or discriminated against because of certain characteristics or attributes (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, mental health, physical disability, and many more) [77]. Stigmas can be deeply harmful, leading to social exclusion, reduced opportunities, and emotional distress for those who experience them. In the literature we consulted, only one author has discussed the stigma effect behind the organisational paradox, particularly the flexibility paradox described above [61] (p. 79). Flexibility stigma can be particularly prevalent in organisations with high productivity pressures and performance vision, stigmatising people who do not fully match the performance model being promoted. For example, working long hours may be encouraged and perceived as an ideal and exemplary work performance, but it may be regarded less favourably by workers who see flexibility as seeking work-life balance. According to Chung, this is a gendered stigma, specifically, a femininity stigma, given the double burden of work and family caregiving that still weighs on women today [77]. However, it is too early to say whether this type of stigma has a greater impact on minority groups or people from diverse backgrounds than on others, although, from an intersectional perspective, the cumulative effect of stigma has been discussed elsewhere in relation to immigrant and racialised people who have been injured at work [77].

2.3. Super-Diversity, Paradoxes, and Double Binds: So, What Is the Connection?

Which work contexts are most conducive to the emergence of paradoxes/double binds? What does this have to do with super-diversity? The term “super-diversity” was coined by anthropologist Steven Vertovec [22] to illustrate the changing nature of immigration patterns and demographic shifts in urban areas and to address the complex interplay of various social factors such as national origin, ethnicity, gendered flows, legal status, diversity of migration channels and legal status, access to employment, location, and transnational dynamics, as well as the response of local authorities (service providers and local residents), etc. [86]. Super-diversity suggests that contemporary migration patterns have led to a proliferation of ethnicities, nationalities, languages, religions, and a wide range of social identities and experiences within a single geographic area and within groups where people interact and coexist [22].

However, contemporary social landscapes still exhibit inequalities and economic gaps that are perpetuated and widened over time [64,87,88]. However, these inequalities and systemic barriers to upward mobility are not random, and they affect certain people more than others. Intersectionality theory has sought to demonstrate this by providing an analytical framework that shows the cumulative effect of the multiple vulnerabilities of disadvantaged groups, most often associated with ethnic, religious, or racial minorities, to which the long-recognised gender effect is added [89,90]. Thus, the different social identities encompassed by the term ‘super-diversity’ intersect and interact to shape an individual’s life course, experiences and chances, privilege, or oppression. For example, racism, sexism, and homophobia may operate simultaneously to compound the disadvantages faced by individuals who are labelled as belonging to multiple marginalised groups [89]. Super-diversity and intersectionality can then be used together to analyse the multifaceted nature of diversity and discrimination in contemporary societies.

Is super-diversity more likely to exhibit the experience of paradoxes and double binds? The answer depends on having precise categories that define the concept of super-diversity. Can precariousness and any other situation of vulnerability cause or predispose people to becoming trapped in various double bind patterns? Conversely, does a situation of precariousness or vulnerability make it more difficult to regulate or alleviate the effects of a paradoxical system? We can hypothetically assume that the effect of a paradox may be felt more acutely by people who are already experiencing several other stressful situations related to their life experience [83]. This hypothesis needs to be verified and developed further, for example, by comparing the reaction to paradoxes and double binds among workers within the same paradoxical system, to extract variants in terms of the possibility of escaping it.

Double bind situations can arise in any context where conflicting messages or demands are present, and it does not appear to be an exclusive feature of super-diversity. Additionally, not all interactions within super-diverse contexts will result in double binds or even paradoxical patterns. We can assume that job security and job type, which constitute an important dimension of the concept of precariousness [25], are important variables; a temporary, agency, part-time, on-call, seasonal, or informal worker may not see the benefit of openly revealing the existence of a paradox or double bind. However, other factors may also be at play, such as the personality traits of the people involved and the openness, humility, and empathy of the first-line manager and other senior managers. The dimensions of power suggested by Julmi [14,34] and Berti and Simpson [30] are certainly an essential element, indeed a crucial part of the various paradox mechanisms that need to be understood in depth if we are to identify the factors that make people more vulnerable to being caught in double bind situations and to propose actions to reduce the risk of escalating personal distress and despair and organisational dysfunction.

Migration history, employment history, ethnicity, and gender are all elements of 'super-diversity' that need to be considered when addressing issues of equity and inclusion. The notion of super-diversity thus has to be closely linked to the issues of precarious work, employment pathways in general, and intersectionality, even if super-diversity cannot subsume them. Diversity is advocated and promoted as an asset in most liberal democracies [91,92], but an asset for whom and under which conditions [93]? Discrimination and other chaotic pathways to employment can also be diversity's blind spot when it presents an idyllic vision of intercultural dialogue and diversity [94,95]. Is the notion of super-diversity still useful for us when it comes to studying workplaces, taking into account working conditions and precariousness, the vulnerability affecting certain groups, management ideologies and power dynamics? Is it not an impracticable, overstuffed, and confusing notion?

2.4. How to Fix the Double Bind: Building Resilient Work Environments

In light of the current knowledge on double binds and organisational paradoxes, solutions for eliminating them involve having a space for free and safe discussion, recognising paradoxical injunctions (in order to reduce their toxic nature), communicating about the "system" and dismantling its mechanisms, addressing why the situation is paradoxical, and providing greater autonomy in defining and dividing up team tasks [14,30,34,39,41]. However, presumably, the paradox and double bind effect can encourage the emergence of collective and individual awareness of what needs to be addressed and improved within an organisation. Paradoxes can be used as leverage if the existing structure, organisational culture, or leadership style is conducive to dialogue, open communication, and reflective practices. Otherwise, the paradoxical effect moves towards a double bind because no way out has been found; there is no Ariadne's thread to lead us out of the maze of organisational problems, failure, or dysfunction. Clearly, a fine line has to be walked in the search for organisational (re)balancing.

Paradoxical situations must be explicitly acknowledged [32] to allow for uncovering the defensive routines or tactics used by organisations to avoid "discussing the undiscuss-

able” [48] (p. 7). This aligns with the thinking of the Palo Alto School of Communication, which gave rise to the systemic theory of pragmatic paradox, advocating metacommunication, i.e., that by communicating about the ‘system’, dismantling its mechanisms, and analysing why it is paradoxical, we can free ourselves from its clutches [13,28]. Communicating about the system should be a collective learning experience so that we can learn from the paradoxical situation [31].

Building a resilient work environment requires not only a concerted effort from leadership, human resources, and all employees but also sincere determination and humility to tackle the various problems experienced in the workplace and the suffering they generate [96]. It is an ongoing process that involves continuously assessing the needs of the workforce and adapting strategies as needed to create a positive and thriving workplace (e.g., open communication, adaptability and flexibility, autonomy and empowerment to make decisions, supportive leadership, and collaboration rather than coercion/manipulation), while fully acknowledging that, as Putnam said, there are no one-size-fits-all remedies or turnkey solutions to alleviating the organisational tensions associated with the double bind [42]. It requires flexibility in the workplace and the ability to transcend and reframe dualities from a new emancipatory and empathic perspective [30]. Recognising the tensions arising from organisational paradoxes and integrating their underlying conflicting demands can also facilitate the achievement of equilibrium and is presented in the literature as a possible strategy combining flexibility and control [97]. This strategy can be particularly effective in open ‘systems’ [53,97] but can also be fragile and sensitive to any change in leadership positions. This means that the whole organisation must walk a very fine line to avoid falling off the cliff.

Finally, organisational strategies to mitigate the effects of pragmatic paradoxes in organisations must address the stigma that could be driving the silencing and self-censoring of employees who are worried about their personal self-image or reputation and prefer to endure an unbearable situation to the point of exhaustion.

2.5. Future Directions for Research and Avenues for Action

The study of paradoxical systems and the structure of organisations that generate double binds is not a new field. The basic theory has remained relatively unchanged over the last fifty years, except that the opening of a new channel for reflection and empirical investigation in the workplace has made it possible to pinpoint the unthinking nature of certain managerial discourse geared towards performance at all costs without regard for production and the achievement of autonomy in the workplace. Typologies, mechanisms for inducing double binds and maintaining them as a relational system, and different dimensions of power have been proposed. However, more empirical illustrations that consider the structure of organisations and the specificity of each workplace are needed in order to refine the existing typologies and the possibilities for eliminating or alleviating paradoxical effects.

2.5.1. Hierarchical Structure, Bureaucracy, and the Power Dimension

Metaphors drawn from literary fiction are an interesting way of showing the kind of atmosphere in which a person may repeatedly find himself, at work or in any other occupation, and the subtle mechanisms for controlling human activities and perhaps also for manufacturing mindsets (e.g., questioning ourselves when things go wrong in the work process and failing to recognise external factors). Not all highly hierarchical, bureaucratic organisations produce the same organisational pathologies. The phenomenon is not unique to large, complex, hierarchical organisations, since the theory of pragmatic paradox first emerged from the study of family dynamics. The paradox can be found everywhere in all types of organisations, but it is important to analyse the intersection of types of organisations, the power dimension, and the presence of certain forms of leadership. Are “total institutions”, an expression coined by sociologist Erving Goffman in the late 1960s in his classic book *Asylum*, more likely to create paradoxical situations leading to double

binds? A total institution is generally understood as a closed and highly controlled social environment (a workplace, a community, or a political regime) in which individuals' lives are tightly regulated, typically characterised by strict rules, schedules, and authority figures (e.g., prisons, military boot camps, and mental institutions) [98]. The power dimension is undeniably authoritarian, but it is not clear that its environment is paradoxical, unless thinking models advocating individual autonomy, originality, or creativity are grafted onto it, in which case it could be related to the variety of autonomy–control paradoxes reported by Evenstad [48]. Perhaps the most important thing to underscore in this debate about the power dimension is the question of the source of injunctions. Clearly, injunctions can arise from the integration of societal norms and values, not just in interpersonal interactions as early double bind theories claimed [28], and the integration of norms and values results from the mechanism of subjectification identified above [14,30]. Subjectification is related to normativity, i.e., the principles and norms that guide us in regulating our behaviour and decision-making, which can also vary enormously from culture to culture and change over time. It involves reasoning about how we should act, given our goals, desires, and intentions. For example, if one wants to be more productive, it is normative to work more hours and limit one's time off work. But how are these norms imposed or made explicit? White and Germain introduced the notion of normative density, an interesting reference to the interconnectedness of coexisting norms or normative frameworks [99]—at whatever level, be it societal, cultural, political-legal, organisational, etc.—that structure personal life commitments and visions.

For reasons that may still seem obscure, are some organisations more prone to paradoxes and double binds? Depending on the nature of the intersection, are all double binds of the same type? What distinguishes the different organisational paradoxes? Do they have similar effects in terms of their emotional charge, and what are the strategies for escaping them? It is thus particularly important to analyse paradoxical systems, how they are introduced or created, and how employees help to set them up and reproduce them. It is hence essential to understand how organisations work from the inside and to examine the inner mechanisms in the workplace (power and management structures and dynamics, management style) used to set up paradoxical systems. Appropriate observation or detection methods for more effective workplace interventions could then be designed and implemented [30,33]. From an ethnographic point of view, the remedy may involve identifying and systemically analysing problematic situations in which all the elements can be identified and at their respective levels, as has been done in the analysis of intercultural situations workshops [100]. In this sense, situation-based workshops can be a good way of introducing and encouraging reflective practice.

However, workplace systems and dynamics are not isolated features or self-contained closed circuits, nor are they isolated from the rest of the world or from their immediate social, political, and economic environment. Paradoxes can arise from extra-organisational relationships driven by other political or economic agendas. It is also crucial to understand these inter-organisational and inter-institutional links in order to better understand the genesis of the double bind and the conditions under which it emerges, is maintained, and can be reproduced [34]. This question was raised more than thirty years ago by anthropologist Rosemary Harris in her seminal work *Power and Powerlessness in Industry* [101], which highlighted the complex power dynamics within industrial settings and their impact on individuals and communities. Harris examined power relations not only between individuals but also within larger social, economic and political structures, highlighting the legitimacy and democratic deficit in the face of rapid and complex changes in the world of work, along with the challenges of identifying and engaging with sources of power in modern, conglomerate-owned means of production [101]. A worker may be engaged in a production process that simultaneously involves different sources of power, and this may be conducive to generating different senses of priority and efficiency according to different levels of power and decision-making in the hierarchical structure [102]. This confronts the simplistic manager–employee duality that places the former in a position of powerfulness

and, following a biased and binary logic, positions them as oppressors, manipulators, and Machiavellian tricksters [103]. It also questions how bureaucracies and large, complex corporations operate, how they determine and plan their production activities, how they evaluate their performance, and how they understand accountability (to whom or for what body and for what purpose) [33,54]. Lower- or middle-level managers can easily be sandwiched by the higher-level “forces” at work, including the above-mentioned ideologies that shape our vision of the world, meaning, and experience.

2.5.2. Interaction, Interpersonal Communication, and Operationalisation of Policies and Strategic Plans

Likewise, more empirical studies and case studies are needed for documenting and clarifying implicit injunctions, in other words, injunctions that are not directly imposed, are somehow invisible, and are part of a common or shared managerial paradigm (e.g., performance and efficiency, pace, and intensity of work) and may facilitate the integration and acceptance of demands that may not be adapted to the operational and practical realities [14,32,33]. Studying attempts at metacommunication and how it is received in organisations (and at what level and by whom in terms of administrative function) and the conditions for its success is also vital to a better understanding [39]. In addition, we need to document the different individual responses to the double bind and the ways in which these situations are managed within the same paradoxical system [32].

Although it is beyond the scope of this article, the mechanisms leading to the double bind need to be taken into account, and personality theories need to be better integrated into the systemic analysis of the double bind [104]. This seems particularly relevant when considering asymmetric power relations and interpersonal dynamics, which can become a breeding ground for a double bind in the workplace or wherever a power relationship with potentially abusive authority exists. Conceivably certain leaders, by virtue of their personality traits [51,105,106], are more inclined to establish their power, control, and dominance through a certain number of manipulative techniques. The same applies to those who are more likely to become victims of malicious and “toxic leadership” [104,107,108], also dubbed “vampire leadership” [107]. The vampire analogy is interesting here because the vampire parasitises its victim, invading its vital space and sapping its vital energy in order to exist itself [109]. Understanding how interpersonal dynamics can turn the victim into a scapegoat, where the victim may come to embody (whether consciously or not) the shortcomings of an organisation, appears to be an overlooked, although essential, part of the double bind puzzle. Going a step further, we suggest that on theoretical grounds, the “victim” could even be analysed as a sacrificial victim [52] whose sense of personal identity is disrupted and whose mental and psychological equilibrium ultimately collapses with, in extreme cases, potentially fatal consequences [110].

The insidious and sometimes intangible nature of the double bind makes it even more pernicious and difficult to identify from a research perspective. How can we gather information on the subject when both perpetrators and victims are oblivious to the paradox? The next research step needed is to address this very question and develop observation tools, interview grids, and diagrams that will enable us to describe the organisational context in depth from every angle and ultimately conduct more advanced stages of analysis that allow for the cross-referencing of data at different levels of organisational complexity [72]. Important questions still remain.

3. Conclusions

The interactional–systemic theory of the paradox and double bind, applied to the anthropological study of organisations, work, and health, is not an old wineskin for a new wine. On the contrary, this theory demonstrates its full analytical power by revealing the unfathomable and invisible nature of certain organisational mechanisms and procedures that, like most cultural patterns, are taken for granted. These mechanisms are pernicious and subtle because they end up affecting the entire workplace system, creating suffering

at work, confusion, distress, and negative feelings of all kinds, and infusing dysfunction into productive operations and human communication. The study of the paradox and the double bind favours the analysis of organisational structure and interactional dynamics and their impact on quality of life, well-being, and health at work, rather than the study of inequalities linked to different positions, status, or identity attributes (even though these may also be linked to interpersonal relationships that are possibly indicative of systemic discrimination, exclusion, or economic exploitation) [89].

Reducing the weight of paradoxes or eliminating situations of double constraint is not going to eliminate the intensity of a task, the alienating nature of certain tasks, the precariousness of a job, or exploitation at work, as has been widely documented in Marxian, socialist, and critical theory-inspired work. However, developing detection tools and ways of eradicating double-bind paradoxes will undoubtedly give new meaning to workers' struggles in a context in which work continues to be an essential marker of our self and social identity, not an alienating, debilitating, and absurd experience with a narrow, dark horizon locked in toxic leadership and mismanagement. Work should be a haven for self-fulfilment, not an existential abyss.

The new management models and the technicalisation of certain work tasks must not dehumanise work, especially in its most intimate relational aspects. Perhaps the challenge for modern management, technology, and contemporary industrial society is to reconcile the imperatives of a highly competitive and financialised economy, which in many ways generates and deepens social inequalities, with the human organisation of work, with work experienced as a personal as well as collective achievement [111]. Understanding organisational paradoxes and double bind patterns can take us a step further along the path towards creating a healthy and satisfying work environment. The double bind theory, when applied to the workplace, must include a critique of the political economy of neo-liberalism and the proliferation of approaches to the management of "human capital" that are supposed to limit waste and unnecessary activities and increase productivity [112], which reinforces the ongoing process of precarisation [113,114]. It must include a critique of the hyper-individualism of our so-called post-modern societies, in which everyone is presented as an entrepreneur of themselves in a competitive market [115], the class struggle is replaced by the struggle for places, and the pursuit of happiness is simply a matter of individual will and reasoned choice [116].

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