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## Integrative Perspective on Ambidexterity, Creativity and Networking: Literature Overview

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Joanna Radomska<sup>1</sup>, Przemysław Wołczek<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:**

**Purpose:** This paper is aimed at investigating the research trends about ambidexterity blended with creativity and checking whether networking could be one of the approaches making that perspective more comprehensive.

**Approach/Methodology/Design:** Almost every industry, characterized by particular specifics provides different managerial pressures. Those tensions are the drivers of changing managerial cognition aimed at finding the balance between improving the organizational performance and value creating. Based on the literature review and database search using PRISMA protocol, we proposed integrating ambidexterity, creativity and networking in one research perspective.

**Findings:** A detailed analysis revealed three main research areas that are discussed so far - the development of dyadic ties of individuals, multitasking approach and the evolution of social networks linking individuals.

**Practical Implications:** There are different managerial dilemmas which are rooted in the tensions observed. Holistic perspective that is applied in this study includes managing ambidexterity to develop specific organizational abilities driven by creativity. Providing an integrative perspective where the networking is also included, would allow to find the managerial solutions to some of the paradoxes reported.

**Originality/Value:** Although there are many research results that confirm the necessity of enhancing the level of creativeness in organizations, we proposed including the networking perspective as one of the approaches that would allow to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to build the creative potential. As a result the perspective proposed would allow to deal with the paradoxes identifies and enhance the level of ambidexterity.

**Keywords:** Ambidexterity, creativity, networking, paradox theory.

**JEL classification:** L10, L20.

**Paper Type:** Research study.

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<sup>1</sup>Wrocław University of Economics and Business, Faculty of Management, ORCID ID: 0000-0002-1597-8947, e-mail: [joanna.radomska@ue.wroc.pl](mailto:joanna.radomska@ue.wroc.pl)

<sup>2</sup>Wrocław University of Economics and Business, Faculty of Management, ORCID ID: 0000-0001-5388-985X, e-mail: [przemyslaw.wolczek@ue.wroc.pl](mailto:przemyslaw.wolczek@ue.wroc.pl)

## **1. Introduction**

Resolving the paradoxes is a common managerial practice aimed at building and sustaining the competitive advantage. Dealing with contradictory but related decisions simultaneously is revealed as a huge challenge (Smith and Lewis, 2011). Those managerial dilemmas are rooted in the interdependence and inability to split the conflicting areas (Putnam, Fairhurst, and Banghart, 2016). As already pointed by Schad *et al.* (2016), the perspectives of analysis are very complex and deeper insights are needed. Therefore, the paradox lenses are applied in order to provide comprehensive view on blending the efficiency with value delivery.

There are different issues that are investigated based on the paradox theory proposed by Poole and van de Ven (1989). One of them is integration between innovativeness, understood as the original effect of creative work and its measurable, economic effect. Such simultaneous pressure on enhancing the creativeness and achieving desirable effectiveness at the same time (Jones *et al.*, 2014) would require ambidextrous skills (O'Reilly and Tushman, 2013). The research on creativity provides some insights that we further develop. No matter which research perspective is applied, building the external relationships and operating within internal networks (Starkey, Barnatt, and Tempest, 2000) is recommended. Therefore, this paper is aimed at investigating the research trends discussing the issue of ambidexterity blended with creativity and understanding whether networking could be one of the approaches that would make that perspective more comprehensive. An analysis of the literature is conducted using Scopus and Web of Science databases and PRISMA protocol is applied. Based on that, we analyse the observed research trends and propose further research implications.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Paradox Theory and Ambidexterity**

Dealing with different “*tensions, oppositions and contradictions*” is the core managerial skill important not only to survive but also to gain the competitive advantage which was already discussed in the paradox theory (Poole and van de Ven, 1989). Although the conflicting pressures may have different backgrounds, they have an impact on the decision-making process in different types of organizations (Ogrea, 2016). That general characteristic is derived from the fact outlined by Rodgers (2007) who stated that “*the essential elements of a paradox are the simultaneous presence of conditions that are self-contradictory and apparently mutually exclusive*”. Moreover, as suggested by Lewis (2000) the interdependence between competing pressures, that is the basis of paradox theory, could be used as a source for long-term firm sustainability and ultimately as a source of competitive advantage. For that reason, investigations are focused on resolving the paradoxes seems to be interesting and still relevant for research. As distinguished by March (1991) two universal paradoxes may be identified – exploration where the main goal

is to optimize the results using existing knowledge, and exploitation where knowledge needs to be acquired (Luo *et al.*, 2015). The managerial dilemma is based on balancing between simultaneous pressure on short-term productivity and long-term vision because both choices require resource allocation and coordination (Parmentier and Picq, 2016) and have an impact on organizational performance (Vagnani, 2015). As a result, combining the pressure between flexibility and efficiency is required to successfully resolve the managerial and organizational tensions. It could be achieved by applying the paradox lens, called ambidexterity (Papachroni, Heracleous, and Paroutis, 2015). As observed by Koryak *et al.* (2018) the antecedents of organizational ambidexterity are rooted in a blend of integration and differentiation approaches. Moreover, as mentioned by Maclean *et al.* (2020) imposing the organizational ambidexterity is an ongoing dynamic process.

On the other hand, we may also distinguish different than organizational level of analysis. According to Klonek, Rico, and Parker (2018), it should also be applied to the individual perspective of a team working where the tension to be adaptive and agile (i.e. explorative) but also coordinated and efficient (i.e., exploitative) are observed. As pointed by D'Souza, Sigdyal, and Struckell (2017) ambidexterity should be contextualized in the competitive dynamics of the particular group. Yet, multilevel insights are recommended (Mom *et al.*, 2019). It seems to be extremely important in the case of firms that built their competitive advantage on knowledge and creativity trying to grasp the balance between firm performance and value creation (Oehmichen *et al.*, 2017). As pointed by (Vrontis *et al.*, 2017), organizational ambidexterity in knowledge-intensive firms has a positive and significant mediating effect considering external knowledge sourcing, which is necessary to introduce open innovation.

## 2.2 Creativity

Enhancing creativity is perceived as one of the managerial dilemmas and a source of tensions. The main challenge is finding the balance between the actions aimed at value creation (exploration activities) and the cost efficiency (Jones *et al.*, 2014) (exploitation activities). As revealed by Baer and Frese (2003) climate that fosters the development of personal initiative and creativity mediates the relationship between process innovativeness and company performance. However, the organizational context is determining the success of creative efforts (Oldham and Cummings, 1996). In that vein, the researchers mention the availability of required resources (Nohria and Gulati, 1996), processes designed (Hülshager, Anderson, and Salgado, 2009), organizational structure (Damanpour and Schneider, 2006) and communication and interpersonal exchange of data and information (Baer, 2012). As that perspective is complex and comprehensive, the consistency between creativity and economic efficiency (Jones, Svejenova, and Pedersen, 2012) is highly challenging.

For that reason, a mismatch could be observed between the spontaneous and unstructured use of resources necessary to introduce new ideas (Townley and Beech, 2010) and standardized routines regulating the internal processes which would definitely hinder the creativity by introducing more rigid and formal boundaries (Hodgson and Briand, 2013). Therefore, finding a balance between those tensions requires ambidextrous approach, with a long-term perspective (Lubatkin *et al.*, 2006). However, as financial and human resources are used, such skills are difficult to develop in the case of SMEs (Alvarez and Barney, 2004), where those resources are scarce.

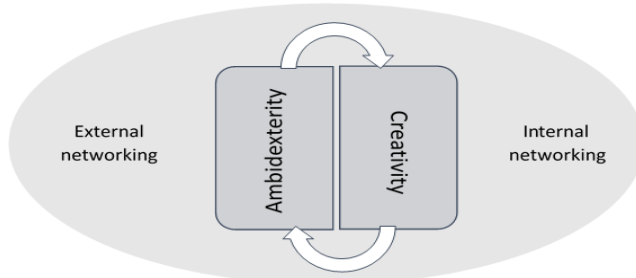
### **2.3 Networking**

As observed by Starkey, Barnatt, and Tempest (2000) networking is a common managerial practice reported especially among creative organisations. No matter which research perspective is applied, there is growing evidence, that it provides a positive impact on different organizational areas. For instance, the research presented by Mitreğa *et al.* (2017), revealed the positive influence of networking capability to build supplier relationships on product innovation and overall firm performance. Moreover, organizational networking leads to competitiveness through organizational learning and innovation processes (Husain, Dayan, and Di Benedetto, 2016). The positive effect brought by developing networking strategy is extremely vital in case of small and medium enterprises, where the lack of crucial resources is observed (Eggers *et al.*, 2018) and external networks help manage innovation obstacles, mainly by initiating exploratory projects by start-up ventures, introducing new design perspectives but also identifying and using the creative potential of employees (Andriopoulos and Lewis, 2010). Those relations between employees (internal networking) gain special attention as they support the knowledge spillover (Snijders, Lomi, and Torló, 2013), transfer and absorption (Fritsch and Kauffeld-Monz, 2009). Therefore, we may perceive internal networking structures, which can operate regardless of the organizational changes (O'Reilly and Tushman, 2013) as highly important to build the creative potential and competitive advantage.

On the other hand, building and developing external networks seems to be also useful, although it is definitely more difficult, as it requires, in some cases, modifying the business model to gain the ability to cope with other sectors (Gandia, 2013). It is called “co-opetition”, and was introduced by Brandenburger and Nalebuff (1996). Lado, Boyd, and Hanlon (1997) provided some evidence that it may foster a higher level of organizational performance. In some cases, the partner resources can be an important alternative to internal firm resources and enable to achieve seemingly incompatible strategic objectives (Wassmer, Li, and Madhok, 2017). Therefore, external networking, either with competitors or with other stakeholders, seems to be highly recommended. We may conclude that both perspectives on networking (external and internal) are supporting the managerial skills by providing either the potential to enhance creativity or deal with organizational tensions observed. Therefore, we wanted to investigate whether such

an integrated perspective could be explored in further research. Our research framework is presented below.

**Figure 1.** Research perspective



**Source:** Own study.

### 3. Material and Methods

In our research we used a systematic literature review, which goal is defined as “integrating a number of different works on the same topic, summarising the common elements, contrasting the differences, and extending the work in some fashion” (Meredith, 1993). According to Denyer and Tranfield (2009) the systematic literature review is an adequate method to locate, select, analyze, appraise and evaluate the literature that is relevant to a particular research problem or question. The purpose of this research is to extend the knowledge about ambidexterity, creativity and networking providing one integrated perspective. We adopted the research methodology proposed by Tranfield, Denyer, and Smart (2003), where a systematic literature review should follow three main steps:

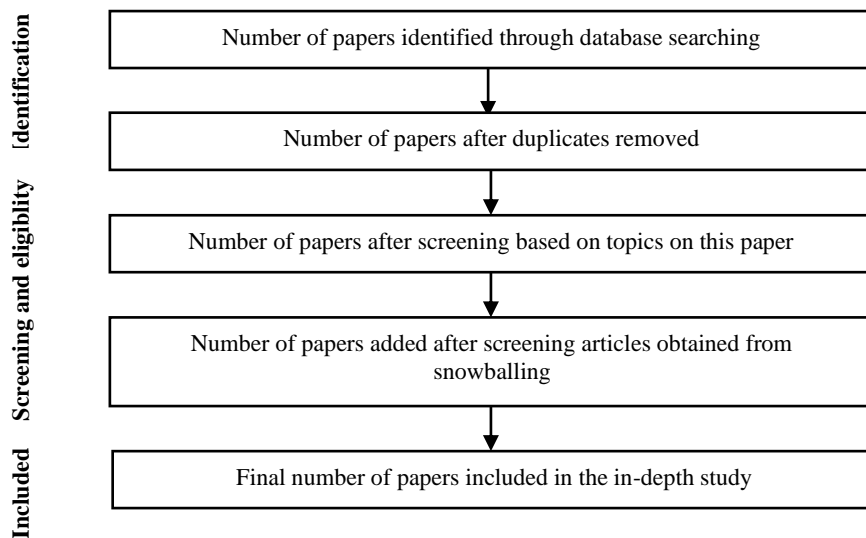
1. Planning the review:
  - a. Identification for the need for a review.
  - b. Preparation of a proposal for a review.
  - c. Development of a review protocol
2. Conducting a review:
  - a. Identification of research.
  - b. Selection of studies.
  - c. Study quality assessment.
  - d. Data extraction and monitoring progress.
  - e. Data synthesis.
3. Reporting and dissemination:
  - a. The report and recommendations.
  - b. Getting evidence into practice.
4. The last step is reported in the analysis and discussion.

**Step 1. Planning the review:**

Based on the literature review the main aim of the research was to determine the research trends in the area of integrative perspective on ambidexterity, creativity and networking. In particular, we were trying to check whether networking could be one of the approaches used to blend ambidexterity and creativity (Figure 1).

Prior to the systematic literature review, a research protocol was developed based on PRISMA proposition made by Moher *et al.* (2009). Figure 2 presents research the protocol used in our literature review.

**Figure 2.** Phases of a systematic review



**Source:** Own study.

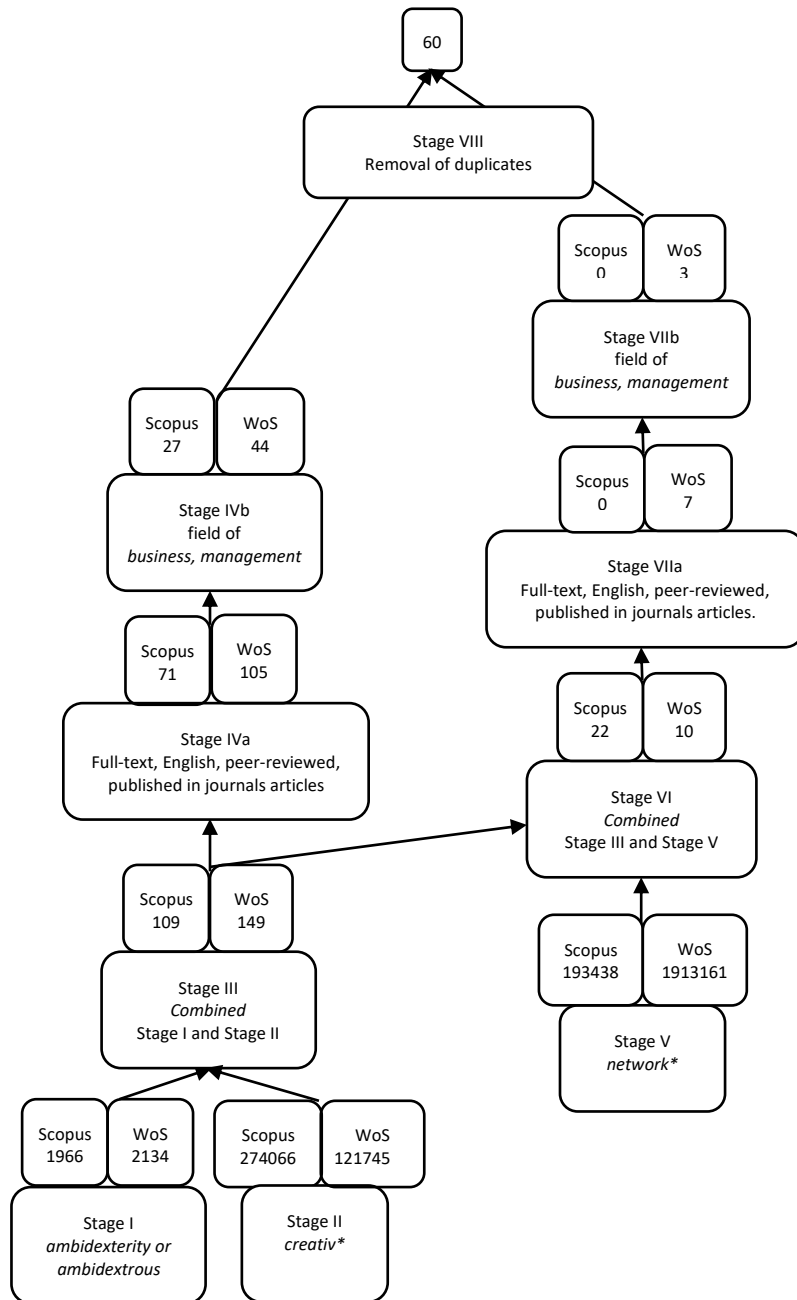
To locate papers finally used in this study two databases were searched: Web-of-Science and Scopus. We decided to focus on these two databases due to a need to gather high-quality paper related to our integrated research perspective. The data from 2000-2019 was used in the study and were obtained by the following keywords: *ambidexterity*, *ambidextrous*, creative, creativity, creatively, creativeness, network, networking.

**Step 2. Conducting the review:**

To accomplish the research goal, our analysis was divided in three parts described below:

- Part I – Identification – to identify the proper number of papers from databases, we conduct 7-Stage process (Figure 3). In the first step (including stages I-IV) we focused on one the ambidexterity concept and creativity issues.

**Figure 3.** Stages, criteria and results of article selection using the Scopus and Web of Science databases (between the period 2000-2019)



Source: Own study.

Therefore, in the first four stages, filtering was performed based on two criteria: the occurrence of the term *ambidexterity* or *ambidextrous* (the first set) and the occurrence of the terms *creative\** [creative, creativity, creatively, creativeness] (the second set). Only the title, abstract or key words were analyzed. In the research results, only the full-text articles published in journals (excluding the reviews, editorial notes and conference materials) and focused on business and management were considered. There were 27 papers in the Scopus database, and 44 were identified in the WoS database.

In the second step (including stages I-III and V-VII) further selection was proposed by narrowing the results obtained in stages I-IV to publications containing the term *network\** (network, networking). In the research results, only the full-text articles published in journals (excluding the reviews, editorial notes and conference materials) and focused on business and management were considered. No publication was found in the Scopus database, whereas 3 were identified in the WoS database.

- Part II – Screening and eligibility - the objective of this part was to screen the gathered papers and check whether they are relevant to the study. In this way the first group of articles was created. After that the articles cited in the first group were screened to find additional papers matching the topic studied (so-called snowballing procedure).
- Part III – Included – the aim of this part was to establish the final number of papers taken into account in the in-depth study and recognized the type of the articles (theoretical or empirical).

Table 1 summarizes the literature review process described. In total, 74 papers were found in two databases, of which 14 were duplicates. From 60 papers we removed another 14 because they were unrelated to this study. In snowballing procedure 23 papers were reviewed and 17 of them were added. Finally, we gathered 63 papers that were included in the in-depth study. 11 of them were theoretical and 51 were empirical.

**Table 1.** *Conducting the review – data collection and selection*

		Number of papers
Identification	Database search Databases: Web of Science, Scopus Key words: ambidexterity, ambidextrous, creative, creativity, creatively, creativeness, network, networking Searched in: Title, abstract and keywords Selection criteria: Full-text, English, peer-reviewed, published in journals articles, field of business, management	Web of Science: 47 Scopus: 27 74



	Duplicates Removal of duplicates found in multiple databases	Removal of 14 papers	60
Screening and eligibility	Relevance Removal of papers that are not relevant to the subject of this article	Removal of 14 papers	46
	Snowballing Review full papers of cited articles of interest: 23 papers were reviewed and 16 was added	Addition of 16 papers	62
Included	Final number of papers included in the in-depth study divided into theoretical and empirical		Total: 62 Theoretical: 11 Empirical: 51

*Source: Own study.*

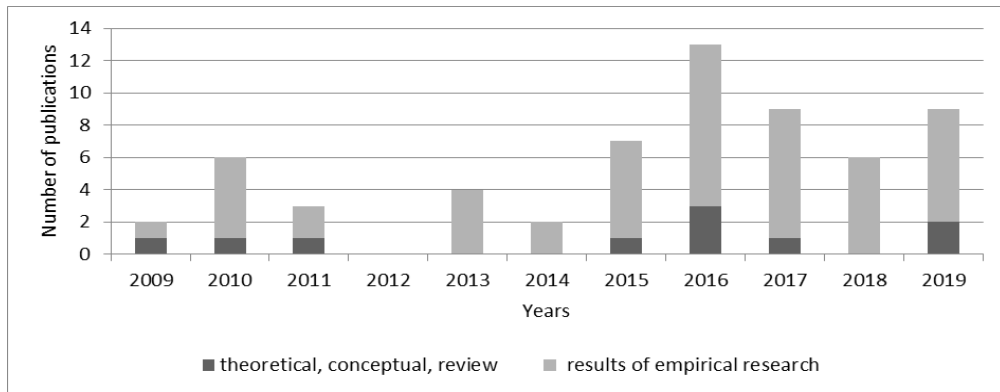
#### 4. Research Results and Discussion

At the next stage of research, bibliometric techniques were used, including either the analysis of the number of publications and their content, or frequency analysis, which facilitated the investigation of research activity in the area of ambidexterity in combination with creativity (broadly defined) and networking over the last 20 years (2000-2019). Based on the detailed analysis of 62 articles, the main research areas were identified.

Based on the research results we may identify the first article referring to ambidexterity and creativity that was published in 2000 by Sheremata. The author discusses issues of organizations' ambidexterity (in terms of act creatively as well as collectively) to successfully develop a new product. In the paper two opposing forces are investigated. The first increases the quantity and quality of ideas, information, and knowledge available for creative action, while the second integrates these things into collective action. The author models these forces to explain how the coexistence of contradictory structural elements and processes increases the probability of successful development of a new product (Sheremata, 2000). In the period from 2001 to 2008 we did not find any articles referring to ambidexterity and creativity.

As we can see on Figure 4 between 2009 and 2014, another 16 articles were published. The publication peak occurs in 2016. That year 13 articles were published. Since then, we have observed a fluctuation of works on ambidexterity and referring to broadly understood creativity. It should also be noted that during the period considered, empirical publications dominate (almost 84% of papers that appeared between 2009 and 2019).

**Figure 4.** The number of publications referring to ambidexterity and creativity between 2000-2019<sup>3</sup>.



*Source:* Own study.

Using frequency analysis based on our research perspective (Oliver and Ebers, 1998) main research areas were identified and further analyzed. Sample references are presented in Table 2.

A detailed analysis of 62 articles referring to *ambidexterity* and *creativity*, allowed to identify four research perspectives:

- Learning process and knowledge acquiring;
- Organizational context;
- Managerial practice;
- Company's characteristics.

It can be observed that the research perspective focused on the managerial practice dominates and we may refer to many research results where different research areas were investigated. New problems that emerge are focused on leadership skills, especially on comprehensive and holistic approach that seems to be necessary in facilitating team ambidexterity aimed at enhancing the level of creativity in the organization. It goes in line with the recent insights in the organizational context where the role of meta-routines is discussed.

Therefore, we may observe the recommendations that are prone to blend the formal and informal managerial practices. Among all research perspectives identified we may reveal partial focus on sustaining the internal relationships (i.e. collective culture, collective actions). For that reason, our further analysis contained the third research area – networking.

<sup>3</sup>Only the data for the period 2009-2019 were presented, because there was only one article found in Scopus and WoS databases before that period.

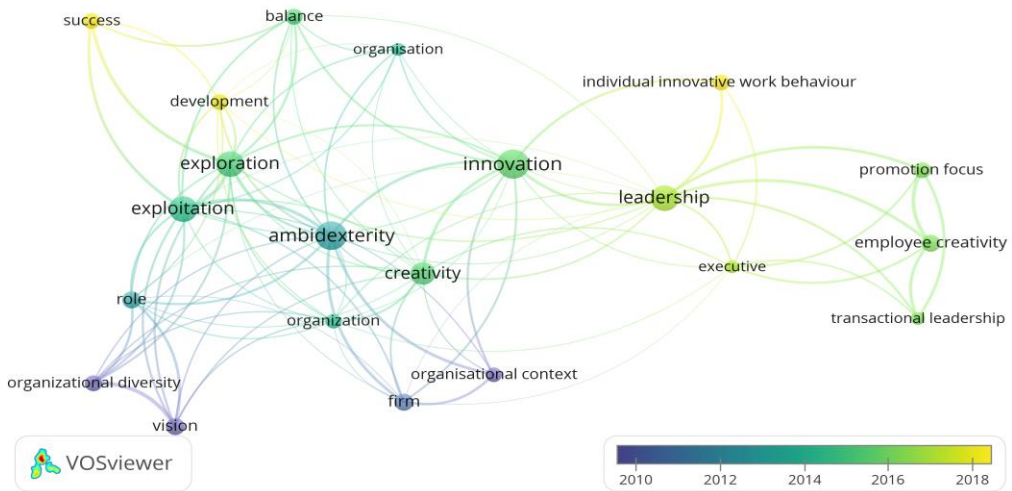
**Table 2.** Main research areas of ambidexterity and creativity in management science and sample references (the period between 2010-2019).

Research perspective	Research areas explored	Sample references
Learning process and knowledge acquisition	the balance between explorative-exploitative learning	(Brink, 2016)
	exploration-exploitation knowledge management	(Schmitt, 2016))
	specialization	(Caniëls and Veld, 2019)
	creative vs. collective action	(Sheremata, 2000)
	design thinking concept	(Gaim and Wählin, 2016)
	knowledge, learning and motivation as 3 levels of paradoxes	(Knight and Harvey, 2015)
Organizational context	building the competences	(Brion, Mothe and Sabatier 2010)
	addressing ambidexterity of creativity mechanisms at different levels of analysis	(Revilla, 2019)
	role of metaroutines	(Snehvrat and Dutta, 2018)
	contextual ambidexterity and organizational culture	(Wu and Wu, 2016)
	collectivistic culture	(Hooge, Béjean and Arnoux 2017)
	organizational capabilities (also dynamic capabilities)	(Birkinshaw, Zimmermann and Raisch 2016)
Managerial practice	project management as a supporting tool	(Andersson and Johansson, 2010)
	the role of HRM in facilitating team ambidexterity	(Jørgensen and Becker, 2017)
	empowering and training	(Sok and O’Cass, 2015)
	measuring team performance	(Kostopoulos and Bozionelos, 2011)
	role conflict and dual-leadership approach	(Rosing and Zacher, 2017)
	goal setting	(Stetler and Magnusson, 2015)
	complexity/holistic leadership	(Kodama, 2019) (Diesel and Scheepers, 2019)
	ambidextrous leadership skills	(Murphy, 2016)
	individual behaviour - fostering creativity on individual level	(Simon and Tellier, 2011)
Company's characteristics	company size, level of R&D investment or sector as ambidexterity drivers	(Revilla and Rodríguez-Prado, 2018)

*Source:* Own study.

The frequency analysis of main research topics allows for the identification of the most investigated issues related to ambidexterity; innovation and networking. As presented at figure 5 in the last ten years, the focus of research related to combined perspective of ambidexterity and creativity and less in networking concerned exploration, exploitation, innovation and leadership.

**Figure 5.** Yearly publication main topics



**Source:** Own study (visualization with VOSviewer).

In the next step of our research we investigated the most influential paper (in term of citations). In table 3 it can be seen that in last 20 years the most frequently cited article was the first one published in studied topic by Sheremata. But on the other hand, the most influential article (in terms of average citations per year) was *Explaining the heterogeneity of the leadership-innovation relationship: Ambidextrous leadership*. In this article authors proposed a concept of ambidextrous leadership which utilizes opening and closing leader behaviors and switches between them to deal with the ever-changing requirements of the innovation process (Rosing, Frese, and Bausch, 2011).

**Table 3.** The most frequently cited articles in research areas of ambidexterity, creativity and networking (the period between 2000-2019).

Title	Authors	Source Title	Publication Year	Total Citations	Average per Year
Centrifugal and centripetal forces in radical new product development under time pressure	Sheremata, W. A.	Academy of Management Review	2000	297	14,1
Explaining the heterogeneity of the leadership-innovation relationship: Ambidextrous	Rosing, K.; Frese, M.; Bausch, A.	Leadership Quarterly	2011	265	26,5

leadership					
Managing Innovation Paradoxes: Ambidexterity Lessons from Leading Product Design Companies	Andriopoulos, C.; Lewis, M. W.	Long Range Planning	2010	107	9,7
Team Exploratory and Exploitative Learning: Psychological Safety, Task Conflict, and Team Performance	Kostopoulos, K.C.; Bozionelos, N.	Group & Organization Management	2011	80	8,0
Can Quality-Oriented Firms Develop Innovative New Products?	Sethi, R.; Sethi, A.	Journal of Product Innovation Management	2009	53	4,4
Ambidextrous leadership and team innovation	Zacher, H.; Rosing, K.	Leadership & Organization Development Journal	2015	51	8,5
When the glass is half full and half empty: CEOs' ambivalent interpretations of strategic issues	Plambeck, N.; Weber, K.	Strategic Management Journal	2010	45	4,1
Organizational diversity and shared vision: Resolving the paradox of exploratory and exploitative learning	Wang, C.L., Rafiq, M.	European Journal of Innovation Management	2009	44	3,7
How Do Firms Adapt to Discontinuous Change? Bridging the dynamic capabilities and ambidexterity perspectives	Birkinshaw, J.; Zimmermann, A.; Raisch, S.	California Management Review	2016	37	7,4
Why and How Combining Strong and Weak Ties within a Single Interorganizational R&D Collaboration Outperforms Other Collaboration Structures	Michelfelder, I.; Kratzer, J.	Journal of Product Innovation Management	2013	29	3,6
Examining the new product innovation - performance relationship: Optimizing the role of individual-level creativity and attention-to-detail	Sok, P.; O'Cass, A.	Industrial Marketing Management	2015	25	4,2
Adaily diary study on ambidextrous leadership and self-reported employee innovation	Zacher, H.; Wilden, R. G.	Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology	2014	23	3,3

*Source: Own study.*

At the last stage of our research, we identified and deeply analyzed 3 articles that described all three research areas blended (networking, creativity and ambidexterity). Although slightly different perspectives were explored, all papers were focused on R&D activity (which is highly creative) and confirmed our dominant logic that introducing the networking approach could foster reducing the ambidextrous tensions. As indicated by Schultz, Schreyoegg, and Von Reitzenstein (2013), creativity required in R&D departments is strongly connected with

exploration-exploitation tensions. Therefore, a multitasking approach is recommended where the internal as well as external resources due to application of networking are more efficiently allocated.

Those findings reveal an interesting perspective for further research which could be focused on the impact of the type of networking (external or internal) on different types of individuals. The network structures were also explored in the second paper authored by Simon and Tellier (2011) who pointed that dealing with ambidexterity can result in the evolution of social networks linking individuals involved in the idea development. The research results indicated that “*different network structures and types of connections are relied upon depending on the explorative or exploitative objectives of teams of individuals*”.

Therefore, those different objectives are the drivers of building the network structures and establishing different types of connections. Focus on individual, rather than the company level is also stressed by Michelfelder and Kratzer (2013) who applied the combination of strong and weak ties to reveal that if the right structure and processes are adopted, a large network could outperform several smaller, independent networks. Thus, supporting the development of dyadic ties of individuals would reduce the ambidextrous tensions observed.

## **5. Conclusion**

In this paper we were willing to investigate the research trends where the ambidexterity is blended with creativity. Furthermore, we wanted to check whether networking could be another insight in that equation. We have used a formal PRISMA protocol and followed all the rules that are applied in that procedure. Our research revealed that we may identify only three works where that integrated perspective is used, which provides the conclusion that this topic is still unexplored. As there are many research results that confirm the necessity of enhancing the level of creativeness in organizations, we proposed including the networking perspective as one of the approaches that would allow to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to build the creative potential.

On the other hand, we may also point some managerial dilemmas which are the responses towards tensions observed. Holistic perspective that is applied includes managing ambidexterity to develop specific organizational abilities. That is the research gap that we identified and confirmed through our literature study and therefore it is our main contribution. The main limitation of that study includes providing the insights based on theoretical perspective that should be further developed in empirical study where the integrated perspective of networking, ambidextrous skills and high level of quality would be investigated. It would also be recommended to include the company size, level of R&D investment or sector as ambidexterity drivers in further analyses.

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