In management science, it is now widely admitted that organizations are rather dynamic than stable. If Tushman and Romanelli (1985) were able to assert that organizations are relatively permanent systems punctuated with a few episodes of change (Michaud, 2011), other studies go well beyond by affirming that continuity and change are parallel rather than consecutive (Bouchikhi, 1998; Pettigrew, 1997; Smith & Lewis, 2011). This coexistence of movement and stability can give rise to tensions. Some of these tensions can be derived from the opposition of polarities, yet complementary, explaining why they are called paradoxical tensions.

According to Lewis (2000), a tension is considered as being paradoxical when the perspectives, feelings, messages, requests, identities, interests and/or practices are contradictory but related. Unlike dilemmas or choices, a paradox connects two sides of the same coin as for example autonomy and dependence (Lewis, 2000), collaboration and control (Sundaramurthy & Lewis, 2003), individual and collective level (Murnighan & Conlon, 1991), flexibility and efficiency (Adler, Goldofas, & Levine, 1999), exploration and exploitation (Smith & Tushman, 2005), cooperation and competition (Pellegrin-Boucher & Fenneteau, 2007), etc. In their article, Smith and Lewis (2011) propose a classification of different paradoxical tensions based on four main themes (learning, organizing, performing, belonging) and their interactions.

They show that in general, paradoxical tensions emerge in the daily management of a business. They also point out that the performance of an organization, especially in the long term, is often linked to the simultaneous consideration of multiple and competing demands. The fact that performance and management of paradoxical tensions are related is also emphasized by Cameron (1986) and Lewis (2000). The findings of Gebert et al. (2010) reveal that a complementary management of paradoxes generates an increase in performance.

Indeed, it is not about resolving the tensions and limiting the interactions or increasing the control mechanisms between two opposite poles (Smith & Lewis, 2011) as in the end this would only lead to an intensification of the tensions. Rather should the opposites be connected to identify complementarities. And rather than eliminating paradoxical tensions, managers should accept their existence and play with them in a constructive way (Fiol, 2002; Jarvenpaa & Wemick, 2011; Lewis, 2000; Poole & Van de Ven, 1989). Managing paradoxes which is rooted in the management of
the dialectic aiming at simultaneously considering thesis and antithesis (Jarvenpaa & Wernick, 2011) seeks to transcend the opposites (Lewis, 2000). This requires integrating actions rather than their confrontation or segmentation (Bloodgood & Chae, 2010; Jarvenpaa & Wernick, 2011).

Although research on the management of paradoxes is growing within the context of large enterprises, literature is still rare at the level of SMEs (Granata, Géraudel, Gundolf, Gast, & Marques, Forthcoming). Yet paradoxes are frequently to be found when it comes to strategic choices made by small organizations: managing emergencies and long-term projects, innovate and construct organizational routines, delegate and maintain a centralized decision-making (transmit but maintain control), invest to ensure development but refuse indebtedness or open up for capital, or managing emotional bonds with the personnel while giving them binding performance targets.

This workshop seeks to put into perspective new, critical and original approaches concerning paradoxes and their management in the context of SMEs. What are paradox for SMEs? What are their implications in organizational and strategic terms? How are paradoxical tensions manifested at the individual, organizational and inter-organizational level? Can we manage them and benefit from them? Research involving both theoretical reflections and empirical studies are welcome.

INVITATION TO SUBMIT TEXTS:

Contributions should be sent to Katherine GUNDOLF (k.gundolf@montpellier-bs.com) and Annabelle JAOUEN (a.jaouen@montpellier-bs.com). They can be written in French or English, but only English submissions will be considered for publication in the partner journals.

The workshop is sponsored by the academic journals International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business (4 CNRS), and International Journal of Business Globalisation. The best articles will be published in one of these journals. The conference participants will also be invited to submit an improved version of their paper (in English) before June 30, 2016.