

Abstract

Tensions are one of the natural elements of innovation. Some says that tensions are good for creativity and innovation; others call for solutions to resolve tensions. This article explores the paradoxical tensions on three levels within multinational corporations: intra-organizational level, organizational level, and project level. Relying on a qualitative case study of 15 innovation projects within a Swedish multinational engineering firm, this study described an array of tensions that emerged during the process of innovation, explaining where the tensions came from and how the tensions were dealt with. The results of the investigation have identified a list of ways handling the tensions. These approaches are further conceptualized into three types of top managers' role in their practice of managing tensions, respectively– participant, facilitator and spectator. The findings provide a nuanced view of tensions in innovation processes and extend the understanding of top manager's role in dealing with the paradoxical tensions to enable creativity and innovation. Departing from a practice-based perspective, this article also contributes to the implications for shaping ambidextrous multinational corporations.