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Investigating the 'mission and profit' paradox- Case study of an ecopreneurial organisation in India

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Abstract

This paper, based on an in-depth case study of an ecopreneurial organisation in India, investigates the underlying processes involved in achieving dual goals- positive environmental mission of 'reducing waste going into the landfill', and financial viability. Drawing on the paradox theory, this study contributes to research by focussing on 'ecopreneurship' and investigates 'how' such organisations 'how' balance social and economic demands.

Our analysis shows that, in the case study organisation, management of the 'mission-profit' paradox happened not through isolated decisions, but organically, due to a collective of actions taken over time which at times prioritised both profits and the environment while at other times focussed on one goal more than the other. Two factors facilitated this namely- Leadership, Formal and Informal organisational processes. Further, our study extends Pastakia's work (2002) and shows that two contextual factors namely regulatory policies and the civil society offered strong support to the ecopreneur in their pursuit of achieving the dual goals.

Much of the research on the topic is from the developed world and does not represent the challenges of managing mission-profit paradox in a developing country context. Further, the research on social enterprises in India focuses on not-for-profit organisations rather than those which must be financially viable. We argue that it is timely to shift attention to exploring how organisations can be financially viable and address social concerns simultaneously.

Keywords: *Ecopreneurship, Social Entrepreneurship, Paradox theory, Tension, India, Context, Mission – Profit paradox*

Introduction

Social Entrepreneurial (SE) organisations i.e., those with a dual purpose of achieving altruistic objectives along with commercial goals, fill in an important gap in solving intractable problems such as alleviation of poverty, employment generation, education, women empowerment and environment conservation. With the *raison d'être* of making a substantial impact on social issues while ensuring financial viability, SEs are mushrooming all over the world. In emerging economies such as India, social entrepreneurs are seen as catalysts who can greatly contribute towards mitigating social, economic and environmental issues (British Council report, 2016). Emerging field of scholarship from India has studied various dimensions including how social value creation takes place through social entrepreneurship (Singh, 2016); the genesis and progress of social entrepreneurship (Baporikar, 2016); how collective social endeavours lead to empowerment for women (Datta and Gailey, 2012); strategic responses to institutional complexity (Cherrier et al, 2018) and enablers for social entrepreneurship (Satar and John, 2019).

An off shoot of the social entrepreneurship domain is 'Ecopreneurship', which identifies itself through its dedicated focus on environmentally sustainable activities, while ensuring financial sustainability of the organisation (Schuyler, 1998). The author refers to ecopreneurship as 'a new market-based approach to identifying opportunities for improving environmental quality and capitalising upon them in the private sector for profit'. A pioneering work in this area was by Pastakia (2002) who proposed a theoretical framework based on internal and external factors affecting the emergence of an ecopreneurial organisation. Further ecopreneurship as a discipline was explored by Galkina and Hultman, (2016); McEwen(2013); Schaltegger (2016, 2002), Schneider (2020) among others. Even so, scholarly work in the field is deficient in both theorisation and empirical findings.

One of the areas that need to be explored further is how ecopreneurs routinely manage contradictions arising out of seemingly competing goals, also called paradoxes. In a paradoxical situation the decisionmaker is presented with two opposing choices wherein neither can be rejected and a juxtaposition of the two, leads to considerable tension. Paradoxes have been widely studied in social enterprises (Peattie & Morly,2008; Mason & Doherty,2016; Smith et al, 2012, 2017). However, little is known about *how* paradoxes are managed by ecopreneuers, and how they might be impacted by contextual factors.

The present study draws on literature on SEs, paradox theory, human resource management and leadership and applies it the emerging field of ecopreneuership in an Indian context. Specifically, it aims to examine the role leadership style as well as organisations practices might play in management of paradoxes in an ecopreneuerial setting. It also attempts to explore the impact of contextual factors in management of paradoxes.

Literature Review

What is Ecopreneurship

The scope of 'ecopreneuership' is highly contested (Galkina and Hultman, 2016). Terminology such as 'sustainable entrepreneurship', 'environmental entrepreneurship' and 'ecopreneurship' have been used interchangeably (Antolin-Lopez et al, 2019; Hoogendoorn et al, 2019) and a lack of consensus has been attributed to the infancy of the field (Kirkwood and Walton, 2014). Apart of Isaak (2010) which defines ecopreneurship as a "system transforming, socially committed environmental business characterized by breakthrough innovation", much of the early literature focused on personal attributes and 'push and pull' factors that lead to the emergence of ecoprenuer/ecopreneuership. Indeed, Dixon and Clifford (2007) in their study of a UK based ecopreneuerial organization focused on ecopreneur's strong business acumen and ability to manage stakeholders as the key in the pursuit of environmental and social goals, while running a thriving business. Further, some authors argue that an ecopreneur is one who is "profit oriented and environmentally concerned at the same time" (Ljungkvist and Andersen, 2019), for others an ecopreneur is primarily driven by their environmental values (Gast et al., 2017; Dixon & Clifford, 2007). More recently, Ljungkvist and Anderson (2019) studied ecopreneuership as a multi-dimensional concept and found that when firms focus mainly on environmental goals, they tend to be outperformed by those that balance both financial and environmental goals.

Much of the research lacks an exploration into how the predisposition, values and beliefs of the founder can translate into the balancing of profit and environmental goals. This is important to avoid an uneven balancing of objectives, leading to either the demise of the enterprise or its complete shift towards economic success. Our study fills this gap. Drawing on a case study in India, it explores how leadership style and behaviours as well as adoption of formal and informal organisational practices helped an ecopreneuerial organisation to successfully balance its commercial and environmental objective. It also explores influence of the contextual factors on its success in achieving this balance.

The mission-profits paradox in ecopreneurial organisations

Unlike conventional entrepreneurial organisations, challenges faced by ecopreneurial organisations are amplified by the multi-dimensional nature of their objectives (environmental and commercial goals) that appear contradictory to each other. However, as paradox theory argues (Lewis, 2000) organisations can successfully achieve both goals. The goals may not be equally weighted (Antolin-Lopez, et al, 2019) and while some ecopreneurs may prioritise environmental goals over profits in their decision making (Kirkwood and Walton, 2014), others might see environmental products/services as vehicle for profit generation (Ljungkvist and Anderson, 2019).

A review of the literature shows that while there is a recognition of paradoxes in ecopreneurial organisations, theory development is deficient with respect to '*how*' the seemingly divergent goals can be balanced, with the exception of work by Clifford and Dixon (2007) and Soderstrom and Heinze (2021). The two studies show that embeddedness of the multiple goals, coupled with stakeholder engagement and inter-organisational partnerships can provide a solution to how such paradoxes can be managed, but argue that this is context dependent.

This paper draws on the SE literature to examine how paradoxes may be managed. Scholarly work points to critical elements namely, Leadership (Smith et al, 2012) and organisation practices (Smith & Beshrov, 2019; Battilana et al, 2015). In addition, it also considers how *context* might influence management of the paradox. The following sections review literature on these in detail.

Leadership

Literature in the SE domain and more widely has explored leadership approaches in organisations facing multiple and yet competing demands. It highlights the need to exhibit 'paradoxical leadership', referring to the ability of leaders to embrace paradox, understand competing goals and simultaneously address them (Smith et al, 2016; Lavine, 2014; Smith et al, 2012; Hahn et al, 2018). These authors note that when leaders consciously avoid looking at profits and mission as binary choices, and accept the need to engage in both, synergies between the goals can emerge, leading to higher performance of the organisation (Levine, 2014; Smith et al, 2012). However, for this to happen it is important for the leader to ensure

that the dual goals are understood by the followers (Lewis, 2000) such that there can be an organisation-wide 'shared meaning' of the paradox and its management (Lavigne, 2014).

Leaders also demonstrate, through their behaviours, that they embrace paradoxes. This may require them to switch between directive and participative leadership styles alternating between centralised and decentralised decision-making; providing clear direction and allowing employees autonomy and flexibility to execute tasks; monitoring output and trusting employees. This helps them to manage multiple demands and leads to positive employee outcomes (Klonek et al, 2021; Alfes and Langer, 2017). Despite its importance, 'paradoxical leadership' is missing in analyses of entrepreneurial organisations, and our study addresses the gap.

Formal and Informal practices

The literature also looks at the role of organisational practices in form of formal and informal processes (Smith and Lewis, 2011, Hahn et al, 2018; Smith et al, 2019) that prevent SEs from veering towards one goal, rather than balancing both. Organisational processes act as guardrails (Smith & Besharov, 2019), that assist in decision making by defining boundaries and thereby empower employees to manage conflicting demands. They can also be people management practices. Newman et al (2018) in their editorial article note that smaller SEs often tend to have bespoke and informal people management practices, which gradually become formalised as the organisation grows. They highlight the need to study how practices such as hiring, socialisation, rewarding, engaging, can facilitate management of paradoxical challenges faced by these organisations. Battilana and Dorado (2010) explain the hiring tensions that emerge in micro-finance organisations where the dilemma is whether to hire socially oriented employees or those with technical expertise. Their study found that this tension could be overcome only when the institutions began to focus on the socialisation practices that not only teach the technicalities of the job but also helped the new hires understand the social mission of the enterprise. These can be achieved through 'spaces of negotiation' (Battilana et al, 2015) that encourage open communication and the sharing of perspectives between the groups of employees responsible for specific functions. Hsieh et al, 2018 too found that this paradox can be resolved by embedding a common identity, created during hiring and socialisation and via processes such as internal communication, flatter organisation structures, democratic decision making and giving incentives for work that is aligned to organisational values. Once the team members have imbibed the dual objectives of the enterprise, it should guide them in choosing both goals in their decisions and actions.

Hence people management practices should be a part of the study of management of paradoxes in organisations.

Contextual factors

Extant literature highlights the need to study contextual factors as these can significantly impact SEs, from the stage of idea generation to their ability to scale for impact and achieve financial viability (Saebi et al, 2019; Newth & Woods, 2014; Smith et al, 2013). Further authors state that context can be both a constraint as well as an opportunity for SEs (Newth & Woods, 2014; Cherrier et al, 2018). For example, Newth & Woods (2014) paper explores context dependent opportunities that the social entrepreneur can exploit. Andriopoulos & Gotsi (2017) also highlight the importance of contextualising study of paradoxes to provide robustness and nuance to research.

In the context of ecopreneurship, Pastakia (2002) argued that internal factors (such as sustainability values of the organisation, competitive edge of the products and services on offer) and external factors (i.e., power of the discerning customers and investors, enabling policies, regulatory agencies, and civil society) are key drivers in the success of ecopreneurs. They found that in the Indian context, external forces, particularly civil society coupled with judicial activism and to some extent enabling policies and regulatory agencies, had a much stronger impact than internal forces. Recent research has explored the India context (Cherrier et al, 2018), but we could not find any study investigating management of paradoxes in ecopreneurial organisation in India

Contribution

This paper bridges literature from social entrepreneurship, Human Resource Management, leadership, and Paradox theory and examines gaps identified in the preceding sections. Specifically, it examines 'how' paradoxes can be managed in an ecopreneurial organisation, at the level of the organisation as well as the people who make it- its founder, team members and volunteers. It does so in a developing country context. Such granularity is lacking in extant literature.

First, this study investigates the leader's role in management of challenges faced by an organisation in pursuit of scaling for growth and for impact. This has been explored in the SE literature but not in the field of ecopreneurship (Smith et al, 2012). Second, the study examines the influence of formal and informal processes, including people management practices in

achieving the dual goals of economic success and socio-environment mission. Smith and Besharov (2019) emphasized the role formal mechanisms play in the management of paradox but there is no empirical evidence to substantiate it. The present study attempts to apply the concept in the context of an ecopreneurial organisation and thereby adds to the research in the file of paradox literature and ecopreneurship.

Finally, the study examines the influence of contextual factors in management of paradoxes, in an ecopreneurial organisation operating in India. Thus, it adds to the literature by considering context specific tensions and how these may shape the organisation's successes and challenges (Cherrier et al, 2018).

The Indian Context

India is a unique context in that while on one hand, Indian culture is rooted in 'reuse' rather than 'use and throw', on the other, the urban phenomenon of generation and disposal of waste, coupled with the lackadaisical attitude of the government authorities, has given rise to challenges that may be not understood in a global context. Recent changes to legislation and changing attitudes towards the environment have provided an ecosystem to a new class of social entrepreneurs who seek to tackle environmental issues, including management of waste. The waste management industry in India, is projected to be worth \$14 billion by 2025 as per a 'Research and Markets report (2019), making it a compelling context to examine.

Based on the discussion in the preceding sections, we set out to address the following research questions:

1. To investigate 'how' ecopreneurial organisations engage with the mission-profits paradox.
 - 1.1 To examine the role of leadership in management of paradoxes within an ecopreneurial organisation.
 - 1.2 To investigate how formal and informal organisational practices might help in management of paradoxes.
2. To the examine the extent to which a developing country context impacts an ecopreneurial organisation and its ability to manage the mission-profits paradox.

Methodology

Research Context

The paper is based on a study of RUR Greenlife (rur.co.in), a small ecopreneurial organisation in Mumbai, India comprising ten employees and several hundred volunteers and green champions. RUR was initially established as a volunteer organisation run by 'school moms' and focused on educating households, shopkeepers and consumers in local 'bazaars' on home composting and environmental hazards of plastic. In 2009, it registered as a for-profit organisation when the founder came to recognise that RUR needed to make a bigger impact-beyond their community and that "*nothing that was offered for free was valued by people for long*".

RUR has grown in scope. It offers a diversified portfolio including its flagship product- Green Gold Bio Composter, and services such as eco-awareness workshops and collaborating with corporates on CSR and EPR (Extended Producer Responsibility). In keeping with its mission, RUR has prevented 600,000 kilos of waste from going to landfill sites, educated over 3,000,000 individuals about managing waste, and has generated compost from 5,22,000 kilograms of biodegradable waste, annually (Source: <https://rur.co.in>). It has received several national and international awards for its work. In existence for over ten years, RUR is distinct in that unlike its competitors, who focus on profit motives, RUR has a clear environmental mission i.e., "*stop waste going to landfill*". Further while SE sector in India is dominated by NGOs, that depend on external funding to sustain and carry out their mission, RUR is self-reliant and financially viable. Thus, it is an exemplar in the ecopreneurship domain and a perfect subject for our study.

Research Design

The research questions seek to gain an insight into 'how' an ecopreneur can achieve its mission goals while ensuring financial viability. In doing so, an in-depth investigation of behaviours of team members as well as organisational processes was necessary to explore embedded concepts in the management of paradoxes. Hence an inductive approach, based on a qualitative case study was adopted, in line with the research on paradoxes in SE settings (Smith & Besharov, 2019; Jackson et al, 2018; Volery et al, 2015).

Data collection

Primary data was collected over a period of twenty-three months through online interviews and field visits from a single case-study organisation. Secondary data in form of internal documents, videos posted on the website, was analysed. A summary of the data and how these were collected is given below

Table1: A summary of the data collection methods employed over the course of ten months.

Data collection	Number	Brief rationale
Semi-structured interviews with the founder- Between 60 - 90 minutes	4	To understand about the background of RUR, the founder's journey and to understand RUR's challenges in managing both mission and profit goals.
Semi-structured Interviews with three team members, including follow up interviews, between 60 minutes - 120 minutes	6	To get the perspective of team members working on different verticals, to get more details on the operational aspects of the organisation (such as how projects are chosen, sales and marketing), organisation's culture, as well as challenges faced by the team members in their respective roles.
Semi-structured Interviews with customers (between 45 minutes -120 minutes)	2	To understand the customer's perspective on RUR's ability to deliver their mission as well as be financially viable.
Semi-structured Interviews with volunteers (between 35 minutes to 60 minutes)	1	To examine the role of volunteers in spreading the environmental mission.
Semi-structured with a freelance consultant (30 mins)	1	To explore the extent to which a person who was external to the organisation understood the dual goals.
Analysis of YouTube videos	10	Get additional information on the background of RUR, their projects, their focus areas and examine the extent to which they openly spoke about their products and services while discussing their mission.
Participation in webinars	3	To examine the extent to which RUR used the webinars to connect with potential customers and whether they openly spoke about their products and services while discussing their mission
Participation in an internal review meeting	1	To understand the 'language' around mission and profit objectives in the internal meetings
Analysis of documents submitted for awards	3	To get information about RUR successes/challenges
Site visit	2	To observe interaction between RUR's team members, the founder-leader, and a customer.

Interviews:

Snowball sampling was used to access the interviewees. The interviews included collecting historical information about RUR and participant's perspective on RUR's response to the paradoxical challenges. Fourteen semi-structured interviews were conducted – four with the founder, six with three team members, one with a volunteer who had joined as newly recruited employee, one with a business development consultant and two with customers/green champions. The first round of interviews was conducted in the summer of 2019, when the ongoing 'tensions' between the two seemingly divergent goals were identified. This led us to interview team members and customers to get more insights into the research questions. An average interview lasted about 50 minutes. All the interviews were recorded.

The multiple sources of secondary data helped in triangulating the primary data collected during the interviews and observation, thereby offering robustness to the research design.

Data analysis

A thematic analysis technique was used to analyse the data. All interviews were transcribed, summarised and grouped into themes, in line with the research questions. Through an iterative process, these themes were revised as other sources of data were analysed.

Case selection

Three criteria were used for selecting the case. The organisation needed to have an environmental mission, needed to focus *both* environmental and economic goals and been in existence for at least three years. Communication was initiated with the founder of RUR through a personal contact.

Findings

RQ1.1 To examine the role of leadership in management of paradoxes within an ecopreneurial organisation

The following section details the leadership at RUR and how it enabled the organisation to manage the mission-profit paradox. The founder-leader reconciled the dual goals of environmental mission and financial viability by demonstrating a range of decision making and leadership behaviours.

Demonstrating the Paradoxical Leadership

Choosing to be a social enterprise

RUR sought to promote environmental awareness and limit the amount of waste going to landfills. The founder-leader understands that the mission cannot be achieved by her and her team alone. She provided an example of how wider participation was required. Previously, her organisation offered free environmentally friendly jute bags to customers to replace plastic bags. However, customers used it only for a day or two and then returned to using plastic bags. However, charging a nominal amount for the jute bags encouraged them to continue using the bags, promoting change on a wide scale. This realisation, along with the bureaucratic challenges of starting a not-for-profit organisation persuaded her to set up a social enterprise instead that sells a basket of products and service. RUR's flagship product - the green bio-composter, contributes to 70% of its revenues and also acts as RUR's vehicle to instil environmental values in its customers and empowers them to take ownership of their own waste. Training sessions conducted with key stakeholders before installation of the composter educates them about the importance of segregation waste at source, dealing with solid and wet waste and composting. Collaboration with firms through CSR initiatives such as RUR's 'Go Green with Tetra Pak' sensitises consumers to the benefits of recycling. Similarly, RUR's organisation of eco-education programme at schools and colleges focuses on achieving environmental objectives, instilling these values in the youth.

As the founder-leader reflected,

"We knew that we wanted to make a real difference... the [profit] margins were still very low, and I wondered how long we could go on for... I knew there had to be more creation and innovation (and that led to developing and patenting the bio-composter) ...The paradox is that how much time you spend (on chasing social mission), so do you take too much time selling a paper pencil, costing Rs. 30 rather than spending time selling something which is a lac?"

Targeting a niche market to achieve both objectives

RUR seeks to generate collective action to maximise its environmental impact while keeping its activities financially viable. Its bio-composter is marketed as a product for use by groups of people, rather than by individuals.

The project manager who has delivered over 65 of RUR's projects explained:

“Not everyone has the time, space, money, or the interest to do composting... if 65 households came together in terms of pooling in financial resources and if the responsibility was given to a dedicated individual, while households had to segregate waste, the impact would be enormous”. (Employee1, Interview1)

RUR's positioning of its Bio-Composter, as a niche product, helps it to achieve dual goals. Its innovative design, quality of compost and services offered alongside the product, sets it apart from its competitors. This explains why despite potentially losing customers due to being expensive, the founder-leader maintained that it should remain a premium product as she believes that lowering the price will reduce the potential environmental impact. Her business development associate said that they want it to be like an 'Apple product in the waste management arena'.

The project manager explained this

“Our price is so high because a lot of research goes into what we do to understand the process, deriving inspiration from nature, understanding weather conditions, we innovate constantly and improve our product... But we have to apportion some money for research and eventually the customer has to pay for it... Many people only see the blue tumbler, but they may not see what go behind it and how a whole forest is created in that....We do end up losing a lot of potential customers because of the price we charge. People do ask us to reduce the price drastically, but We believe in 'quality' and we believe that rather than selling a 1000 such tumblers with 90% people not utilizing its full potential, we would much rather have 100 customers who appreciate and get the full worth out of it and would utilise it”

An ex-employee who had worked for over four years at RUR confirmed this view:

“People who have done composting and understand it, appreciate the value of our product and are happy to pay extra for it. These are people who haven't even tried to negotiate on price” (Respondent 2, Interview 2)

Promoting organic growth to avoid mission drift

Rather than expanding rapidly and increasing the danger of mission drift, innovative solutions were adopted to ensure steady growth. The founder-leader emphasised that RUR was mission driven "...not looked so much at making money, it is taking a long time to grow ...We have grown very organically but we have kept our core purpose very clear- we didn't compromise on that. When examining RUR's decisions over a period of time, our results show that while in some cases the social gains were given more importance the economic gains and vice versa, over a period of time, RUR has successfully been able to balance the two goals.

The following quotes from our interviews illustrate the mission-profits paradox and the leader's strategic response to these.

"A big part of what we do...is training the customer (about using the product as well eco-education). But when we sell our product on Amazon, only 20% of customers give us a call back (to learn more about the product and how to use the compost) ...so we have introduced a marketing gimmick, to activate a warranty, they have to give us a call, as otherwise I can't interact with my customers because of Amazon's policy on this". (Business Development Management)

"I realise that there are trade-offs... (For example) I am against printing flyers [because of the costs associated] but I realise that if we are targeting a market that doesn't read things on their phones, we have to compromise" (Founder-leader, Interview 1)

"We worked briefly with X, who are a plastic manufacturer ...we put up banners- saying "no plastics" ... the CEO asked the banner to be taken down. It became a Catch 22 situation because for me, it's a green event, and I can't put a one-time disposable packaging that says Happy World Environment ... instead of saying say 'no' to plastic bags we said 'yes' to cloth ((Founder-leader, Interview1)

This ability of the founder-leader to embrace paradoxical goals is echoed by her team members. One respondent mentioned how she stressed that "Mission drives profits". The respondent explained:

"...the whole idea is to make sure that nothing is going to the landfill...So when we are selecting a project, she (leader) ... says that okay if you want to select a project, you might as well select a project that is 10% less profitable but has the potential to create impact...". (Respondent 4, Interview 1)

The above examples demonstrate an acknowledgement and acceptance of paradoxical choices. The response to these at times involved innovative solutions that achieved both objectives simultaneously, while at other times required prioritising one goal over the other in the short term and focusing on achievement of both goals in the long term.

Alternating between behaviours and styles

The founder-leader alternates between centralised decision making and empowering her team. She believes in giving autonomy to team members but offers support when necessary. RUR team members spoke highly of how she nurtured employees within the organisation. During a visit to the premises, we saw her personally serving and sharing lunch with team members. Respondents used terms such as 'purpose-driven', 'compassionate', 'inspiring', 'authentic', 'ethical', 'clear', 'visionary' to describe her leadership style. She encouraged team

members to share new ideas and insisted that only 30% of each meeting should be dedicated to addressing routine work, but 70% to focus on pitching new ideas, and motivating people.

Equally, she maintained close control of organisational affairs. One respondent mentioned that “while she is creating leaders out of each person...if everyone leaves RUR, the work will still go on as she knows everything that’s happening”.

In summary, we found that the leadership was effective because of the leader’s ability to demonstrate a both/leadership approach as well as switching style- to move between a decentralised approach and keeping a tight control of her organisation.

1.2 To investigate the role of organisational practices in the management of paradoxes in an ecopreneurial organisation

This section summarises the organisational practices, including people management practices, that have helped RUR stick to its objective of achieving dual goals and ensure that growth doesn’t come at the cost of mission and likewise mission doesn’t affect its commercial viability.

Hiring at RUR emphasises BOTH passion and expertise. The process involves an in-depth interview, aimed at assessing the candidate’s passion for environment and composting. It also includes a visit to waste sites, followed by assessment of a reflective report written by the candidate. Finally, it culminates with an informal interaction between the applicant and the team members, aimed at giving them a clear picture of what the job entails. The project manager explained:

“If they can stand that (segregation and handling of waste at sites) then we know they are waste friendly” (Interview 2)

The applicant then writes a reflective piece about their visit, which helps RUR understand their passion and ability to communicate and manage challenges. The applicant also interacts with team members to understand their work and impact. The founder-leader mentioned to us her key message to the candidates during her interview with them:

“From sweeping the floor to meeting the clients and signing the contract, you have to do everything because it is part of our work. We work with waste, so it is everywhere. First, you must be comfortable with kachra (waste). When I go somewhere...if unclean, I pick up a broom and clean it myself” (Founder-Leader, Interview1)”

RUR also seeks individuals with a technical knowledge. The qualifications of current team members demonstrate an expertise in Environmental & Natural Science, Engineering and Microbiology. The founder-leader explained that it was important to have employees who cared for the environment but also for them to be known for their knowledge, as this gives confidence to customers-

“We are focussed on hiring a technically strong team of people because we want to be a very robust technology solution provider... Just being green management friendly does not help us ... It is okay to a point but to scale it is not. (Founder-Leader, Interview1)

A customer testimonial on the website endorses this

“The extremely qualified and knowledgeable staff handheld us through the entire process right from conducting orientations to setting up the composting system to consistent check-ups.”

Hiring employees who have both passion and technical skills, sits well with RUR’s goals of achieving its mission while being profitable. Having the reputation of being ‘experts in waste management sector’ gives RUR the legitimacy to sell an innovative but a highly priced product.

Every new hire is supported by a mentor and shadows team members doing different roles. They are encouraged to interact with customers, thereby learning on the job but also embracing the tension between different goals and understanding how the team navigates through these.

Contrary to common practice in the sector, remuneration at RUR is above the market rate. Annual increments are made based on ongoing feedback sessions. The founder-leader believes that high pay ‘signals’ to employees that they are valued and that working in RUR can fulfil both their personal career goals and their passion for the environment.

In addition to people management practices, RUR also adopts formal and informal processes of communication. These include get-togethers such as ‘Fantastic Fridays’, celebrations of birthdays, potluck lunches, as well as off-site activities such as gardening, yoga and meditation, hiking trips, bike rides, which provide employees a chance to know each other, exchange ideas and build cross functional networks. The more formal monthly brainstorming sessions bring together employees from different functions (sales, project, communication) and provide opportunities for knowledge sharing and help to appreciate demands placed by different roles. For instance, the business development manager, whose function is to find suitable customers and sell the product can understand nuances involved in project installation

and management; and educating customers sufficiently about the product and the mission. A combination of such formal and informal approaches enables RUR to leverage personal relationships formed through informal networks and share ideas freely in a formal set up, thereby helping employees see different functional perspectives.

In addition, two processes help the team in balancing the environmental and revenue goals. The first involves 'vetting the customer'. This is a cross-functional team process that assesses every new potential customer with respect to their intent and passion to manage their waste as well as their access to resources (space, time, and a dedicated person). The team also considers expected revenues and environmental impact of the prospective project. The stringent vetting process offers a mechanism to ensure that decisions about engaging with a new customer aligns with both mission and profit goals.

RUR has an 'order process protocol', which is formal system that helps manage customer expectations. In the past RUR team members found themselves commit overly to one project, resulting in having to support the customers well beyond the service agreement. The new protocol, limits site visits and hand-holding sessions, and has helped shift the onus of waste management to the customers, thereby increasing impact as well as efficiency of operations while freeing up time to look for newer clients. A survey of customers, conducted by RUR showed that the quality of customer engagement with composting had increased after the introduction of the process. This formal mechanism helps RUR to manage time with customers better. The process has helped to reduce existing customers' dependency on RUR which frees time for the organisation to engage in further business development.

In summary, the above-mentioned organisational practices have provided mechanisms through which the team can understand, embrace and balance multiple goals of the organisation.

RQ: 2 To the extent to which context impacts an ecopreneurial organisation

Drawing on Pastakia's work (2002), we questioned our respondents on the impact of contextual factors on ecopreneurial organisations and the extent to which these influenced their ability to balance mission and profits. Two factors stood out as key drivers and are discussed below.

Regulatory policies

Our respondents highlighted the role legislation has played in creating an enabling environment for ecopreneurs. For instance, the Bombay Municipal Corporation (BMC) rules mandate building societies/ establishments generating more than 100 kilos of wet waste in a day, to be responsible to segregate their waste and carry out composting in their premises. The legislation provided major fillip to RUR's scaling efforts, as its sites grew from a few to about 40 in a single year in 2018. This created a ripple effect. RUR's customers often become green champions and volunteers who help by role modelling green behaviours and spread awareness. These volunteers/green champions have grown from a few to over 100 in the last few years.

Stringent 'Solid Waste Management (SWM) rules' enforced in 2016 have given a boost to the waste management industry. Plastic ban plan in 2018 also started a conversation in the public domain, with Mumbai being at the forefront of penalising individuals carrying single-use plastic. RUR, in its presentations to clients and its campaigns often refers to the impending plastic ban in 2022, when waste management be in the spotlight and explain how individuals and building societies can find solutions to the new regulations.

The laws on Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) and Corporate Social responsibility (CSR) have mandated action on the part of manufactures (who must make sure that the consumer recycle their product post use) and large corporates (who must invest at least 2% of their profits after tax on community initiatives and social causes). RUR is increasingly working with corporates on end-to-end waste management solutions. This helps them to generate revenues and reach out wider community via campaigns. RUR's work with Tetra Pak is an exemplar in collaborating with the community to achieve its environmental objectives while generating revenue. Through this EPR initiative, RUR worked with local cooperatives to collect cartons, recycle them in composite sheets that can be used to make classroom desks, garden benches and other items many of which are then donated to local free schools, community areas. The campaign resulted in international and national recognition and provided legitimacy to RUR by positioning it as an expert/innovator in the field.

The respondents also alluded to the paradoxical context that India presents, and that progressive legislations were downplayed by poor implementation and corruption. The founder-leader in her first interview explained the contradictions.

"The first thing the people at the Govt office gave me was the law book - a small pocket size version which said that you pay Rs 5000 if you mix your waste, and you

pay Rs 10000 if you throw something but I wondered that nobody had fined me so far. So, I asked them to start fining me...they said Oh Well! 60 million people, how many people are we going to fine...if you want to do something, figure it out. That is when I could envision that this (law) would come as an enforcement at some point and people would have to do something about it"

While highlighting the challenges of the present waste management system in Mumbai, one of RUR's customer's mentioned that BMC outsources waste disposal to independent contractors, who are supposed to refuse waste disposal for societies that exceed the waste disposal limits. However, by bribing these contractors some societies manage to evade the rules.

While enforcement of policies continues to be a barrier for ecopreneurs, these have also enabled raising awareness in the communities and thereby helped RUR in their mission and in growing their business.

Role of Civil Society

The ongoing conversation on climate issues in India, has helped RUR find support from the civil society in achieving its dual objectives, by raising their profile as well as through advocacy for environmental objectives. For example, in 2019/2020 RUR proactively partnered with volunteering groups and educational institutions, such as 'Inner Wheel Club of Bombay', 'Lions Club', YOUNGO, a youth constituency affiliated to United Nation Framework for Climate Change (UNFCCC) by running joint webinars, through which they offered their expertise in waste management to individuals and communities. Although these webinars did not directly help in generating revenue, they helped in bringing the RUR successes and impact to the spotlight, which increased their profile.

At a national level, the cleanliness campaign initiated by Prime Minister Modi in the Swachh Bharat mission, in 2014 brought the issue of waste to the forefront and reflects a change in direction from the old narrative of economic success sans environmental concern to an inclusive approach where citizens across the country, irrespective of their economic status, age etc were encouraged to join hands in this mission. Several NGOs, working closely with communities across Mumbai on sanitation programmes and cleanliness drive, have greatly contributed by shining a light on the environmental issues around waste management. Many of our interviewees mention that such public discourse helped sensitised individuals including children on environmental issues. This increased awareness has directly influenced recognition of the RUR brand in the local community, leading to revenue generation through

sale of the composting product as well as demand for hands-on workshops on waste management.

The volunteers and green champions participate in the environmental awareness workshops and narrate their personal experiences with waste management bringing a lot of credibility to the message RUR tries to spread. A customer who we spoke to told us how they were inspired during one of the workshops.

“...I was quite shocked (to see her) put her hands into waste, into tumblers when they are open. In front of the housekeeping staff- she would say ‘such a beautiful waste’. I used to wonder how she can do that. Later... even I used to feel the same feeling that this waste will give us so much compost and the repulsion went away ... People usually keep waste at arm’s length but her way of handling it built confidence in everybody” (Customer 1, Interview1)

At the same time, as some of our interviewees lamented, it isn’t easy for individuals to understand waste as it is filthy, making it difficult for them to accept the responsibility for waste management. While campaigns can help to highlight the problem, it takes a lot more effort to mobilise people to do something about it on a sustained basis.

In summary, the two factors together have helped in providing an ecosystem to RUR and similar organisations to run a successful business that can deliver on its environmental objective of managing waste.

Discussion

Our findings show that leader’s competence in understanding, accepting, and focusing on dual goals, as well as their ability to switch between participative and directive leadership styles, are instrumental in an ecopreneurial organisation’s ability to achieve both mission and profit, without comprising on either. Second, it highlights the role that formal and informal mechanisms, including people management practices, play in enabling individuals to accept dualities in their goals and thereby find a balance between the two seemingly conflicting goals. Finally, it indicates that the ecopreneurial organisation’s success in managing dual goals is shaped by the unique context that India provides, by virtue of being a country where paradoxical narratives on waste management co-exist. The following paragraphs discuss these findings in the light of existing literature.

Leadership and Management of paradoxes

RUR's founder-leader demonstrates a 'paradoxical leadership' (Smith et al, 2016). This form of leadership, which involves a both/and approach to decision making and embracing of conflicting goals, is imperative for ecopreneurs as they navigate challenges. Lewis (2000) and Smith et al (2012) suggest that such leadership comprises an ability to accept paradoxes and devise strategies to manage them such that there is a shared understanding of these across the organisation. Hahn et al (2018) argue that much of the existing research does not clarify how leaders achieve an equilibrium between the conflicting goals, only suggesting that there needs to be a balance. Their study however focusses on the corporate sector, where challenges are somewhat different from that of a hybrid organisation. This paper advances the literature on ecopreneurship by demonstrating paradoxical leadership approach in practice. Our study shows that the founder-leader balanced both developing eco-consciousness in the community and decreasing the burden on the landfills with economic viability. The decisions taken by her, from the time of RUR's inception to the current stage where it is looking to scale up, illustrate a both/and leadership approach. The decision to choose between projects is a dynamic process. While some projects may yield positive environmental impact over the long term but limited financial gain, others may generate profit in the short term but risk lower environmental impact in the long run. The founder-leader balanced the two goals by looking at the aggregate of projects, over a period of time. She was led by her motto "Mission drives profits". Much of the SE literature on paradoxes offers the view that dual goals need to be simultaneously met. However, our study confirms a divergent thinking on paradox theory that suggests not all decisions may be oriented toward 'simultaneously achieving' conflicting goals. Instead, prioritizing different goals at different times can help in achieving a more sustained approach toward managing of paradoxes (Hahn et al, 2018), even though ecopreneurs may tend to keep the social mission above all else (Dixon & Clifford, 2007).

RUR's strategy of focusing on a niche customer segment for its premium product (the bio-composter) while reaching out to the lower-income building societies through its CSR activity may seem unusual for an SE, whose mission is to create a social change. However, this strategy has helped RUR ensure commercial sustainability while working on its environmental mission. The highly priced product may limit its range of customers but guarantees positive environmental impact by focussing on those customers who have the financial resources and an incentive to use the product. By refusing to sell the product to those who may have financial resources but no incentive to use the product as intended, demonstrates that achieving both goals is important to the organisation.

Confirming existing literature, the leader's decision making showed commitment to both goals, rather than looking at them as trade-offs (Levine, 2014; Lewis, 2000, Smith & Besharov, 2019). But unlike the approach suggested in literature, our study showed that 'separating' (or differentiating) organisational units to focus on different goals is not necessary if the organisation is able to integrate conflicting goals through the decisions its leadership takes.

In RUR we saw another dimension of paradoxical leadership- switching between a participative and directive approach, when there are competing demands (Klonek et, 2021; Alfes and Langer, 2017. Rosling et al, 2011)- and its impact on employees' ability to address multiple demands. In the present study, the founder-leader refrained from micromanaging and her motto was to *create more leaders* and provide a safe environment for employees to stretch themselves. At the same time, she was not passive and instituted review procedures which made her employees accountable. Even during the pandemic, when meeting the employees was not possible, she regularly met her staff online, to take stock of work done and motivated her employees. The leadership style stood out as one of the most remarkable aspects of RUR, as was indicated by practically all interviewees. This style, theorised as paradoxical leadership, hasn't been explored in an ecopreneurial organisation or even in SEs in India. Ours was the first study to advance theoretical understanding of paradoxical leadership approach in this domain.

This paper adds to the ecopreneurship literature by offering a more nuanced understanding of leadership in the management of the mission-profits paradox, by studying the decisions taken by the founder-leader over time.

Role of Formal and Informal organisational practices

SE literature shows that institutionalised structures for strategizing, communicating, monitoring performance and stakeholder relationship building, provide mechanisms through which SEs can prevent 'mission drift' (Smith & Beshrov, 2019, Santos et al, 2015, Battilana et al., 2015). We found evidence of this in RUR's processes, such as 'order process protocol' and 'vetting of customers', which details the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) that the employees can follow when faced by paradoxical choices, thereby ensuring that both mission and commercial goals were met in the long-run. The vetting of customer seems to be a mechanism which allows the leader and the team members to examine the merit of each of the projects. The financial and social impact are properly assessed before finalizing any project. Similarly, the order fulfilment protocol acts as a check for the team members to

optimise the time they invest on on-going projects and makes sure the team knows when to move on and entrust the responsibility of the project with the customer. As they move on to work on newer projects, it adds to further to the dual goals of profits and environment.

More importantly, our paper offers a useful insight into the importance of people management practices, in SEs pursuit of dual objectives, an area that has not been explored in literature. Our study found that HR practices at RUR complemented each other in fulfilment of the dual goals through its 'bundling' of complementary HR practices of selective hiring, supporting learning and development, paying above market rate. This has enabled RUR to ensure an 'alignment' between person's values, career ambitions, passion, and organisation's goals, and thereby limit attrition, which is a common challenge for the SE sector (Moses & Sharma, 2020, Napathorn, 2018). Previous research shows that hiring individuals with pro-environmental orientation does not necessarily mean that they would contribute to the economic goals of the organisation (Battilana & Dorado, 2010) as they tend to be motivated by the mission goals rather than keeping the business running. The founder-leader at RUR understood that employees, no matter how passionate, needed to learn how to balance the dual objectives of achieving a social mission and commercial viability. She encouraged them to 'learn' this skill through developmental sessions, mentoring them and engaging in several formal and informal engagement activities. Our study also found that RUR's reward practice runs counter to the perception that social enterprises pay poor salaries (Sagawa and Segal, 2000; Moses & Sharma, 2020), revealing that a leader who invests in employees, and signals to them that money and passion can go hand in hand, can ensure engagement of employees in achievement of dual organisation. This is an important lesson for ecopreneurs and equally for social entrepreneurs and reward practitioners.

Synergies attained by 'bundling' of HR practices has been studied extensively in HRM literature (MacDuffie, 1995), but not sufficiently in an SE setting, except for Napathorne (2018) who showed that SEs can utilise bundles of HR practices (including recruitment and selection on-the-job training intrinsic rewards than on extrinsic rewards and paternalistic styles of employee relations) to successfully motivate their employees. Napathorne (2018) however, did not elaborate on their relevance to managing paradoxes. RUR case illustrates the application of bundling in the social enterprise space and shows how this bundling has helped in the management of the socio-economic paradox through employees who act to balance the dual sides of the paradox.

Role of Contextual factors

Our study contributes to the literature by extending Pastakia's framework of external and internal contextual factors affecting Indian ecopreneurial organisations (Pastakia, 2002). Contrary to Pastakia, who found that regulatory agencies and enabling policies played less of a role in supporting such organisations than the civil society, we found that both regulatory policies as well as the civil society had facilitated RUR's growth and its ability to engage in paradoxical choices. Our study showed that the ecosystem for ecopreneurs in India has developed substantially since 2002. While the existence of stringent laws has not prevented individuals from flouting them, laws have provided a legitimacy to the companies like RUR. Specifically, the regulatory policies including EPR/ CSR as well as those around waste management, have provided a fillip to ecopreneurs and given them an opportunity to drive both mission and profit goals. RUR team in their workshops, makes extensive reference to the laws and the Swachh Bharat campaign. They highlight problems in implementation and the need for individuals to work on these as changemakers. Scholarly work by Newth & Woods (2014) and Cherrier, et al. (2018) also recognises the role of contextual factors in shaping the opportunities for social entrepreneurship. Our study provided an confirmation that regulation has played a big role in facilitating the success of RUR in terms of both commercial viability and environment impact.

Further, our study evidenced the role of civil society in providing ecopreneurial organisations a supportive ecosystem. The ongoing conversation in communities around climate change and waste management has benefitted RUR. Its customers become ambassadors for their cause, volunteer as green champions and connect RUR with their personal networks to spread the word across the community including volunteering groups and educational institutions, which helps generate further orders for RUR. This alliance building and coming together of like-minded individuals, helped RUR increase its reach while generating revenues and is an important takeaway for budding ecopreneurs.

Limitations and areas for future research

This research relies on one organisation and most of data used in analysis was collected through interviews with the internal stakeholders, volunteers, and the customers. Although we supplemented this with secondary sources, we only looked at the success stories and could not connect with any disillusioned customers. During our interviews we sought examples where things went wrong to mitigate this. Further data collection from similar organisations may corroborate the connections we found between paradoxes and success of ecopreneurs.

In addition, research could investigate if paradoxes change forms through the life cycle of the organization. It is possible that some paradoxes present varying degrees of intensity or get resolved by themselves. The actions of the ecopreneurs within a large time frame could also strengthen the theory of paradoxical leadership in this context. This has not been studied in literature but can be an important aspect in the study of paradoxes.

Literature also points out that the relationship between contextual factors and the SE isn't always as a unidirectional one (Galkina and Hultman 2016). In other words, not only does institutional context influence ecopreneurs, but the latter also has an impact on their institutions and hence a bidirectional relationship exists between the two. We did not have enough information to investigate if a bi-directional relationship existed and what extent ecopreneurs can impact their context but could be investigated by future researchers.

Conclusion

India is witnessing considerable growth in the waste management industry. It provides a conducive climate for social enterprises to enter this space. There is a need to have more players in this industry to bring in a major social change in terms of awareness of environmental issues and responsible behaviour. The organisations/ entrepreneurs who have chosen this domain continue to wrestle with the paradox of achieving profits and environmental impact and look for ways to manage both. Our study focuses on the role leadership plays in the balancing of the socio-economic paradox in the context of ecopreneurial organisations. Besides underlining the role of leadership, the study found that the role of organisational practices as guardrails was important in steering employee behaviour in managing a balance in the face of paradoxes.

The study can provide important lessons to ecopreneurs in how to channel leadership and specific organizational practices in better management of its social and economic objectives.

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