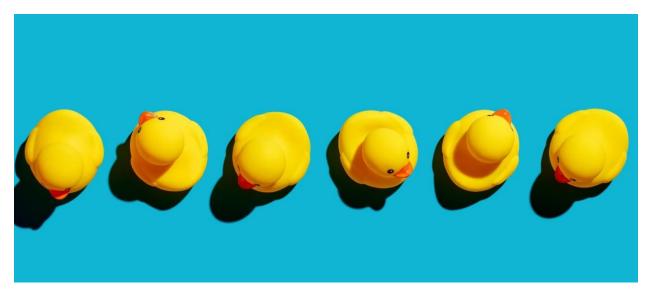# ChatGPT Launch and Managing Contradictions: Why We Need Ambidextrous Leaders

By Charles Galunic , INSEAD

What the launch of ChatGPT can teach executives about leading in disruptive times.

Measured in numbers, ChatGPT has no rival (yet): The chatbot became the **fastest growing consumer app** in history only two months after its launch, chalking up 100 million monthly active users in January 2023.

But in terms of quality, the **generative AI** tool lay no claim to be the best. Based on technology already in existence, ChatGPT was **pushed out to market** in a hurry to outpace other chatbots in development. (I asked ChatGPT specifically what problems users have encountered so far. The reply: the quality and accuracy of responses, ethical implications of AI in general and technical glitches.)

ChatGPT's phenomenal popularity has revealed an arms race among rivals. Most recently, a **Google-backed competitor is responding with a version** that is easier to interact with and less likely to produce harmful

output, and Google itself **just launched its own chatbot**. The jostling illustrates one of the many contradictions – speed versus quality – that organisations face. Should they aim for first-mover advantage with the attendant reputational risks, or bide their time until their product is good enough to capture the confidence of the market more fully?

Although only time can tell the wisdom of either move, the general point is that business life is full of contradictions, and the best organisations do not avoid them. Instead, they need to manage through them over time.

To manage contradictions effectively requires ambidexterity, and particularly leaders who are sufficiently discerning and dexterous to achieve an optimal, dynamic equilibrium between two opposing imperatives. This is something my colleague **Jose-Luis Álvarez** (Senior Affiliate Professor of Organisational Behaviour) and I seek to impart in an INSEAD online programme, **Leading Organisations in Disruptive Times**. We cover concepts, tools and skills that enable managers to lead organisations better in turbulent times, and we deal specifically with the challenge of ambidexterity in the final module.

The ambidextrous leader

Contradictions take specific forms: the long-term versus short-term view; autonomy (decentralised systems) versus collaboration (synergistic, centralised systems); and two essential modes, "exploration" (exploring new opportunities for business development) versus "exploitation" (exploiting the resources in hand for more immediate returns).

The best place to start cultivating ambidexterity is the mindset of executives (as outlined in my book, *Backstage Leadership: The Invisible Work of Highly Effective Leaders*). Managing contradictions often involves being torn between different stakeholders and staying on top of difficult and uncomfortable situations. Imagine being caught between one group of stakeholders who demand that the company clamp down on costs in order to keep up with a giant competitor, and another group of stakeholders who are convinced the company's future lies in long-term innovation and big, over-the-horizon projects.

Four ways to cultivate ambidexterity

Without the ability to "stay in the problem/contradiction" within one's own mind, leaders cannot effectively steer their organisations through

complexity. There are at least four ways to lay the groundwork of cultivating an ambidextrous or paradox mindset.

1. *Embrace and tolerate paradox and contradiction*

My colleague **Ella Miron-Spektor** (Associate Professor of Organisational Behaviour) has done great work on the phenomenon of the **paradox mindset**. To embrace paradox and contradiction is to consciously acknowledge and re-articulate that contradictions such as short versus long term, local/competitive versus collective/cooperative, and exploration versus exploitation are all valuable and necessary to well-performing organisations. It means acknowledging the big picture around paradoxes and their value, and reminding yourself of that basic value and logic.

2. *Embark on self-reflection and self-knowledge*

How well do you know yourself? How have your experiences in management and business shaped your thinking? No one can be truly objective or unbiased, but you should ask yourself whether you have such strong preferences that they amount to dogma and ideology. It may be worthwhile to take stock of your own experiences and preferences, so you can at least be aware of your natural filters when dealing with situations that require paradoxical thinking and patient reflection.

3. *Frame a situation in different ways*

When thinking about a situation or problem, especially about organisational development, practice using contrasting mental templates or approaches, such as an exploration frame and an exploitation frame. Cognitive variety can be a source of recombinant innovation, creating a wider array of potential solutions derived from diverse templates to apply to a given problem. Toyota's famed just-in-time production system is an example where paradoxical frames are allowed to co-exist – high efficiencies, yet fast and adaptive reactions – and thrive in the construction of routines and processes.

4. *Use divergent and convergent thinking to juggle competing dimensions*

Divergent thinking means delving into the exploration logic and the exploitation logic separately. At least for a while, do not allow either logic to shackle the other. A good example was the debate in traditional print media on adapting to digital and online technologies. The more successful ones,

such as *The New York Times*, not only framed it as an opportunity but also explored ways of attaining greater differentiation from their print businesses; the less successful ones framed it as a threat and tended to focus on incremental innovations.

Then, take some time to consider convergence – overlaps, integration and synergies – across these different logics. Attempt "combinatorial play". Look for paths and resource strategies that enable you to straddle both exploitation and exploration with as little cost, conflict or confusion as possible.

The ambidextrous mindset is just one of five components of the framework featured in our online programme to help leaders manage contradictions for better organisational performance. The other pieces are leadership versatility, team cohesion, structural moves and contextual work.

Creating ambidextrous organisations takes work, not least of which is a mindset change. It begins with leaders who can cope with and absorb contradictions.

Find article at
https://knowledge.insead.edu/leadership-organisations/chatgpt-launch-and-managing-contradictions-why-we-need-ambidextrous

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