SOCIAL ORDER AND DISORDER: Institutions, Policy Paradigms and Discourses – An Interdisciplinary Approach

Tom R. Burns\textsuperscript{1} and Marcus Carson\textsuperscript{2}

May 25, 2003
Appears in Paul Chilton and Ruth Wodak (eds), A New Agenda in Critical Discourse Analysis: Theory and Interdisciplinarity, John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, 2005. Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. We are grateful to Nora Machado for her valuable comments and suggestions, in particular with respect to the development of the model in Figure 1 and Table 1.

\textsuperscript{1} Uppsala Theory Circle, Department of Sociology, Uppsala University, Box 821, 75108 Uppsala Sweden. Email: tom.burns@soc.uu.se
\textsuperscript{2} Department of Sociology, University of Stockholm, 10691 Stockholm, Sweden and Department of Sociology, South Stockholm University College, 14189 Huddinge, Sweden. Email: marcus.Carson@mail.com
ABSTRACT

Taking the new institutionalism as a point of departure, this article focuses attention on socio-cognitive models or paradigms and the related discourses that are part and parcel of any institutional arrangement and its evolution. Institutional paradigms are communicated and articulated through discourses – descriptive narratives, conceptual metaphors, and normative articulations. Discourses play a central role in actors’ defining their situations, identifying problems and solutions, conducting situational analyses, and making key judgments, among other activities. The article conceptualizes the linkages between organizational arrangements, policy or problem-solving paradigms, and discourses, and identifies those institutional configurations conducive to relative stability, or to paradigmatic and discursive shifts and institutional transformation.

Key words:
Introduction

A central argument of the article is that major institutional failings in dealing with conventional problems or new types of threatening problem precipitate crisis. Crisis evokes particular discourses. Some of these discourses are formulated in terms of the conceptions, values, and principles of the paradigm; for instance, idealized role performances, other types of normative action, goal achievements, and developments that are right and proper, that is, according to the principles of the established paradigm. But critique may also emerge external to the paradigm – indeed, it may entail criticism of the paradigm itself or other key components of the institution. Critics may propose alternatives that break with the prevailing arrangements and their particular norms, roles, cognitive categories and assumptions. This involves a different type of discourse and rhetoric than those formulated from within an established order. The latter is more or less consistent with the institutional paradigm and its corresponding organizational arrangements – the situation is one of normality. In contrast, under conditions of ab-normality and crisis, critical responses may lead to a paradigm shift and the establishment over time of new arrangements and practices. Such developments are characterized by entrepreneurship and charisma.

The article introduces concepts of institution, paradigm, and discourse -- and their interrelationships. It goes on to identify particular types of discourses in connection with institutional crisis or major malfunctioning of an institution. Finally, it identifies several common patterns of emerging paradigms, paradigm competition, and shifts. In this the socio-cognitive and discursive dimensions are related to institutional and political dimensions. The approach outlined here stresses rule-based cognitive processes such as framing, contextualizing, and classifying objects, persons, and actions in a relevant or meaningful way (Burns and Engdahl, 1998a, 1998b; Burns and Carson, 2002; Burns and Gomolinska 2000, 2001; Carson, 1999, 2000a; Nylander, 2000). It also considers the production of meaningful accounts, discourses, and commentaries in the context of a given institution or institutional arrangement.

Our approach combines then institutional theory, with cognitive science, and discourse analysis. These are fields that are typically separated. The separation can be observed in the different journals; the different conferences for the fields; different organizations or associations; and in the weak overlap of authors engaged in the different areas. We believe that the investigation and analysis of social phenomena needs the three scientific traditions. In particular, theoretical and methodological efforts are required to integrate the institutional with cognitive and discursive analyses (see Burns and Carson (2002); Weiss and Wodak
(2003)). This article purports to contribute systematically to such integration.
1. Institutions and Institutional Arrangements

An institution is a complex of relationships, roles, and norms, which constitute and regulate recurring interaction processes among participants in socially defined settings or domains. Any institution organizing people in such relationships may be conceptualized as an authoritative complex of rules or a *rule regime* (Burns et al, 1985; Burns and Flam, 1987). Institutions are exemplified, for instance, by the family, the firm, a government agency, markets, democratic associations, and religious communities. Each structures and regulates social interactions in particular ways; there is a particular interaction logic to a given institution. Each institution as a rule regime provides a systematic, meaningful basis for actors to orient to one another and to organize and regulate their interactions, to frame, interpret, and to analyze their performances, and to produce commentaries and discourses, criticisms and justifications. Such a regime consists of a cluster of social relationships, roles, norms "rules of the game", etc. The system specifies to a greater or lesser extent who may or should participate, who is excluded, who may or should do what, when, where, and how, and in relation to whom. It organizes specified actor categories or roles vis-à-vis one another and defines their rights and obligations – including rules of command and obedience – and their access to and control over human and material resources.

More precisely: (1) An institution defines and constitutes a particular social order. It delineates positions and relationships, in part defining the actors (individuals and collectives) that are the legitimate or appropriate participants (who must, may, or might participate) in the domain, their rights and obligations vis-à-vis one another, and their access to and control over resources. In short, it consists of a system of authority and power. (2) It organizes, coordinates, and regulates social interaction in a particular domain or domains, defining contexts – specific settings and times – for constituting the institutional domain or sphere. (3) It provides a normative basis for appropriate behavior, including the roles of the participants in that setting – their interactions and institutionalized games – taking place in the institutional domain. (4) The rule complex provides a cognitive basis for knowledgeable participants to interpret, understand and make sense of what goes on in the institutional domain. (5) It also provides core values, norms and beliefs that are referred to in normative discourses, the giving and asking of accounts, the criticism and exoneration of actions and outcomes in the institutional domain. Finally, (6) an institution defines a complex of potential normative equilibria, which function as “focal points” or “coordinators” (Schelling, 1963; Burns and Gomolinska, 2001; Burns and Roszkowska, 2003). The actors engaged in a given institution use their institutional knowledge of relationships, roles, norms, and procedures to
guide and organize their perceptions, actions and interactions. Institutional knowledge is also used to understand and interpret what is going on, to plan and simulate scenarios, and to refer to in making commentaries and in giving and asking for accounts.

In this article, we focus on three subcomplexes or components of an institutional regime. The first is the organizing subcomplex – the rules that define roles, relations, norms, and procedures. The second complex consists of the problem-solving or policy paradigm. The third is the discursive complex, which consist of the forms, expressions, etc., for institutional discourses concerning the organization, performances, and goal achievements; included here are the questions that accounts are to answer and the accounts themselves.

These three interrelated core complexes of an institution are activated and applied with respect to concrete problem-situations or classes of problems, and can be represented as follows:  

Most modern institutions, such as business enterprises, government agencies, democratic associations, religious congregations, scientific communities, or markets, are organized and regulated in relatively separate autonomous spheres or domains. Each is distinguishable from others on the basis of distinctive rule complexes, each of which contributes to making up a specific moral order operating in terms of its own rationality or social logic. The actors engaged in an institutional domain are oriented to the rule system(s) that has (have) legitimacy in the context and utilize it (them) in coordinating, regulating, and talking about their social transactions.

Many modern social organizations consist of multi-institutional complexes. These combine, for instance, different types of institutionalized relationships such as market, administration, professional, and democratic
association – each in a particular domain. They may also combine various types of informal networks. When different institutional types are linked or integrated into multi-institutional complexes, the resultant structure necessarily entails gaps and zones of incongruence and tension at the interfaces of the different organizing modes and social relationships (Machado, 1998; Machado and Burns, 1998). For instance, a modern university consists of scientific and scholarly communities, administration, democratic bodies with elected leaders, and both internal and external market relationships. Such diverse organizing modes are common in most complex organizations or inter-institutional complexes. Rule system theory identifies several of the types of institutional strategies and arrangements to deal with contradiction and potential conflicts in complex, heterogeneous institutional arrangements (Machado and Burns, 1998). These include rituals, non-task-oriented discourses, and mediating or buffer roles that actors develop and institutionalize. Moreover, the theory suggests that social order – the shaping of congruent, meaningful experiences and interactions – in complex organizations, as in most social life, is built on more than rational considerations. It is also built on non-rational foundations such as rituals and non-instrumental discourses. These contribute to maintaining social order and providing the stable context that is essential for most “rational” decision-making and action.

2. Institutional Problem-Solving Paradigms

As actors engage in judgment, planning, interpreting, innovating, and applying rules in a given institutional domain or field of interaction, institutional rule knowledge is combined with other types of knowledge. Such organization of rule knowledge and its applications is accomplished through a shared cognitive-normative framework which we refer to as the institutional paradigm: the problem-solving, or policy subcomplex (see Figure 1) (other work using paradigm in this sense are Carson, 2000a, 2000b; Dosi, 1984; Gitahy, 2000; Hall, 1993; Perez, 1985).² It provides people with a cognitive model with which to organize information, and to define and try to solve concrete problems of performance, production, and goal achievement in a given institutional domain. The paradigm – associated with a particular institution – is a cognitive-normative framework, used by institutional actors in their concrete judgments and interactions to define problems, problem-solving strategies, and solutions.³ Paradigms incorporate complexes of beliefs, classification schemes, normative ideas, and rules of thumb, which are used in conceptualizing and judging key institutional situations and processes, relevant problems, and possible solutions for dealing with key problems.

The organizing subcomplex and paradigm, as subcomplexes of an institution, are obviously intertwined, but they are each affected in different
ways in change processes – particularly those driven by tangible institutional problems. If, on the one hand, actors have a great investment in protecting the concrete organizational arrangements themselves – for reasons such as the desire to preserve power, security, or predictability – rules are tightened, enforcement mechanisms are deployed, and may even be strengthened (as in Michels’s Iron Law of Oligarchy (1962)). There is an emphasis on protecting ideas and principles that are already materialized, and sometimes this is done at great cost and to the detriment of the long-term functioning of the institution. If, on the other hand, actors have – or would like to make – a much greater investment in effectively solving problem(s) than the institutional organization and its operating paradigm have managed, the actions taken are quite different. Rules are consciously broken in spite of possible or likely sanctions, supporters are rallied around possibilities rather than certainties, and short-term, material interests may be set aside in favor of imagined or envisioned long-term opportunities. There is a substantial shift in risk-taking orientations and in the readiness to transform conditions.

A paradigm, as a collectively produced and maintained entity, is usually changed with reluctance – collective identities and interests, including material interests, are often closely associated with it. This contributes to making difficult changes that participants judge to alter the core elements that give them and their concrete institutional practices their identity, status, and power. A paradigm whose core principles, values, and normative practices are deeply embodied in concrete institutional and identity-giving practices will tend to be durable and resilient.

3. The Gaps And Anomalies of Institutional Paradigms

An institutional paradigm is used in the process of identifying, defining and classifying institutional problems (and “non-problems”), potential solutions to such problems (including the use of appropriate and effective technologies and techniques), and source(s) of authority in the institutional arrangement. These judgments play a key role in the giving and asking of accounts and in justifying or legitimizing actions.

Each paradigm is grounded in a particular set of fundamental assumptions and beliefs about reality that a group of actors shares. It forms the framework for organizing their perceptions, judgments, and action that determines which phenomena are included in the picture – and which are excluded (Kuhn, 1970; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). It is also the basis for operationally assigning values to certain actions and conditions, and encouraging and pursuing certain activities (or discouraging or even prohibiting others). Much of the day-to-day work of actors in a given institutional arrangement has the effect of cementing and normalizing the paradigm in a
sense similar to what Kuhn (1970) characterized as “normal science,” and we refer to as normality. Problems appear manageable, there is a high degree of consensus, and there is no sense of crisis or bold challenge. Because a paradigm necessarily focuses attention on certain phenomena while obscuring others – it is used to select and also restructure data so that they fit within the framework of its basic assumptions, categories, and rules. Because of paradigm selectivity, its biased rules of interpretation, and its inherent limitations, the actors utilizing a given paradigm will experience difficulties in understanding, explaining, or knowing how to manage some types of situation or problem. Some of these problems arise in connection with – or as a by-product of, actions guided by the paradigm itself. That is, meaningful action – viewed from the perspective of the paradigm – generates anomalies and failures that some participants define as “problems” (Spector and Kitsuse, 1987). Such problems are not only cognitive; they are also practical. Problems fail to be adequately addressed, and goals are not achieved. The stage is set for entrepreneurial actors to suggest new approaches and solutions, although these need not be initially radical.

One institutional paradigm can be distinguished from another in that it entails a distinctly different, and often incommensurable, way of framing, conceptualizing, judging, and acting in relation to particular classes of “problems” and “issues.” Incommensurability refers to core paradigmatic elements rather than routine adjustments and corrections (and can be likened to the cognitive switching that occurs with figure-ground images). The properties of two distinct phenomena are present, but focusing on one involves making the other a secondary property – or obscures it altogether. This becomes particularly important when actors guided by alternative paradigms compete with one another or each tries to impose her respective paradigm in a given institutional domain. Two competing institutional paradigms – each with its reality-defining features and discourses – may embrace competing organizational modes or decision-making principles, for instance, “bureaucratic hierarchy” versus “democratic procedure,” or “market problem-solving” versus “welfare” or “re-distributive” problem-solving” (see later). While these may coexist within a single institution, one or the other is accorded primacy during conditions of stability. As we discuss below, conditions of instability are characterized by figure-ground switching in core paradigmatic elements and can be identified through the specific discourses that express these competing orientations.

4. Institutional Paradigms Expressed in Key Discourses

An institutional paradigm is communicated through discourses – both descriptive narratives and conceptual forms – and through social action and
These discourses and actions define social problems and potential solution complexes, and suggest the assignment of authority and responsibility in a given or appropriate area of activity. Through their characterizations of goals and purposes, and accounts of institutional performance – successes as well as failures – actors in a given institution express or reveal their common paradigm. It is the means by which they perceive and judge the world, and organize, understand, and regulate their activities in the institutional domain.

Particular institutional discourses, serving as a means of describing, interpreting, and dealing with real problems and issues, are inspired and organized – directed and purposeful – on the basis of the institutional paradigm. The discourses indicate, among other things, parameters of appropriate problems, leaders, solutions to problems, and performances. For instance, they may concern whether the current performance or status of the institution represents improvement or deterioration over earlier performance or status. In general, an institutional paradigm encompasses a range of institutional practices and strategies for addressing issues considered to be problems, and for defining or establishing authority for how to address various types of problems.

Discourses are written or oral expressions which are shaped and regulated according to particular rule complexes, codes. Typically, they are embedded in a particular institutional context, in which participants express orally and in writing accounts, explanations, etc. These are in the form of ordinary talk as well as other sources of text such as historical documents, diaries, reports, letters. Our approach combines deductive and inductive approaches. Institutional theory indicates appropriate forms and content. But also, through empirical studies, one discovers the emphases on giving and asking of accounts, normative assessments, interpretation and shaping and regulation of conceptions of social reality.

While Michel Foucault suggested a connection between the collectively representational and the interactional, arguing, among other things, that interpretative structures are embodied in discourse, we stress the embeddedness of discourses in institutions and institutional arrangements (see also Machado, 2000). Gubrium and Holstein (1997:117) point out: “Foucault focuses on the role discourse plays in constituting, configuring, and conveying knowledge. He contends that the way we understand and represent experience derives from, and is constrained by, sociohistorically anchored discourse structures. But these structures are not mere linguistic templates for expressing knowledge. Foucault argues that discourses are more than systems of signs or signifying elements that refer to the content or meanings of objects and actions. ……Instead, discourses are ‘practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak. Of course, discourses are composed of signs; but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things’” “Foucault thus points directly to discourse, both its structures and articulations, as the essence of reality construction. The notion of practice provides the vehicle for linking substantive meaning to experience. … It is much more like a complex and dynamic border engagement at the lived intersection of reality and intersection… Throughout his work, Foucault is skeptical of individual agency, tending to reject the active subject. Moving away from the interactional dynamics of reality construction, he engages in the archaeology and genealogy of knowledge.”
Key Components of Discourse

Paradigms are articulated, in part, through discourses concerning institutional “problems,” or “threats” and “crisis”, the expressed distribution of institutional “authority and responsibility”, the distribution of “expert authority”, and “appropriate solutions” to deal with defined problems. The discourses refer to written rules and laws, and basic socio-cognitive principles that define the location and other aspects of authority, and set(s) of institutional strategies and practices for dealing with specific types of problems and issues (concerning public policy areas, see Sutton, 1998; Carson, 2000a; Carson, 2000b). The approach outlined here analyzes the ways in which discourses, on the one hand, express and articulate a public policy paradigm and, on the other hand, frame and define reality (see, for example, Spector and Kitsuse, 1987; Hardy and Phillips, 1999; Kemeny, 1999).

Public policy or problem-solving discourses can be analyzed in terms of the categories or complexes of defining rules they contain (Carson, 1999; 2000a, 2000b; Sutton, 1998):

(1) Problem/Issue Complex. This defines and characterizes key issues/problems, including characterizations of who is affected and how, and the broad categorizations of an issue or problem as social, moral, economic, political, etc. Here we find causal narratives – or narratives and statements that contain either implicit or explicit assumptions about the sources or causes of major problems as well as narratives of threat which indicate or describe who is affected and the likely consequences if the problems are not “solved”.

(2) Distribution of Problem Solving Authority and Responsibility – defines who is the authority which has the formal or informal responsibility for addressing and/or resolving key issues and problems. On a more systemic level, it defines where the location and distribution of appropriate problem-solving responsibility and authority lies in the organization or institutional arrangement. This refers, among other things, to institutional authority with the responsibility for taking specific corrective action and having legitimacy for making policy. This is related in part to expertise, as discussed below, but equally important, is grounded in the social roles and norms for determining who should be empowered to pass judgment, adopt new problem-solving strategies, or initiate necessary action on behalf of the institution.

(3) Distribution of Expert Authority – the location and distribution of legitimate sources considered knowledgeable and authoritative on the issue or issues. It also defines who has the legitimacy to explain the causes and solutions of any particular relevant problem.
(4) Solution Complex, the form and range of acceptable solutions to institutional problems. Solution complexes include the particular way(s) in which the resolution of an issue or problem should be constructed, including the use of appropriate, available institutional practices, technologies, and strategies. Problems are often deliberately defined in ways that permit an issue to land in particular parts of an institutional apparatus (Nylander, 2000). This, in turn, dictates the range of both possible and likely responses (Sutton, 1998).

5. Systemic Problems and Types of Discourse

Particular discourses in an institutional context relate to key dimensions in the paradigm: types of problems, solutions, distribution of responsibility and authority, and location and forms of appropriate expertise. They are generated in the institutional context, relating to what is normal or expected – and also in response to threats and deviation. Another way of putting this is that discourses are patterned with respect to the functioning (and malfunctioning) of the institution. Moreover, when there are institutional transformations in connection with paradigmatic shifts, then discourses are also transformed, e.g. as occurred in the “velvet revolutions” of Eastern Central Europe (Burns, 2002; Burns and Carson, 2002). A major principle in our analysis is that the formulation and diffusion of significant new paradigms accompany and underlie many, if not most, radical reforms and structural revolutions. They provide new points of departure for conceptualizing, organizing, and normalizing institutional orders and generating new discourses.

In general, major paradigm adjustments, or even paradigm replacement, may be preceded by changes in the discourses as well as in the organization and practices of the institution. In the perspective of some of our previous work (Burns and Carson, 2002; Carson, 2000a, 2000b), this is all relatively straightforward – and may only articulate conventional knowledge. Our aim here is to go a step further by identifying particular types of discourses in connection with institutional crisis, including major failings or malfunctioning of the institution. Any institution is faced with problem situations, types of problems or tasks in the course of its functioning, some of which are experienced or defined as “crisis”.

In some of the research drawing on a social systems approach (Burns, 2004; Burns et al, 2002; Burns et al, 1985; Burns and Flam, 1987; Burns et al, 2003), one may distinguish conditions that are problematic. Of particular interest are cases so problematic that they make for the threat of substantial destabilization and disorder, that is a type of crisis. The characteristic feature of crisis situations is that a system failure or instability develops in areas the institution is expected to deal with and control, and the problem is found to be neither understandable or analyzable nor controllable within the
established paradigmatic framework. Another type of major problem or crisis arises when there is intense, destabilizing social conflict among institutional groups, for instance, capital and labor, or key professional groups in an institution such as a medical or university system. This may be referred to as social dis-integration. In sum, there are different types of problematic situation and these will involve very different but characteristic discourses, as we outline below.

For the purposes of our analysis here, we distinguish 4 ideal-type situations with their dominant types of discourses likely to appear in these diverse situations. Let X symbolize such situations, types of problems or tasks that agents involved in the institution, or responsible for its performance, should address and deal with. That is, they are the objects of attention and problem definitions.

(A) *Discourses of normality*. High knowledge levels with respect to X is combined with high solidarity and value convergence (consonance) on the specific issue or problem X. Knowledge is available within the established paradigm to distinguish problems and solutions. The actors believe (and demonstrate) that they have an effective paradigm. They are capable of identifying and solving typical problems and are unified or express solidarity in doing this. Risk is calculable and presumably controllable. Guiding assumptions and core principles are not threatened. The process, or phenomenon X is known and “controllable”. Failings and accidents are, in general, knowable, in some cases even calculable and predictable. Even more complex problems and actions may arise for which the established paradigm is believed to readily and systematically address the problems. In other words, the overall system is well understood and established and derivable knowledge can be brought to bear to address any issues or problems. Under these conditions, the institutional complex tends to be stable.

Three types of crisis conditions are characterisable by conditions of ignorance and lack of control and/or social conflict, which make for particular types of discourse:

(B) *Uncertainty and Discovery Discourses under Conditions of Social Integration*. In this type of situation, there is cohesion and social integration (as in (A)) but a high degree of uncertainty about the nature of the problem and measures to deal with it. In other words, there is some significant form of system malfunction, but social integration and order continue to hold. Here the institutional actors’ discourses refer to problems of high uncertainty and ignorance. They activate procedures and strategies of discovery, and they engage in corresponding discourses. There is consensus about the institutional authority and procedures essential to obtaining necessary knowledge for correcting malfunctioning and ineffective performance. For instance, key groups in the health care system may feel
highly uncertain about human cloning and that a decision about the appropriateness or the impact of human cloning cannot be made currently. At the same time, the uncertainty is mitigated by continued basic agreement (and certainty) about the procedures (and the agents involved) to determine the nature of the problem and how eventually to solve it. A consensus about the way to achieve an optimum level of knowledge needed for correct decision and action contributes to relative paradigmatic and overall institutional stability. In sum, type B crisis conditions are characterized by consensus about who defines the problem(s) and solution(s), and generally how to proceed, although there is a strong sense of a lack of necessary, immediate knowledge.

This situation is not completely unproblematic, however. A high level of social cohesiveness may contribute to an emerging crisis by impeding those involved in the institution from finding radically new solutions. Alternatively, while their problem solving efforts are initially cooperative, there is some risk that in the course of exploring and developing solutions, differences emerge that result in intense social conflict. In general, a sense of relative certainty about the efficacy of the institutional arrangements may be maintained, but disagreement about the specific phenomenon may grow so that a type (B) situation develops the characteristics of type C (discussed below). In such cases, the type B situation is transformed into a type (C) or (D) situation (in the case groups within the institution develop entirely divergent knowledge systems, beliefs and value orientations).

(C) Oppositional normative discourses. In this type of problem situation, there are intense conflicts over one or more components of a paradigm, or over different paradigms; for instance, there are conflicts about particular beliefs and values, or conflicts over who should be responsible and exercise authority. This might involve, for instance, religious versus scientific authority (or, under communist regimes, “red versus expert”). There might be a high level of established, agreed on knowledge but opposing values, e.g., in the case of abortion, cloning, construction of a large-scale socio-technical projects such as an airport, nuclear energy facility, etc. Or, in a medical context, contentious issues may arise from allowing euthanasia in the hospital or performing abortion. The staff becomes split. There is a “great normative divide” concerning value judgments of what is good or bad.

Such polarization (and, therefore, low social integration) obtains at the same time that there are conditions of relative certainty about the facts of the issue and about the capability of being able to control the problem. But there is a lack of value convergence and solidarity with respect to the specific issue or problem.

Examples, as indicated earlier, are pointed up by intense normative conflicts as in the case of some religious conflicts, or passionate political conflicts (Berger, 1998:367), for instance, in the struggle over abortion in
the USA and elsewhere; or, over genital mutilation in France, Sweden, and other parts of Europe with significant African immigration (one cannot “split the difference” in the positions between those who believe that abortion is murder and those who understand it as a woman’s right to control her own body); or, over the status of Islamic religious law in countries with substantial Muslim populations (compromises are difficult between those who believe that God’s law supersedes any democratic decisionmaking and those committed to submitting their beliefs to the democratic process).

The risk in type C situations is that the highly polarized conflicts block effective negotiations and compromises, possibly escalating into intense, even violent conflict. However, if a transcending principle is found around which to negotiate a compromise, the situation may be stabilized, leading to situation (A). One example of this was the Treaty of Westphalia (1648), which brought to an end European religious wars by determining that the religion of a region was the religion of its Prince. A very different, contemporary example is the merging of seemingly incompatible concepts into the notion of “sustainable development” (although some degree of contention remains as to exactly what constitutes sustainable development).

(D) Chaos and Transformative Discourses. The discourses in this type of situation characterize conditions of social disintegration (fragmentation and lack of solidarity) in which actors feel ignorant, or in which other significant actors fundamentally contest the content or form of established knowledge. Uncertainty is intensified, at least on the collective level, because there are groups which have divergent ideas about the nature of the problem(s) and what to do about them. Different ontologies, epistemologies, and methods – which may be connected with identities – are brought to bear. Everything can happen in such an unstable, even revolutionary situation. The core principles in dispute might include, for example, the kind of production regime considered most just or efficient, or the type of political/policymaking form considered most legitimate or effective: a competition for instance, between different forms of government ranging from democracy to dictatorship.

The conditions under which type (D) discourses occur can be characterized as contentious uncertainty, reflected in low cohesion and low certainty about the nature of the problem or what is to be done about it. Such conditions are likely to emerge in situations in which elites feel unable to adopt a new paradigm in order to retain social order (and their positions of power), or under which the elites are discredited to such an extent that they and the existing social order are unacceptable to the participants regardless of the policy paradigm adopted (see Burns and Carson, 2002).

Under conditions of contentious uncertainty, the discourses are of chaos and confusion. Discourses of indifference or resignation to performance failings may also be commonplace. “Nothing can be done,” in
part because of lack of solidarity, in part because of ignorance and/or lack of controls over the relevant policy area (X). Under such conditions, individuals and subgroups adjust and adapt “as best they can.” Given the social conditions (the low level of social integration), there is a common feeling that they themselves are in no position to establish a new order.

In sum, here one finds discourses about chaos, deep societal crisis, not only in terms of knowledge but in terms of profound cleavages in the society. One of the common responses is to call for a dictator to establish an order (the Hobbesian solution). There may be related discourses about returning to a “Golden Age” or establishing a “New Age”, based on a new paradigm constructed around an alternative complex of core principles and assumptions.11

The ideal type situations outlined above obviously define extremes. In reality, there are varying degrees of system ignorance and of social disintegration, and successes or failures in one institutional domain will have effects on other related domains. Moreover, the seriousness of X may vary. As we indicated earlier, however, we are most interested here in not only system failures that are considered serious by the groups involved, but in group conflicts that are intense and disruptive of institutional functioning.

Our basic principle is that the form and content of discourses differ substantially in these different problem-situations. (1) The discourses in type (A) situations of consensus and certainty are discourses of “normality”. In such circumstances, “we know what the problem is and how to deal with it.” Problems are recognized and dealt with in established ways, even if in some cases, investigation and analysis are required (conducted by experts) to deal with the specifics of context. The situation is basically in order. (2) Type (B) situations of consensus uncertainty entail discourses about ignorance concerning what has gone wrong and what has to be done. But there is agreement about whom the “authorities” and experts are who will deal with the problem situation. (3) Type (C) conditions of contentious certainty entail discourses of conflicting explanations pertaining to a body of agreed upon knowledge, and reflect disagreement about the existing social order or a proposed order – for instance, the values or operating assumptions of some differ from those that are established and institutionalized. (4) Type (D) conditions entail contentious uncertainty: the combination of types (B) and (C).

Situations (B), (C), and (D) are therefore “problematic situations” of different types and tend to leader, under some conditions, to initiatives to institutional change and transformation. Two major dimensions can be shown to underlie many cases of the four ideal type situations, the situation of normality and the three types of crisis situation. The dimensions are the degree of system knowledge and control (as a basis of stabilization) and the degree of alienation and disruptive conflict among groups of individuals. Different types of problem or problem-situation can therefore be distinguished by analysis of these two dimensions: (i) the level of system
knowledge/certainty apparently available within the paradigm employed to define problems and solutions; (ii) the degree of social integration and consensus within the institution about the paradigm (low convergence or consensus refers to social settings where there are competing values or paradigms, or intense disagreement about the validity or usefulness of an established paradigm). Four possible discursive situations can then be distinguished and, in each type of situation, the form and content of the discourses generated differ substantially.
Table 1: Different Types of Problem Situation and their Characteristic Discourses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DEGREE OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION</th>
<th>( \text{HIGH DEGREE OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION} )</th>
<th>( \text{LOW DEGREE OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION} )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>( \text{HIGH DEGREE OF SYSTEM KNOWLEDGE AND CONTROL} )</td>
<td>High Social Integration/Solidarity, for instance high value consensus</td>
<td>Low Social Integration/Solidarity, for instance, low value consensus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \text{LOW DEGREE OF SYSTEM KNOWLEDGE AND CONTROL} )</td>
<td>High level of knowledge and control, for instance, high certainty (about the problem and how to deal with).</td>
<td>(a) &quot;Consensus certainty&quot; Discourses of normality, certainty, and consensus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) &quot;Consensus uncertainty&quot; Discourses of Uncertainty and Discovery-mode Discourses, about which there are common understandings and commitments.</td>
<td>(c) &quot;Contentious certainty&quot; Normative discourses in relation to well-known situations. Cleavage and opposition among key groups who are each highly certain about X and how to act with respect to it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(d) &quot;Contentious uncertainty&quot; Chaos. Cleavage and opposition among groups who are high uncertain about X and how to deal with it. ( \text{Transformative discourses, but no consensus about these} )</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table summarizes in large part the discussion of the different types of problem situation. The following sections consider institutional change, in part paradigm shift and discursive transformation. The discourses occurring emphasize the need to deal with, for instance, a high degree of contentiousness and cleavage; or, the lack of sufficient or optimal knowledge vis-à-vis the problem situation(s) X, and the need of the group (or organization) to find solutions.

6. The Dynamics of Interrelated Subcomplexes

Institutional change entails changes in the rules and/or enforcement activities so that different patterns of action and interaction are encouraged and generated (Burns et al, 1985; Burns and Flam, 1987; Levi, 1990). Such changes may be initiated by various social agents. For instance, an elite
"legislates" an institutional change, or a social movement brings about change through coming to direct power or effectively pressuring and negotiating with a power elite. Changes may also be brought about through more dispersed processes, e.g. where an actor discovers a new technical or performance strategy, and others copy the strategy. In this manner, rule innovation diffuses through social networks of communication and exchange.

In general, several mechanisms explain rule regime formation and change (Burns and Carson, 2002; Burns and Flam, 1987): (a) Key actors or groups in an institution encounter normative failure or gaps in applying a rule system in an appropriate domain, and try to overcome the failure or gap. Such a development may arise because of the emergence and influence of new social values. For example, the rise of more radical egalitarianism or the spread of the normative idea of citizen autonomy, for example, may draw attention to particular legal and normative limitations or gaps in the society, which gives purchase to demands for new legislation and institutional arrangements such as advancing gender equality. (b) Actors mobilize and struggle to realize what they consider an institutional ideal. One example would be where actors pursue a principle of distributive justice or common good that they believe can be more effectively or more reliably realized through reforming institutional arrangements. (c) Self-interest is a well-known and common motivator underlying initiatives to establish new policies, laws, or institutional arrangements. Self-interest refers in this instance to the pursuit of opportunities to make gains or to avoid losses through changing rules.

New technological developments often expose the limitations of existing laws and institutional arrangements. In the area of contemporary information technologies, existing laws concerning intellectual property rights have proven inadequate and have led to a number of reform efforts. Another example concerns internet developments that have led to demands for increased regulation, because of the ready availability on the World Wide Web of pornography, or political extremist and racist websites, among other problems. Or new medical technologies – organ transplantation, life support technologies, and the new genetics – call for new normative principles, legislation, and institutional arrangements (Machado, 1998; Machado and Burns, 2000, 2001). In these and similar cases, rule formation and development must be seen as a form of normatively guided problem-solving.

Power, knowledge, interests, and values are key ingredients in institutional transformation. The power of elites to mobilize resources including wealth, legislative authority, and legal or coercive powers to maintain or change institutional orders is, of course, critical. But emerging groups and movements may also manage to mobilize sufficient power resources with which to challenge established elites, and to force or negotiate institutional change. The interaction between the establishment
and challenging groups or movements is a major factor in institutional dynamics (Andersen and Burns, 1992; Baumgartner and Burns, 1984; Flam, 1994; Woodward et al, 1984). Such power mobilizations and conflicts are fueled by actors' material interests as well as ideal interests reflected in the particular paradigm to establish and maintain "right and proper" institutional arrangements.

A **paradigm shift** implies a change in all or part of the core of an established paradigm, in particular, key organizing principles, normative ideas, and expectations regarding social relationships (see “Key Components” on age 12). For instance, in the context of major crisis (in terms of system failures as well as intensifying social conflict), communist society was transformed into a more liberal type society in a number of former communist countries. A paradigm shift and institutional transformation entailed emphasis being put on introducing market principles as well as civil rights and democratic multi-party systems. Of course, the concrete realization of such shifts required learning the practicalities of making the new institutions operate properly, that is, a certain development of the "semantics" and "pragmatics" of the new rule regimes also had to take place.

In addition, **shifts in discourse took place in many of the former communist countries in connection with the transformation of several key paradigm components**: (1) There was a shift in value expressions and in the definition of the major problems facing the economy and society as a whole. Stress was placed on such values as "liberating production" and "increasing productivity and wealth" rather than on "state ownership of the means of production," "planned economy," "equality of distribution" or "rational central control." Threats to a well-functioning economy and society were no longer "opposition to Socialism" and "bourgeois economic behavior," but "state ownership" and "state controls" and "monopoly powers" – characteristic of a command economy and the one party state. (2) The appropriate solutions for the economy were market reforms in terms of "free enterprise," "privatization," "private initiative," "entrepreneurship," "positive investment conditions." Solutions for the polity were expressed in terms of "democratization" and "political pluralism" in the form of independent, multiple parties and competitive politics. The role of the state should then become more regulative rather than controlling in detail. In the case of the economy, for instance – rather than the party-state deciding the quantities and distribution of goods and services as well as prices and wages – independent, decentralized enterprises were to assume responsibility and authority to make plans and to determine quantities and qualities of goods and services as well as prices. Thus, solutions to economic problems were not to be expected solely or largely from the state, but from enterprises and market mechanisms. State organized "solutions" would then concern only a few, select areas such as monetary policy, competition policy, research and development policy. The policy measures to be taken were to operate rather indirectly (for instance, monetary policy) rather than directly and in detail
(price and wage controls, national production plans, or detailed regulation of imports and exports). (3) Expertise would not be embodied in the political leadership or the "vanguard party" which was assumed to have a monopoly of "historical truth" but in specialized professional experts such as economists, lawyers, and business leaders – among whom knowledge is dispersed.

7. The Dynamics of Paradigms, Paradigm Competition, and Paradigm Shifts and Related Discourses

What is it that gives a policy paradigm weight and importance and draws adherents to it, beyond the role of power and the distribution of resources to attract or buy-up supporters? First, the conceptualization of how a particular institution or institutional arrangement should work and the courses of action it recommends (in a particular sphere, i.e., welfare, health care, governance, etc.) must be sufficiently plausible and compelling to attract adherents from other, competing paradigms. Part of what makes any paradigm compelling is that it more satisfactorily addresses urgent and currently insolvable institutional problems and formulates this in a language that resonates, for instance in terms and concepts that resonate with or relate to core values of society: “equality,” “democracy,” “justice or fairness,” “efficiency,” “rationality,” etc. Second, it must offer an apparently coherent approach to the phenomena (designated as problems) which it addresses. It allows for “open-endedness,” permitting the application of the paradigm to both a broad range of recognized institutional problems and those not yet defined. What makes this open-endedness compelling is not certainty, but possibility and promise. But there is also a strong belief (“certainty”) that any current uncertainty will be resolved. For instance, the “state welfare” paradigm of Scandinavia and a number of other European countries addressed itself to persistent problems of poverty and mal-distribution of resources that the conservative and liberal paradigmatic thinking of the early 20th century had failed to satisfactorily account for or address. In a similar vein, we can consider the nature of the contest between the agents who promote particular paradigms, the means and standards by which a particular paradigm gains prominence, and the kinds of benefits awarded to those whose paradigm prevails. These are particularly salient in the way in which resources are marshaled behind one or another paradigm, in claims-making activities, and in the eventual fate of discarded paradigms.

Paradigmatic Phases and Paradigm Shifts

The relationship between a policy paradigm and its institutional embodiment has a direct effect on the various possibilities and probabilities
for change; it presents actors with concrete opportunities for (and obstacles to) action. The character of this relationship follows certain regular patterns. Any paradigm has a limited life-span (also, see Kuhn, 1970: 92-134), and is characterized by distinct phases in a life cycle. Three discrete phases can be identified based on the processes that most strongly characterize each phase, which are identified here as emergence, institutionalization, and reification. Particular conditions and processes are characteristic of each phase, and that they are vulnerable to challenge in distinctly different ways and to differing degrees.

**Emergence** – This initial phase is characterized by the emergence of a reconceptualization of possible guiding principles. This represents a realization of the possibility of reordering or redefining guiding principles in response to crisis or radically new conditions that create an opening: for instance, radical novelty, or pressing social problems not adequately explained and accounted for by the currently established paradigm. As the new ideas and principles become more systematized, a new paradigm emerges. This represents a challenge to the existing conceptual order, and as such, is typically not readily embraced. The initial rejection is in part a function of individual, organizational, and institutional investment in the established paradigm, and in part the inherent difficulties in conceptualizing dramatic change.

In all social systems, there is to a greater or lesser extent resistance to substantial change in the social order and attempts at “eliminating” challenging critique, ideas, and paradigms. In authoritarian systems, this “inertia” is accomplished using means of coercion, even state terrorism. In more open, democratic societies, the process involves the use of ridicule, de-legitimation through referrals to “unscientific” or “utopian” ideas, etc. There is a spectrum of strategies ranging from attempting to crush the new paradigm on the one hand, and co-opting it on the other, adopting pieces of it as their own and taking credit for it. Both of these polar strategies contain their own particular hazards for the actors who seek to preserve an established order and the paradigm upon which it is built.

In the replacement of one paradigm with another, those who have not “invested” in the old paradigm or the institutions that promoted it are likely to be more open to persuasion and pressures from others, other things being equal. This would include, for example, those who have not already deeply invested in careers or power based on the established paradigm, or those who are profoundly engaged in addressing unresolved problems and anomalies rather than in protecting the “infallibility” of a particular institution. For some, of course, the conceptual or institutional change is too great; they are eventually marginalized or simply die out.

In the case of public policy, novelty can be seen as the socially-defined problems that are either inadequately addressed under the existing paradigm, or those that may even arise from the ways in which the
institutionalization of the dominant paradigm structures social action. The new paradigm provides a plausible explanation for the particular social problems (novelty) that are observed, including causal relationships and the likely consequences of a failure to address the problem. In providing these interpretations, the newly emerging paradigm also frames the possibilities for solution to the problem and the definitions of success, and identifies the particular actors who are seen as legitimate authorities for producing information or taking action.

The new paradigm gains a foothold by virtue of its ability to explain and offer plausible remedies for social problems that are unresolvable by the old. However, this is clearly not sufficient to anchor the paradigm and enable its expansion and widespread adoption. This process takes place through the successful realization of elements of the new paradigm in social institutions.  

But the greatest dangers to the challenging paradigm in this stage are, (a) that the irresolvable problem will disappear, leaving the challenger without an opening, or (b) that the realization of any significant paradigmatic elements will be blocked, depriving its proponents of the concrete evidence necessary to offer proof that the remedies offered are capable of delivering on the paradigmatic promises. Thus, the incremental, perhaps strategically sequenced institutionalization of the challenging paradigm is an essential process if the paradigm is to gain adherents and prevail.

Institutionalization – In this middle phase, the replacement of the old paradigmatic principles with the new takes place. This paradigmatic shift takes hold as the new principles and the methods and practices built around them are systematized, expanded, and institutionalized beyond the initial experiments. Of great significance is when the realization of paradigmatic principles delivers the promised result. This not only has a reinforcing influence on paradigmatic beliefs, but also provides the credibility and momentum that help support the institutionalization of additional paradigmatic elements. The foundation of paradigmatic support begins to shift to a relative balance between the power of compelling ideas and the power of institutional structure, perhaps reflecting a shift from the idealism of the challenger to a pragmatism rooted in the need to deliver on promises made and being in position to attempt to do so. The conceptual framework is systematically applied to a widening array of problems, defining new problems to which it is particularly sensitive. Leadership is increasingly as likely to be bureaucratic as charismatic, and the movement within or into the institutional structure more restricted as actors begin to concern themselves as much with protecting what they have achieved as reaching to realize the dreams that once inspired them. A potential weakness of this phase of relative balance and strength is that key elements of the paradigmatic promises will be kept and dreams will be achieved without renewing and
modernizing some idealized vision. New adherents may be attracted less by visions of the better society that could be made possible, and more by the practical benefits of alignment with the current regime. While these are not mutually exclusive, there is a distinct shift in the balance between idealism and pragmatism in their role of attracting and holding adherents. Weaknesses also begin to emerge more concretely, as the paradigm’s limitations are established through its increasingly broad application and practice.

**Reification** – The old paradigm is sufficiently developed and applied to have exposed some of its inherent shortcomings, weaknesses, and inconsistencies. The problems for which the paradigm provided the conceptual structure for solutions have been either resolved and therefore faded from the immediate consciousness of many, or proven themselves resistant to solutions developed on the basis of the paradigm. Additional problems arise from incompatibilities between core principles and marginal, situational adjustments in practices. Its inability to accommodate an expanding array of novelties is represented by gaps and inconsistencies between paradigmatically-informed expectations and empirical reality. Instead of using the power of ideas through persuasion, inspiration, and building consensus, adherent address problems and challenges by wielding institutional power, including sanctions and penalties. Robert Michels’ (1962) characterized these processes in great detail in his study of the powerful tendency toward oligarchy in ideals-driven organizations.

Nevertheless, the efficacy of the old paradigm, and the practices of the actors who wield institutional power are likely to be subject to questioning – although it may in the face of authoritarian power and controls operate underground and entail much hypocrisy and cynicism. In the case of public policy, a sufficiently large body of unresolved problems or undesirable side effects (as well as possibly authoritarian measures) helps to raise doubts about the efficacy or advisability of solutions guided by the paradigm in question. Some (it may be a few, some, or many) seek out or try to develop a new paradigm to explain and respond to the new or re-newed social problems, failures, and inconsistencies. Depending in part upon the power and vitality of the mature paradigm, in part upon the external conditions that helped produce unsolvable problems, and in part on the strategies and resources employed by the challengers, the introduction and support for a new paradigm may eventually lead to the modification or replacement of the established paradigm. Paradigmatic modification is distinguished from paradigmatic shift by whether the change takes place in peripheral rules and practices, or in core principles.

As already pointed out, some of the phase-bound challenges faced here are expressions of the powerful organizational tendencies observed by Michels (1961), in which the pursuit of utopian dreams is superseded first by the need to deliver on promises, then by the need to stay in power – both to protect the faithful and to be in position once a new utopia is found or
constructed. Weber (1946) described this general pattern in terms of traditional leadership being challenged and replaced by charismatic leadership, which itself becomes (or is eventually replaced by) bureaucratic leadership. The bureaucratic system takes on the reified characteristics of the traditional, and the cycle continues.
REFERENCES


Wodak, Ruth and van Dijk, Teun 2000 **Racism at the Top** Klagenfurt, Austria: Drava.


---

**ENDNOTES**

1 There is a meta-paradigm, which provides the core for constructing the institution (and its subcomplexes).

2 This is a usage which differs substantially from Kuhn’s (1970) notion of “scientific paradigm” which refers to a theoretical model or framework for representing and explaining empirical phenomena, the theoretical and methodological rules to be followed, the instruments to be used, the problems to be investigated, and the standards by which research is to be judged. There are, of course, a number of parallels with our conceptualization of an institutional paradigm, a matter which we shall take up in a later article.

3 The paradigm is a “rough” or “fuzzy” rule complex. Levels of knowledge of it vary among participants (Burns and Roszkowska, 2003). Also, it is “distributed knowledge” with variants among different individuals and groups.

4 A shared paradigm must be simplified for purposes of communication. At the same time it has definitional power – the power to define, interpret, and prescribe action for dealing with reality.

5 In this respect, it relates to the notion of “master frame” used in the social movements literature (Nylander, 2000), or that of “meta narrative”, within which individual issues or policy questions can be contextualized and “framed” (Gottweis, 1998:30-33).

6 This phenomenon is expressed in its more extreme form in the saying “if your only tool is a hammer, then every problem is a nail”.

7 Such inconsistencies can be conceptualized as a source of cultural/institutional dissonance, a sociological version of the cognitive dissonance experienced by individuals and described by Leon Festinger’s theory (Festinger, 1957; Machado, 1998; Machado & Burns, 1998).

8 In this sense, the introduction and spread of Christianity and Islam (and, undoubtedly, the other Axial Transformations (Eisenstadt, 1982) entailed socio-cultural revolutions.

9 For our purposes here we ignore external conflicts.
In light of “bounded rationality” or “asymmetrical information” situation (a) may contribute to a false sense of security – an ill-founded confidence that all is well and good. The potential for complacency is a latent problem here, and there is likely to be a subsequent lack of preparation for possible paradigm failure in the sense that new problems might (invariably will) arise that cannot be understood or analyzed effectively within the existing framework.

It is possible to envision a situation in which actors guided by different paradigms compete under conditions of general consensus regarding the failure of the previously established paradigm. This was arguably the case immediately following the Second World War, when a broad consensus about the failures of the system of sovereign states spawned experiments in supranational and international organizations ranging from the United Nations to European Free Trade Area to the European Communities.

There are discourses which are “stabilizing” and those that are aimed at change, transformative discourses. In the “stabilizing” discourses, the actors emphasize how much they know (or can now) and that the systemic problems will be solved. Also, that there are no basic disagreements among agents. Even in cases of high uncertainty the participants emphasize their consensus and their capability to mobilize and develop their knowledge. Some transformative discourses are of the form that Max Weber indicated: When a charismatic leader breaks with tradition or prevailing legal norms, he states “It is written that….but I say unto you…..” This is a prototype for discourses of paradigm shifts. That is, in times of crisis there is the possibility that a “prophet from the wilderness” emerges who promises solution to ignorance and/or social conflict.

Actions freely taken based on the values contained in a given paradigm have their own reinforcing quality. Research in social psychology, for example, indicates that when people struggle for something based on their beliefs and values, that action tends to reinforce those values and beliefs. The reverse also appears to be true: failing to act in accordance with values tends to undermine them (see Aronson, 1976:131-139).