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Multiparadigm Perspectives on Theory Building

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Traditional approaches to theory building are not entirely consistent with the assumptions of alternative research paradigms that are now assuming more prominence in organizational study. We argue for a multiparadigm approach to theory building as a means of establishing correspondence between paradigms and theory-construction efforts. Because of the implications of the multiparadigm approach, we also examine ways of bridging across blurred paradigm boundaries. In addition, we explore a metaparadigm perspective that might allow disparate approaches to theory building to be considered together. Such a perspective can produce views of organizational phenomena that not only allow scholars to recognize inherent and irreconcilable theoretical differences, but also can encourage them to adopt a more comprehensive view by accounting for those differences.

> The most difficult thing in science, as in other fields, is to shake off accepted views. (Sarton, 1929 [1959] p. 88)
>
> —George Sarton
> *The Civilization of the Renaissance*

Dubin (1978) introduced the second edition of his classic book on theory building with Sarton's quote. Although Dubin's book was intended to promote theory building according to the tenets of traditional science, his use of Sarton's observation provides grounds for questioning whether theory building in the social and organizational sciences has adhered to a goal of shaking off accepted views in attempting to build theory. We believe that it has not—in great part because the wisdom inherent in the quote has been bound up in an overly constrained view of the nature of the theory-building process itself. Traditional approaches to theory building in organizational study have tended to produce valuable, but nonetheless incomplete, views of organizational knowledge, mainly because they have been predicated predominantly on the tenets of one major paradigm (Kuhn, 1970) or way of understanding organizational phenomena. By now, however, the field recognizes that the use of any single research paradigm produces too narrow a view to reflect the multifaceted nature of organizational reality (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Frost, 1980). Curiously, however, theory-building discussions seem to proceed as if the principles of theory building are somehow universal and transcendent across disparate paradigms of thought and research. They are not. Because different paradigms are grounded in fundamentally different

assumptions, they produce markedly different ways of approaching the building of theory.

Our purpose in this article is two-fold: (a) to recommend a broader approach to theory building that accounts for differing paradigmatic assumptions and (b) to discuss how multiple views created by different paradigms might be linked, or at least juxtaposed, to yield a more comprehensive view of organizational phenomena. Our central thesis, that appropriate approaches to theory building depend on the paradigmatic assumptions brought to bear on a topic, derives from the belief that our field has not developed adequate alternative approaches to theory building that can account for the multifaceted nature of organizational phenomena. The ramifications of this thesis lead us first to explore the possibilities for limited bridging across paradigm boundaries and finally to discuss ways that disparate and inherently irreconcilable theoretical views might be considered together to generate multiple perspectives on central topics of concern.

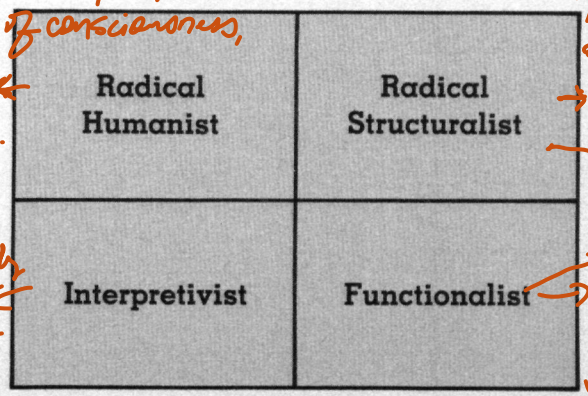
The Paradigm Issue

Like all other fields of inquiry, organizational study is paradigmatically anchored. A *paradigm* is a general perspective or way of thinking that reflects fundamental beliefs and assumptions about the nature of organizations (cf. Kuhn, 1970; Lincoln, 1985). Scholars in our discipline are presently involved in a debate over the distinctive contributions of knowledge, and to knowledge, that arise from different philosophical views and conceptual paradigms (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Lincoln, 1985) (see also Astley & Van de Ven, 1983; Rao & Pasmore, 1989). This debate is perhaps most succinctly characterized according to differing fundamental assumptions about the nature of organizational phenomena (*ontology*), the nature of knowledge about those phenomena (*epistemology*), and the nature of ways of studying those phenomena (*methodology*). Burrell and Morgan (1979) have organized these differences along objective-subjective and regulation-radical change dimensions, which yields a 2 × 2 matrix comprising four different research paradigms (see Figure 1).

In this representation, the functionalist paradigm is characterized by an objectivist view of the organizational world with an orientation toward stability or maintenance of the status quo; the interpretive paradigm is characterized by a

Focus on human subjectivity within the context of social conflict, emphasizing pathologies of consciousness, alienation, and possibilities for liberation.

Traditional Marxists focused on conflict & how society radically change.



Describing objective reality

Describe how individually subjectively construct, negotiate & order their own lives within the status quo.

Mainstream sociologists attempted to describe objectively how society gets things done.

emphasis on order & stability

Figure 1. Burrell and Morgan's (1979) four paradigms.

They assert that the four are incompatible paradigms. Each is based on broad & mutually exclusive meta-theoretical assumptions.

more subjectivist view, also with an apparent concern with regulation, or at least a lack of concern with changing the status quo (see Morgan & Smircich, 1980, for an in-depth comparison of these two paradigms); the radical humanist paradigm also is typified by a subjectivist view, but with an ideological orientation toward radically changing constructed realities; and, finally, the radical structuralist paradigm is typified by an objectivist stance, with an ideological concern for the radical change of structural realities.

The modern study of organizations has been driven mainly by social science variations of natural science models (cf. Audet, Landry, & Déry, 1986; Behling, 1980). Consequently, debates about theory building and contributions to theory have been confined, for the most part, within the bounds of the functionalist paradigm. Organizational science has been guided predominantly by the assumption that the nature of organizations is a basically objective one that is "out there" awaiting impartial exploration and discovery. Hence, we have tended to operate by using a deductive approach to theory building, specifying hypotheses deemed appropriate for the organizational world and testing them against hypothesis-driven data via statistical analyses. A rendering of Burrell and Morgan's paradigm matrix that depicts the relative dominance of functionalism in organizational study is shown in Figure 2.

The assumptions of the functionalist paradigm, however, become problematic when subjective views of social and organizational phe-

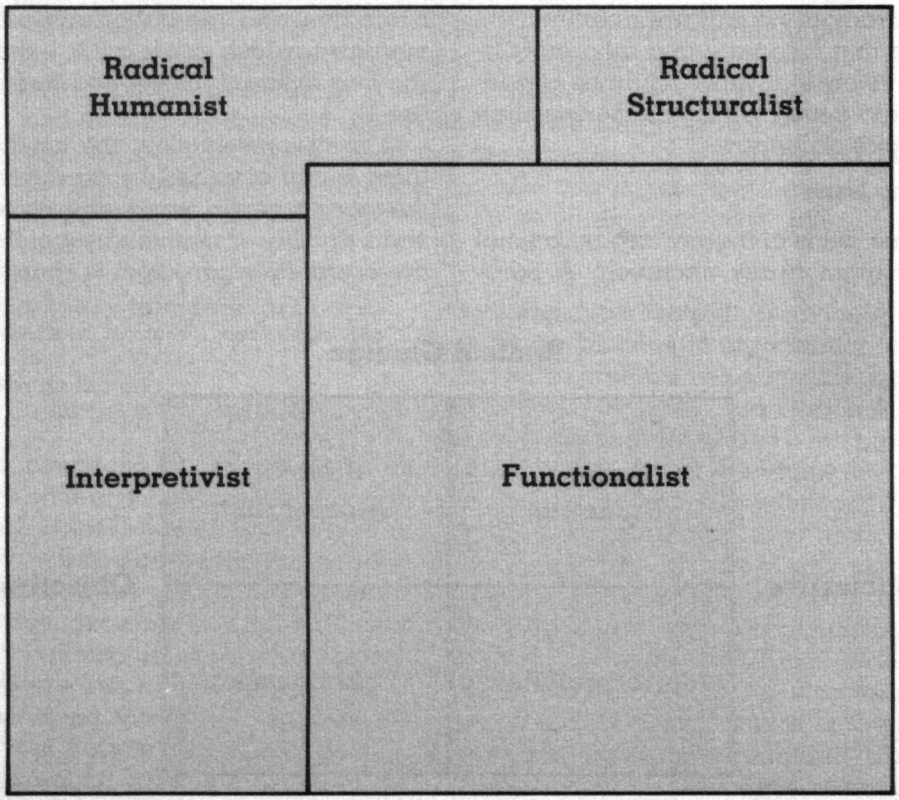


***Figure 2.* A representation of the dominance of functionalism in organizational theory and research.**

nomena are adopted or when there is a concern with transformational change. Suddenly, the existence of social "facts" and the assumption of stability are called into doubt. The study of phenomena such as sensemaking, meaning construction, power, and conflict becomes very awkward to handle using any immutable objectivist framework. What is "out there" becomes very much related to interpretations made "in here" (internal to both the organization members under study and the researchers conducting the study). Likewise, when a person adopts a value for challenging the status quo, the implicit assumption of stability also becomes inappropriate. What is stable becomes a target for change.

Scholars have increasingly called into question the general appropriateness of the dominant "normal science" paradigm (Kuhn, 1970), which typically has been assumed in organizational study (Lincoln, 1985; Rorty, 1987). Knowledge generation is often best construed as a rhetorical process wherein the nature of knowledge is inextricably tied to assumptions and vocabularies used to communicate ideas and approaches to study (cf. Nelson, Megill, & McCloskey, 1987; Rao & Pasmore, 1989). Rhetoric, theory building, and knowledge are therefore essentially epistemic (cf. Cherwitz, 1977; Scott, 1967, 1977)—in other words, they are paradigm-based. The upshot of this recognition is that we can no longer simply argue that positivist/functionalist theory building applies everywhere with some adjustments and let it go at that. There are major implications for theory building that arise from these paradigm differences.

The Theory Building Issue

We broadly define *theory* as any coherent description or explanation of observed or experienced phenomena. This atypically broad definition is necessary to encompass the wide scope of theoretical representations found in the alternative paradigms. *Theory building* refers to the process or cycle by which such representations are generated, tested, and refined. Approaches to theory building that are grounded in appropriate paradigmatic assumptions are better-suited to the study of those organizational phenomena that are consistent with such ground assumptions (e.g., attempts to describe the efficacy of one production process over another are better represented by theories grounded in objectivist/functional assumptions, whereas attempts to describe the social construction of cultural norms are better represented by theories rooted in subjectivist/interpretive assumptions). The grounding of theory in paradigm-appropriate assumptions helps researchers to avoid the common tendency to try to force-fit functionalist theory-building techniques as a "universal" approach.

We want to emphasize that we are not advocating the dismissal of traditional positivist theory building and deductive approaches. Far from it. Such approaches clearly are relevant when issues are defined according to their basic assumptions. However, using different theory-building approaches to study disparate issues is a better way of fostering more comprehensive portraits of complex organizational phenomena. At a basic level, then, we advocate a focus on paradigm-based theory building. Otherwise, we will continue tacitly to operate out of elaborate modifications of prior hypothetical deductions that are not necessarily appropriate to the phenomena studied. In addition, we will continue to admit only the theoretical perspectives derived from a single paradigm, thus restricting our basis for constructing an organizational science that is not only eclectic, but original as well.

Given our multiparadigm perspective, we believe it would be useful for theory building to be viewed not as a search for *the* truth, but as more of a search for comprehensiveness stemming from different worldviews. This stance implies that the provincialism that comes with paradigm confinement might instead be turned toward the production of more complete views of organiza-

tional phenomena via multiparadigm consideration.

Paradigms and Theory-Building Approaches

To provide some example of how each of the paradigms shown in Figure 1 offers different treatments of related issues, we will use the general concept of *structure* as a running theme. For instance, from a functionalist perspective, organizational structure is usually viewed as a stable, objective characteristic; from an interpretive perspective *structuring* is often viewed as a socially constructed, ongoing process of accomplishment; from a radical humanist perspective *deep structure* (more accurately, the reification of deep structuring) is frequently seen as a subjective construction of those in power that should be exposed and changed; and, finally, from a radical structuralist perspective, social class structures are considered as objective realities that demand examination and radical change. We begin with the interpretive paradigm and proceed clockwise (see Figure 1).

Theory Building in the Interpretive Paradigm

The interpretive paradigm is based on the view that people socially and symbolically construct and sustain their own organizational realities (cf. Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Morgan & Smircich, 1980). Therefore, the goal of theory building in the interpretive paradigm is to generate descriptions, insights, and explanations of events so that the system of interpretations and meaning, and the structuring and organizing processes, are revealed. The structures that are disclosed are the outcomes of rule-based processes that lead to particular interpretations (cf. Agar, 1986). Individuals develop patterned relationships that serve as heuristics and symbolic forms that represent "structuring" influences or occasions for structuring (cf. Barley, 1986; Mehan, 1978; Mehan & Wood, 1975; Ranson, Hinings, & Greenwood, 1980).

Interpretive theory building tends to be more inductive in nature. Through this process, researchers attempt to account for phenomena with as few a priori ideas as possible, which implies that existing theories about structuring processes are often accounted for relatively late in the theory-building process (if at all). Strong precautions frequently are taken to prevent emerging theories from being biased toward, or contaminated by, existing theories.

The basic stance toward theory building is one of becoming part of the evolving events studied, that is, to see from the perspective of the organization members experiencing the structuring processes. The interpretive researcher collects data that are relevant to the informants and attempts to preserve their unique representations. Analysis begins during data collection and typically uses coding procedures to discern patterns in the (usually) qualitative data so that descriptive codes, categories, taxonomies, or interpretive schemes that are adequate at the level of meaning of the informants can be established. Thereafter, analysis, theory generation, and further data collection go hand in hand. Thus, the theory generation process is typically iterative, cyclical, and nonlinear. Through this process, tentative speculations about organizational structuring processes are confirmed or disconfirmed by further consultation with informants. Subsequently, revisions and modifications are likely to occur before a grounded, substantive, mid-range theory is proposed (cf. Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987) (see also Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1984).

Theory Building in the Radical Humanist Paradigm

Theory building in radical humanism is similar to that of interpretivism, but there is the important distinction of having a more critical or *evaluative* stance. The goal of theory is to free organization members from sources of domination, alienation, exploitation, and repression by critiquing the existing social structure with the intent of changing it. *Critical theory* (cf. Giddens, 1982) is a prototypical example that demonstrates the paradigm's theory-building char-

acteristics. Critical theorists focus on two levels of understanding: a surface level and a deep-structure level, wherein the underlying sources of a given reality are presumed to reside. Major attention is given to the ways that power-holders (e.g., management) influence structuring processes that become part of a reified, taken-for-granted way of seeing. Critical theorists look at the ways that reified deep structures embedded in the status quo affect human action (Putnam, 1983).

In this paradigm, theory building is best viewed as having a political agenda (Rosen, 1985), because the purposes of theory are to examine the legitimacy of the social consensus on meaning, to uncover communicative distortions, and to educate individuals about the ways in which distortions occur (Forester, 1983; Sartre, 1943). Whereas proponents of interpretive theory building focus on *how* a particular social reality is constructed and maintained, radical humanists focus on *why* it is so constructed and ask whose interests are served by the construction and sublimation to the deep-structure level.

The critical perspective implies different kinds of research questions and, thus, different theory-building approaches, as exemplified by Burawoy's (1979) insightful inversion of a usual question such as "Why do workers restrict output?" (a question representing managerial interests), to a question like "Why do workers work as hard as they do?" (a question representing worker interests) (cited in Deetz & Kersten, 1983). Representations of countervailing views are thus presented in theoretical terms, and resolution of the competing interests often occurs via dialectical methods (Benson, 1977).

Within this paradigm hypothesis testing is rare, and even literature reviews are not a central characteristic of theory-building efforts. Although theory generation is often grounded in specific instances and situations, it also is based on an article of faith that new theory should be geared mainly to the goal of radical change and liberation from the psychic prison of the organization (cf. Morgan, 1980, 1986). Activism is the watchword; knowledge production without intention to act is deemed worthless (Deetz, 1985).

Critical theorists have been indicted for failing to engage in renewed theory-generation efforts in favor of a "propensity to reinterpret existing research rather than collect new data" (Deetz, 1985, p. 131). Often, then, the theory-building process is limited to reinterpretations of existing deep-structure accounts. The presentation of theory in this paradigm is meant to be persuasive, in that theories are intended to serve as a motivating impetus for change toward an ideologically laden viewpoint.

Theory Building in the Radical Structuralist Paradigm

Theory building in radical structuralism is related to that of radical humanism by virtue of the shared ideology for change, or perhaps more dramatically, for *transformation*. A more macro focus on existing societal class or industry structures is of prime concern. Such structures, however, are seen as objectively real and are taken as instruments of domination (cf. Morgan, 1980, 1986) for higher members of the social hierarchy over lower ones. For radical structuralists, organizational conditions are historically specified. Societal and organizational functioning is seen as constrained by social forces stemming from existing dysfunctional structural relationships, which can only be changed through some form of conflict. Because of the asymmetry of these social forces, people are said to have lost control of the means of production (and reproduction) of the material, social, and cultural worlds (Lévi-Strauss, 1958; Turner, 1983).

Historical, dialectical, and critical modes of inquiry are used in theory generation (although the term *theory* rarely occurs in this literature, even though it is evident that theoretical frameworks are developed). The goal of radical structuralist theory is to understand, explain, criticize, and act on the structural mechanisms that exist in the organizational world, with the ulti-

mate goal of transforming them through collective resistance and radical change (Heydebrand, 1983). The process by which this theoretical intent is accomplished is initially grounded in observations about the oppressive nature of the societal and organizational world, but, more frequently, it is defined by a cyclical consideration of argument and evidence. Theory building involves the rethinking of data in light of refinements of viewpoints; it also involves attempting to recast contextually bound situations into some broader context (Benson, 1977).

For the radical structural theorist, like the radical humanist, the theory-building process is a pronounced exercise in argumentation and marshalling of historical evidence. Theory-building efforts are mainly persuasive constructions *about* structural features and their implications for the purpose of fomenting transformative change (cf. Jermier, 1985). Paradoxically, regarding a paradigm devoted to change, there is little evidence that radical structuralists are inclined toward changing their own theories; thus, there are few actual attempts at new theory generation.

Theory Building in the Functionalist Paradigm

The functionalist paradigm seeks to examine regularities and relationships that lead to generalizations and (ideally) universal principles. Organizational structure is taken as an objective phenomenon that is external to, and independent of, organization members. Functionalist theory usually carries an implicit orientation toward a managerial perspective and maintenance of the organizational status quo. Organizational structures are seen as shaping the activities of organization members in fairly deterministic ways.

In functionalism, new theory generation, per se, is seldom practiced; theory refinement is the watchword. Theory building, instead, typically takes place in a deductive manner, starting with reviews of the existing literature and operating out of prior theories about organizational structure. Hypotheses are derived by selecting specific variables as likely causes of some designated effect. Such hypotheses are tentative statements of relationships that either extend prior theory in a new direction, propose an explanation for a perceived gap in existing knowledge, or set up a test of competing possible explanations for structural relationships. Data are collected with instruments and procedures designed according to the hypotheses formulated; analyses are mainly quantitative. Variables, categories, and hypotheses all tend to remain constant over the course of the theory-elaboration processes. The result of these processes is either the verification or falsification of the hypotheses, with theory building occurring through the incremental revision or extension (or occasionally, rejection) of the original theory.

Comparisons of theory-building approaches across the paradigms are displayed in Table 1. Table 2 shows some of the ways that analogous steps in the theory-building processes usually differ across paradigms. Each table is presented as a prototypical representation; neither is held to be exact, exhaustive, or invariant.

The domain of organizational theories and theory building enlarges considerably if the assumptions of these paradigms, each of which can produce a different perspective on a given topic of study, are taken into account. Indeed, variations in theories relating to the notion of structure show that there is more to learn than any single view can account for. The assumptions, vocabularies, and interests (Rao & Pasmore, 1989) of the paradigms shape not only the conceptions of "structure," but also theory-building approaches to understanding and/or influencing those conceptions. Thus, each produces its own version of "truth" (Astley, 1985). Therefore, given the multifaceted nature of organizational reality, consideration of theories from alternative paradigms is needed (Hassard, 1988). Then, a question of interest becomes: Are there any relationships among these differing

Table 1
Paradigm Differences Affecting Theory Building

Interpretivist Paradigm	Radical Humanist Paradigm	Radical Structuralist Paradigm	Functionalist Paradigm
Goals To DESCRIBE and EXPLAIN in order to DIAGNOSE and UNDERSTAND	**Goals** To DESCRIBE and CRITIQUE in order to CHANGE (achieve freedom through revision of consciousness)	**Goals** To IDENTIFY sources of domination and PERSUADE in order to GUIDE revolutionary practices (achieve freedom through revision of structures)	**Goals** To SEARCH for regularities and TEST in order to PREDICT and CONTROL
Theoretical Concerns SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY REIFICATION PROCESS INTERPRETATION	**Theoretical Concerns** SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY DISTORTION INTERESTS SERVED	**Theoretical Concerns** DOMINATION ALIENATION MACRO FORCES EMANCIPATION	**Theoretical Concerns** RELATIONSHIPS CAUSATION GENERALIZATION
Theory-Building Approaches DISCOVERY through CODE ANALYSIS	**Theory-Building Approaches** DISCLOSURE through CRITICAL ANALYSIS	**Theory-Building Approaches** LIBERATION through STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS	**Theory-Building Approaches** REFINEMENT through CAUSAL ANALYSIS

theory-building approaches? Put differently and more provocatively, can the paradigm boundaries be bridged?

Bridging Across Multiparadigm Theory-Building Approaches

Multiparadigm approaches offer the possibility of creating fresh insights *because* they start from different ontological and epistemological assumptions and, therefore, can tap different facets of organizational phenomena and can produce markedly different and uniquely informative theoretical views of events under study. One of the consequences of multiparadigm approaches, however, is a potentially unwieldy proliferation of theoretical views. Although a greater abundance of theories can contribute to our understanding of multifaceted organizational realities, the fundamental incommensurability of the paradigms often leads to a fragmentation and provincialism in the field (i.e., scholars refusing to consider theories that have their origins in other paradigms). We would prefer to encourage a more positive proliferation (cf. Feyerabend, 1975), wherein scholars develop more comprehensive views by examining and, if possible, accounting for the work of alternative paradigms. For that reason, it is useful to explore possibilities for constructing bridges across paradigm boundaries that are ostensibly impenetrable.

Bridging Across Paradigm Boundaries

Are paradigmatic boundaries permeable? We argue that to a limited, but conceptually crucial extent, they are. Although the central assumptions of the paradigms clearly are at odds,

the boundaries between them tend to be ill-defined and *"blurred"* (cf. Bochner, 1985; Geertz, 1980). Indeed, it is obvious that the paradigmatic dimensions (subjective/objective and stability/change) are actually continuua, making it difficult, if not impossible, to establish exactly where one paradigm leaves off and another begins. In a strict sense, then, the paradigms do not constitute hard-and-fast domains. The boundaries between paradigms are therefore more usefully conceived as *transition zones*.

The discussion of bridging across these blurred transition zones is facilitated by employing second-order concepts (Van Maanen, 1979), which are explanatory constructs used to describe dimensions of "scientific" understanding (as compared to first-order concepts, which are manifested by the people experiencing a phenomenon). (See Bacharach, 1989, for related discussions.) Second-order concepts can help clarify possibilities for communicating across paradigm transition zones, because it is at this level of abstraction that related or analogous concepts become more evident. We again employ the notion of structure as a focal concept to discuss the possibilities for bridging across transition zones.

Interpretivist-Functionalist Transition Zone. In the interpretive paradigm, which presumes a subjective reality, we saw that theoretical discourse often takes place in terms of structuring. If any bridge is to be drawn with functionalism, which presumes an objective reality and, thus, objective social structures, some connection must be made between these concepts. A number of authors have addressed this point, and the most promising ideas fall under the rubric of *structurationism* (Barley, 1986; Giddens, 1979; Poole & McPhee, 1983; Ranson et al., 1980; Riley, 1983).

In brief, structuration theorists focus on connections between human action (in the form of structuring activities) and established organizational structures (cf. Riley, 1983). Proponents of this theory do not treat structuring as separate from structures; they consider social construction processes together with the objective characteristics of the social world. Simultaneously, they recognize that although organization members use generative rules to produce organizational structures, such structures serve to influence and constrain the structuring activities themselves. Structuring and structures are thus placed on equal footing by showing how social structures emerge from structuring activities and become external and influential on subsequent structuring processes (cf. Mehan & Wood, 1975). Structure is therefore conceived simultaneously as "a flow of ongoing action and as a set of institutionalized traditions or forms that reflect and constrain that action" (Barley, 1986, p. 80). Hence, structure is both the medium and the outcome of interactions (Giddens, 1979).

Structurationism serves as a means of bridging a gap between subjectivist and objectivist views of related notions (cf. Barley, 1986). It thus occupies an intermediate position on the subjective-objective continuum and spans the interpretive-functionalist transition zone. The net effect of this view is that structuring and structure are not seen as exclusive concepts simply because they reside in different paradigms; or, as Poole and Van de Ven (1989) framed it, structuration resolves an apparent paradox between action and structure. Thus, a link is provided for bridging the two paradigms (which already share a concern with maintenance of social order, or at least a lack of concern with changing it).

Functionalist-Radical Structuralist Transition Zone. The bridge between the functionalist and radical structuralist paradigms is arguably less problematic to establish. First, these paradigmatic differences occur along a regulation-change dimension that might be more usefully characterized in terms of *degree* of change (ranging from incremental to radical change, rather than from stability to radical change). Second, this is a dimension primarily involving ideology, rather than fundamental differences in ontological and epistemological stance like those associated with the subjective-objective

Table 2
Paradigm Comparison of Steps Toward Theory Building

Interpretivist Paradigm	Radical Humanist Paradigm	Radical Structuralist Paradigm	Functionalist Paradigm
Opening Work SELECTING A TOPIC: What are the issues? What are the research questions? DESIGNING RESEARCH: What are data? Where to find data? How to record data?	**Opening Work** SELECTING A TOPIC: What are the issues? What are the research questions? DESIGNING RESEARCH: What are data? Where to find data? How to record data?	**Opening Work** SELECTING A TOPIC: What are the issues? What are the research questions? ARTICULATING THE THEORY: How is the topic a "potential" special case of a grand theory?	**Opening Work** SELECTING A TOPIC: What are the issues? What are the research questions? REVIEWING LITERATURE: What do we know? FINDING A GAP: What is missing? PUTTING A FRAMEWORK TOGETHER: What are the relevant theories and variables? FORMULATING HYPOTHESES DESIGNING RESEARCH: What are data? Where to find data? How to measure data?
Data Collection IDENTIFYING SPECIFIC CASES QUESTIONING INFORMANTS: according to what is relevant to them in context	**Data Collection** IDENTIFYING SPECIFIC CASES OR EXISTING RESEARCH QUESTIONING INFORMANTS: according to what is relevant to them; contextual information pertaining to deep structure	**Data Collection** PROBING HISTORICAL EVIDENCE: according to a grand theory	**Data Collection** PROBING REPRESENTATIVE SAMPLES OF SUBJECTS: according to the hypotheses formulated
Analysis CODING: Provide a description at the first and sometimes at second level of abstraction FORMULATING CONJECTURES: Identify the relations between concepts at first level or across levels of abstraction EVALUATING CONJECTURES: Validate with informants through new data collection FORMULATING THEORY: Identify the emerging concepts and relationships REVIEWING LITERATURE: Identify what was already known	**Analysis** CODING: Provide information at the first level of abstraction FORMULATING A DESCRIPTION DEEP ANALYSIS: Reflect on what makes people construct their world the way they do CRITICIZING: Unveil how deep forces influence the first level of abstraction Identify whose interests are served	**Analysis** ARGUING: Use specific instances to further validate the theory STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS: Identify the sources of domination and the potential points of leverage	**Analysis** TESTING HYPOTHESES: Evaluate the significance of the data according to initial problems and hypotheses
Theory Building WRITING UP A SUBSTANTIVE THEORY: Show how it all fits together	**Theory Building** WRITING UP DIALECTICAL ANALYSIS: Show how the level of consciousness should change	**Theory Building** WRITING UP RHETORICAL ANALYSIS: Showing how the praxis should change	**Theory Building** WRITING UP RESULTS: Show how the theory is refined, supported, or disconfirmed Show what it tells the scientific community and the practitioners

dimension. The central issue has to do with functionalism's orientation toward regulation (and, thus, with an implicit managerial focus) as contrasted with radical structuralism's activism (and advocacy for an underclass).

The essential difference turns on the question of what one *does* with theory and findings about the role of organizational and societal structures. Conceptually, the application of activist values could transform macro functionalist approaches into a form of radical structuralism. Although we see only limited similarity in the writings of these two paradigms (cf. Burrell & Morgan, 1979), this lack of similarity might occur simply because of their markedly different outlooks. Radical structuralists clearly intend to engineer change, and their theoretical vocabulary is strongly oriented toward that goal. On conceptual grounds, however, bridges across the regulation-change boundary are less difficult to envision.

Radical Structuralist-Radical Humanist Transition Zone. Radical structuralism and radical humanism share the value for activism and change. Their proponents differ (usually) in their levels of analysis and in their assumptions about the nature of reality, with the former assuming underlying, objective class and economic structures and the latter assuming the subjective, social construction of deep structures at a somewhat more micro level. These disparate assumptions can be bridged at the transition zone, for reasons similar to those offered for the bridge between interpretivism and functionalism. Through a number of intellectual endeavors, theorists have constructed concepts related to structurationism to deal with the subjective-objective duality; these include *negotiated order* (Strauss, 1978), *reflexivity* (Garfinkel, 1967; Mehan & Wood, 1975), *structuring structure* (Mehan, 1978; Ranson et al., 1980), and *relative independence* (Layder, 1982), all of which relate in one form or another to the relationship of structuring and structure.

Layder's (1982) notion of relative independence, for instance, provides a way of thinking about phenomena that are subjective vis à vis those that are relatively more objective. There are some phenomena that occur in the world of immediate experience. When people interact, for example, their interactions are an ongoing accomplishment from which meaning transpires and structuring occurs. In contrast, when we look at the context or environment within which these people are interacting, structuring, and ascribing meaning, we can recognize that these phenomena occur in social systems that can be treated as "objectively real" (e.g., organizational structures or power hierarchies). Although these social systems might have been constructed by past human agency, over time they are treated as facts or objective realities by the people who live within them. Everyday meanings become institutionalized into rules, rites, and ceremonies (Meyer & Rowan, 1977), and everyday structuring becomes treated as an objective dimension of organizations (e.g., formalization, centralization). Those systems are therefore *relatively independent* of the immediate social construction processes. Thus, relative independence and structurationism are related ways of bridging the objective-subjective transition zone between radical humanism and radical structuralism.

Radical Humanist-Interpretivist Transition Zone. Similar to the bridge between functionalism and radical structuralism, the bridge between radical humanism and interpretism is easier to establish, again for reasons having to do with orientation toward change. Interpretive research generates theory to describe the structuring of the meaning systems and organizing processes of informants (cf. Weick, 1979). Because of the shared subjectivist assumptions with radical humanism, there is a straightforward connection between the interpretivist concept of structuring and the radical humanist concept of deep structure (which is taken as a reification of structuring processes). However, radical humanists act on their knowledge of deep structure by building theory to expose the distortions caused by those reified structures

and by attempting to raise the consciousness of the individuals concerned; interpretivists, in contrast, fulfill their theoretical goals by providing detailed descriptions of the rule-based structuring processes. Indeed, some writers (Putnam & Pacanowsky, 1983) treat these two perspectives as belonging to a single paradigm, which is labeled as interpretism and divided into naturalistic and critical theory domains. Poole and Van de Ven (1989) also addressed this issue from a level-of-analysis perspective. In any case, we do not consider the regulation-change transition zone as particularly dense, and we believe there are firm bases for arguing relative permeability across it.

The preceding discussion suggests that there are grounds for bridging across paradigm transition zones and implies that the paradigms are not totally independent or completely isolated knowledge-generating and theory-building systems. In a related vein, it is worth noting that a number of approaches to social and organizational knowledge have a foot in more than one paradigm. Action research, critical theory, early-to-late Marxism, Weberian approaches, and solipsism (see Burrell & Morgan, 1979) all bridge paradigm boundaries to some extent. The presence of these cross-paradigm ideas represents permeability to a greater or lesser degree. To some extent, then, it would appear that the paradigms are not completely incommensurable, because there are ways of understanding important facets of one paradigm's view in terms of another by focusing on the transition zones.

This conclusion, however, does *not* imply that the paradigms can be collapsed or synthesized into some integrated framework. Despite the demonstrated possibilities for bridging across blurred boundaries, permeability of the paradigms is confined essentially to the transition zones themselves. The inherent character of the paradigms away from the transition zones makes their theoretical tenets incompatible with alternative views offered by other paradigms. Their fundamental assumptions about the nature of the social and organizational world, their purposes and goals for constructing theory, and, perhaps most important, the epistemic rhetorical bases and vocabularies used to communicate concepts (Cherwitz, 1977; Cherwitz & Hikins, 1986; Nelson et al., 1987; Scott, 1967, 1977) preclude any bona fide synthesis of competing theoretical views into some general model or convergence on some grand theory (Rorty, 1987).

The hope for such a synthesizing scheme is misguided in any case because of the multifaceted nature of organizational phenomena. For the same reason, however, it is important to avoid theoretical narrowness. Though synthesis is not possible, consideration of an alternative avenue might be useful, that is, a path that develops a means for considering multiparadigm views together.

Bridging at a Metaparadigm Level

The lack of any possible integration or resolution at the paradigm level would appear to condemn organizational study to proliferation-with-fragmentation in building viable theories concerning topics common to multiple paradigms. Is that consequence of paradigm incommensurability necessary? Or, might multiparadigm theoretical views be considered together from some more encompassing perspective? Given that a uniquely correct perspective cannot exist (Bochner, 1985), and given the multiplicity of organizational realities, a pluralistic, multiple-perspectives view becomes a necessity for achieving any sort of comprehensive view. Such a multiple-perspectives view requires that organizational theorists consider the set of theories relevant to a given topic from some viewpoint beyond that of an individual paradigm. Comparing and contrasting diverse paradigms is difficult when confined within one paradigm; looking from a meta-level, however, can allow simultaneous consideration of multiple paradigms and their transition zones. Elevating to a metaperspective is qualitatively different from cross-boundary consideration. From this view,

the intent is to understand, to accommodate, and, if possible, to link views generated from different starting assumptions.

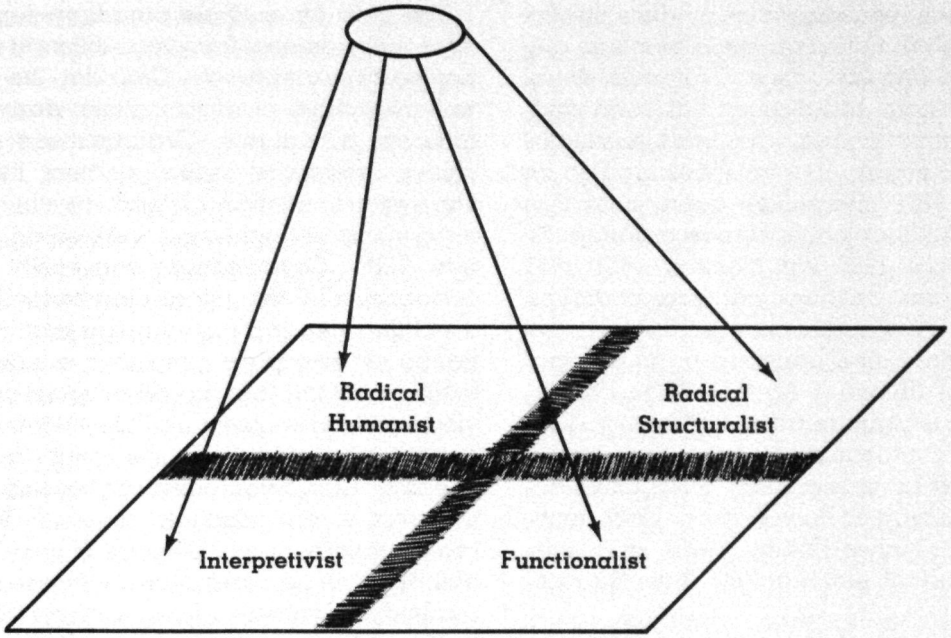
A multiple-perspectives view is not a demand for integration of theories or resolution of disagreements or paradoxes (cf. Poole & Van de Ven, 1989) that inevitably emerge from theoretical comparison; rather, it is an attempt to account for many representations related to an area of study (e.g., organizational structure, culture, socialization) by linking theories through their common transition zones. The various knowledge claims thus assembled can constitute a multidimensional representation of the topic area. Comprehensive understanding occurs only when many relevant perspectives have been discovered, evaluated, and juxtaposed (Cherwitz & Hikins, 1986).

The notion of a metaparadigm view is roughly analogous to the notion of triangulation to achieve confidence in observations in more traditional approaches to theory building. The multiple-perspectives view implies a kind of *meta-triangulation* not across methods *within* a single theory or paradigm, as is currently in vogue, but *across* theories and paradigms. The intent here is to expand the concept of triangulation beyond the usual connotation of accuracy, or the finding of similarity (cf. Jick, 1979), to encompass the notion of seeing how paradigmatic theorizing is similar, how it is different, and how it can facilitate a more comprehensive portrayal of organizations.

Figure 3 graphically represents the notion of bridging at a metaparadigm level. It also suggests that any metaparadigm perspective is nonetheless rooted in a specific paradigm, depending on the ground assumptions of the observer. Furthermore, it represents the paradigm boundaries more appropriately as blurred transition zones. From this level, the theorist can consider his or her preferred second-order representations, derived from research and theory within a given paradigm, with those from other paradigms.

From a vantage above the plane of the paradigms, it becomes evident that analogous concepts can emerge despite incommensurable paradigmatic bases. A representative example is again available from our running theme; all paradigms employ central formulations using a "structur-" root (structuring in interpretivism, deep structure in radical humanism, class structure in radical structuralism, organizational structure in functionalism, and structuration in the objective-subjective transition zones). Consider the "discoveries" about structur- that are available from a simultaneous multiparadigm view (which reveals a complementarity in paradigm-based conceptions, despite the distinctions in the paradigms that generated them and the marked differences in vocabulary used to build theories about them).

True to their assumptions, interpretive theorists assume that human agency is central to the construction of rules for structuring activities. Yet, given an awareness of structurationist considerations and the functionalist perspective, they can recognize that organization members treat the result of their ongoing structuring process as an external, objective reality. Similarly from the meta-level, functionalists can treat the emerged structure in a comparable fashion as an historical artifact of structuring processes, emphasizing the reification of the emerged structure as a given, to be studied objectively. Thus, users of both perspectives can recognize the benefits deriving from the alternative view, without violating their own tenets. Meshing the functional notion of structure with the interpretive conception of structuring produces a more nearly complete picture of the phenomena. Meanings and contexts are emphasized to the functionalist, and relationships and consequences are emphasized to the interpretivist. Similarly, the meta-level view facilitates an awareness to both interpretivists and functionalists that the emergent structure is not merely a description of a phenomenon, but rather (from the radical humanist and/or structuralist view) one that could or should be critiqued and changed.



1. The shaded areas between the paradigms represent the blurred transition zones.

2. The meta-level vantage position, represented by the ellipse, is arbitrarily placed above the Radical Humanist paradigm to connote that the viewer typically is rooted in the assumptions of some paradigm. Yet the circle also represents the possibility of multiple viewers, ideally from multiple paradigms.

3. The directional arrows toward the plane of the paradigms represent the diverse paradigmatic views available from the meta-level vantage position. (The perspective lines are **not** intended to depict convergence toward some viewpoint that would represent integration of differing, multiple views.)

***Figure 3.* The metaparadigm perspective.**

The overarching observation, however, is that theorists who do not make similar assumptions, who do not build theories in similar fashion, and who do not do research in a similar way, nonetheless all tend to be concerned with a related concept. They think of structure differently, talk about it differently, ask different questions about it, but they still are concerned with conceptually related notions pertaining to structur-, which suggests a key feature of metaparadigm consideration: *organization study can arrive at complementarity despite disparity.*

Astley and Van de Ven (1983) pursued a related line of inquiry by developing debates between competing perspectives and demonstrating that deeper understanding results from the comparison. There also are a number of specific topics in organizational research and theory building that have been studied from different paradigmatic perspectives that are amenable to a form of metatriangulation. Representations of culture (cf. Smircich, 1983) stemming from the functionalist paradigm (culture as a variable) and from the interpretive and radical humanist paradigms (culture as a root metaphor) exist and are available for comparison at the meta-

level. All these representations produce distinctive insights, but none can stand alone as any sort of comprehensive view of organizational culture. Similarly, socialization has been studied via functional analysis that has identified its antecedents, stages, consequences, and so on (Feldman, 1976), interpretive approaches that have revealed adaptations by new organization members (Louis, 1980; Van Maanen, 1973), and radical humanist critiques that have portrayed socialization as a process used to influence newcomers toward some preferred organizational interpretation (Buono & Kamm, 1983). Finally, organizational communication has been studied by means of critical approaches (see Poole, 1985; Weick & Browning, 1986), interpretive approaches (Putnam & Pacanowsky, 1983), functionalist approaches (Jablin, 1979), and indirectly by radical structuralists (Lévi-Strauss, 1958).

Overall, the aim of the meta-level view is to facilitate an appreciation for (a) the possibility that similarity is just not possible (i.e., for an informed awareness of the benefits of diversity and eclecticism in accumulating multiple views—in other words, agreeing to disagree, but at least knowing how and why the disagreements exist [a fulfillment of Geertz's (1980, p. 174) observation that "given the dialectical nature of things, we all need our opponents"]) and (b) the possibility that although different assumptions were brought to bear on a given issue of study, some similarities might nonetheless become evident *despite* differences in ontology, epistemology, and methodology (or at least similarities that might not otherwise be evident *except* through consideration from a meta-level). Thus, on the one hand it is clear that the different paradigms produce a striking degree of "similarity despite disparity" in the study of structure. On the other hand, only by adopting a meta-level view can we discern how the different paradigms explain the notion of structure differently (as well as culture, socialization, communication, etc.).

The case for multiple paradigm representations is also evident from yet a different multiple-perspectives approach. Consider the descriptive metaphors of organizations derived from different paradigms. Organizations are machines, organisms, brains, theaters, interpretation systems, political systems, psychic prisons, instruments of domination, and so on (cf. Morgan, 1986). Organizations can easily be conceived as all these things simultaneously. The simultaneous conception implies that these disparate views can exist together without necessarily assuming that the adoption of one set of views precludes others, or that all of them must somehow be integrated. One cannot declare an alternative-paradigm view correct and another incorrect in any absolute sense. A view becomes prominent, not because of its advocates' abilities to refute other views, but because of the compelling nature of their arguments (cf. Nelson et al., 1987) and/or their presentations (cf. Van Maanen, 1988).

Implications of the Multiparadigm Perspective

In a practical sense, multiparadigm perspectives have implications for organization theorists. Given that most (all?) theorists are rather closely married to their own paradigms (as they must be to construct theories that are paradigm-appropriate), some steps can be taken to establish links among differing approaches to theory building. Research teams can be designed to include a member whose role is to consider the possible contribution of theories from different paradigms concerning the chosen topic of study. By focusing on the paradigm transition zones and engaging in discussions with representatives of other paradigms, links in approaches to theory construction can be uncovered. Similarly, interdisciplinary panels representing multiple paradigms can be formed to bring alternative perspectives to bear.

Researchers also could conduct parallel stud-

ies of the same set of events (not the same *data*, because the question of what constitutes data about a given set of events differs by paradigm) to see what similar or different views result. (See Gioia & Sims, 1986, and Gioia, Donnellon, & Sims, 1989, for a comparison of the same events studied from the perspectives of two different paradigms.) Another possibility is simply to account for the perspectives of observers and theorists whose works are devoted to a focus on cross-paradigmatic and metaparadigmatic overviews (e.g., Giddens, 1982; Morgan, 1986) as a way of seeing possible links among theories and ways of juxtaposing or meshing alternative theoretical perspectives into multifaceted theoretical views of organizational phenomena.

In a broader sense, and of more practical relevance to our conduct of organizational study, faculties can develop recruiting strategies that attempt to achieve some level of paradigm diversity and balance in their makeup to try to ensure that multiparadigm viewpoints are represented in research and theory building. Finally, doctoral-level training in philosophies of social science that encourage multiparadigm awareness (e.g., Holland, 1990) would facilitate bona fide consideration of multiple perspectives in future theory-building efforts. All these approaches encourage multiple *thought trials* from different perspectives and enhance creative theory building (Weick, 1989).

Recapitulation and Conclusion

Given the relatively recent recognition and acceptance of different paradigms of organizational study, it is important to evolve approaches to theory building that are consistent with the basic assumptions of each paradigm. We have argued in favor of both greater expansion and more accommodation of multiple approaches to theory building in organizational study. Because a multiparadigm perspective on theory building is likely to result in even more differentiation with the dysfunctional potential for parochialism, we have suggested ways that bridging between paradigms might be accomplished and ways that simultaneous consideration of alternative views might be achieved.

We have concluded that because of the blurred nature of the transition zones between paradigms, it is possible to construct bridges that link apparently disparate concepts together in these zones. Yet, we have also concluded that paradigmatic synthesis, per se, is not possible because of the basic incompatibility of paradigmatic assumptions, vocabularies, and goals. As an alternative avenue, however, we have proposed a metaparadigm perspective for exploring the conceptual grounds for accommodating different approaches to theory building. Such a view allows a more comprehensive consideration of multifaceted organizational phenomena, especially where topics of study have apparent analogues (structure) or complementarity (culture, socialization, communication).

Multiparadigm approaches to theory building can generate more complete knowledge than can any single paradigmatic perspective. The discussion of the metaparadigm perspective is an attempt to deal with the intellectual provincialism that occurs when one accepts paradigms as fundamentally incommensurable and noncomparable and, therefore, proceeds with only one perspective without attempting to account for disparate views. Viewed from a metalevel, the dismissal of possibilities for integrating paradigm-based theories does not preclude the possibility of comparing those theories—of considering alternative theories in juxtaposition, either to discern theoretical links or simply to have an informed awareness of disagreement. Our approach is aimed at exploring argument, counterargument, and accommodation despite fundamental differences.

Finally, in terms of Whetten's (1988) distinction between a contribution of theory and a contribution to theory, the multiparadigm approach can offer both. It offers the potential contribution of theory when applied to theory building within

any given paradigm. In a different sense, it also offers a contribution *to* theory because it fosters an awareness of multiple approaches to the theory-building process, with the consequent potential of constructing alternative theories about the nature of organizational phenomena. In general, however, the multiparadigm view implies an essential broadening of the conception of theory and of the theory-building process itself.

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