INTRODUCTION

THE PARADIGM CONCEPT AS A RESOURCE 
FOR KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPMENT AND CRITICAL REFLECTION 
IN ORGANISATION STUDIES

Massimiliano Monaci* - John Hassard**

Abstract. In this introduction to the special issue on paradigm thinking in organisation studies we argue that by continuing to cultivate paradigm-based ideas we can make new and valuable contributions to debates on theoretical development and knowledge production in the field. We begin by returning to some central issues in the original «paradigm wars» debate and outlining the state of the art in this respect. Then, briefly, we speculate on some broader contemporary areas in which paradigm-thinking is likely to yield significant benefits for scholars in terms of research inquiry and critical reflection. We conclude with a discussion of the papers included in the issue – papers that provide powerful insights into the relevance of paradigm thinking for modern organisation studies, and notably with respect to a range of intellectual challenges emerging within the field.

Keywords: Paradigms, Paradigm thinking, Management and organisation studies, Critical reflection, Philosophy of science.

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This special issue of Studi di Sociologia originates from a long-standing academic friendship between the two editors, one dating back to the mid to late 1990s. At that time, Massimiliano was a PhD candidate working on a thesis about complexity factors in the production of organisational knowledge. In conducting fieldwork for this study, he spent time visiting a number of UK universities in order to interview scholars involved in developing a critical epistemological approach to organisation theory and management research. Around this time John was Head of the Management School at Keele University – where Massimiliano was hosted for the period of his fieldwork – and apart from being an interviewee for this study he spent much time informally convers-
ing with his visitor about the so-called «paradigm wars» in organisation studies (OS), a debate which had stimulated many discussions in the field over the previous two decades. Since then, as fellow organisational researchers, we have had many opportunities to continue discussing intellectual developments in the field generally and the status of the paradigm concept specifically. This has been notably the case at international conferences, where discussions have taken place both formally during working sessions and informally over a beer or two in the evening.

It was in the course of one such discussion that we came up with the idea of producing a collection of essays to explore the meaning, implications and prospects of paradigm thinking from the 1980s and 1990s in terms of the recent theoretical evolution and current analytical concerns of OS. While being aware that many scholarly directions have been followed in the last two decades to define the nature and status of organisational theorising, our impression has been that something significant was lost with the seeming decline of the paradigms debate from around the early 2000s onwards. This was the basis of our decision to address the invitation to submit papers for this special issue to two groups of colleagues in particular: a) senior scholars – who either played an important role in the first wave of paradigmatic discussions or else have been recognised observers of them; with this group being asked to provide reflections on epistemological and ontological dimensions of organisational research over recent decades; and b) ostensibly younger scholars who, in recent years, have either worked directly on the paradigm concept or engaged in kindred discussions over intellectual developments and professional practices in organisation and management theory. Before a full double-blind peer review process was engaged upon, the process of assessment included discussion of initial drafts of some of the papers comprising the special issue at the 2017 Colloquium of the European Group for Organizational Studies (EGOS)\(^1\) in Copenhagen. As a result, we subsequently assembled eight contributions – each illuminating insightful analytical directions for grasping the influence, value and potential of paradigm thinking in contemporary OS.

The remainder of this introduction is structured as follows. We begin by returning to some central aspects of the original «paradigm wars» debate and delineating the present state of the art. Then, we point to a set of areas which, for us, suggest using and further developing paradigm-based concepts to enhance opportunities for producing significant scholarship, and understanding current challenges, in the field. Finally, we introduce the articles that comprise the special issue.

I - WHERE WE HAVE COME FROM

In the 1980s and 1990s, paradigm thinking had a key role in enhancing OS researchers’ awareness of the philosophical principles and intellectual orders under-
pinning their theoretical approaches and positions. This was mainly fuelled by Burrell and Morgan’s seminal work *Sociological Paradigms and Organisational Analysis* (1979), which provided a framework for conceiving the major knowledge paradigms underlying organisation theories, this being founded on the idea that such paradigms were based on mutually-exclusive assumptions concerning the nature of social science (including premises about ontology, epistemology, human nature and methodology) and the nature of society. In their model, the intersection of these two dimensions – termed «subjective-objective» and «regulation-radical change» – resulted in a depiction of the OS terrain as comprising four broad and separate paradigm domains: namely, functionalism, interpretivism, radical humanism and radical structuralism. A feature inherent in Burrell and Morgan’s framework was paradigm incommensurability, a notion that – as with the paradigm concept itself – they proposed by drawing on Kuhn’s (1962) ideas in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, but differentiating it from Kuhn’s original view. According to the incommensurability thesis, different paradigms, while possibly engaging in discussions, cannot be reconciled and combined at the level of their fundamentally diverse assumptions about organisational reality and knowledge.

Burrell and Morgan’s model became popular due to its capacity to offer a convenient map for identifying meta-theoretical positions in OS and, at the same time, a vehicle for promoting pluralism and legitimating alternative theoretical approaches, notably in face of the «orthodoxy» of functionalist intellectual orientations. Interest in the model expressed itself to the highest degree in the paradigm wars debate (e.g. Hassard 1988; Jackson - Carter 1991; Reed 1985; Willmott 1990, 1993), through which attempts to delve into matters of intellectual heterogeneity and competition in OS revolved mostly around the controversial issue of paradigm incommensurability. In such debates, besides the «protectionist» view, represented by the defenders of the incommensurability thesis (e.g. Burrell 1997; Jackson - Carter 1991, 1993; Marsden 1993), two other positions were of particular significance. First, the «integrationist» perspective firmly objected to ideas of paradigm proliferation (and ultimately of paradigm thinking itself) on the basis of two specific but converging projects: one calling for a final (re-)establishing of OS as a monoparadigmatic discipline founded on functionalist theoretical conceptions and positivist research methodologies (e.g. Donaldson 1985, 1995); the other seeing fragmentation in the field as a preparadigmatic state to be overcome in order to reach the condition of «mature» sciences, ones apparently able to compete better in the academic marketplace thanks to their condition of internal consensus around an integrated knowledge paradigm (Pfeffer 1993, 1995). Second, the «pluralist» perspective accepted the notion of OS as a multiparadigmatic terrain and the role of idiosyncratic logics internal to each paradigm field (versus conceptions emphasising integration or dissolution of boundaries) yet refuted radical ideas of paradigmatic closure. In this vein, strategies of paradigm «bridging» were suggested for exploiting the potential of interaction, especially in those intellectual boundary areas found at the margins of paradigm realms (e.g. Gioia - Pitre 1990; Hassard 1991; Schultz - Hatch 1996).

The late 1990s saw the start of a decline of the paradigms debate. Since then, as noted by Shepherd and Challenger (2013), the concept of paradigm has continued to be used in textbooks and across several OS subareas, such as strategic management,
marketing research or recently organisational history (e.g. Decker 2016). However, when looking at OS as a whole, there have been relatively few efforts to propose paradigm-based perspectives for interpreting the evolution of the field and addressing issues of meta-theoretical incommensurability, pluralism and communication. As pointed out by Hassard and Cox (2013), the falling out of fashion of paradigm thinking and debate can be related to the intellectual climate favoured, in the last two decades, by the «linguistic/rhetorical turn» and in particular the development of post-structuralism and postmodernism. The analytic projects and research strategies favoured by these movements led to an emphasis on shifting representational practices, and notably on challenging the traditional agency-structure dualism (the foundation of Burrell and Morgan’s subjective-objective dimension) and criticism of «essentialist» endeavours to identify core belief systems beneath various theory orders. The rise of these sensibilities contributed to a depiction of paradigmatic modelling, and the paradigm concept itself, as almost «heretical» (Calás - Smircich 2003), as various arguments were provided in favour of the replacement of the paradigm concept by that of «discourse» (e.g. Deetz 1996). This has resulted in researchers paying far less attention to the role of meta-theoretical positions in organisational theorising and the associated unfolding of paradigmatic intellectual developments in the field.

If we ask what the current state of the art is, the picture emerging is that paradigm thinking (primarily understood as providing formal frameworks for classifying theoretical perspectives in OS) seems to have abated over the past fifteen years. We can also notice, however, some developments in recent organisational analysis that appear to move against this scholarly grain. This is notably the case in Hassard and Cox’s (2013) analysis of the salience of the Burrell and Morgan framework for the current theoretical order of organisation studies. The most challenging aspect of their work lies in the attempt to extend Burrell and Morgan’s model to include a paradigmatic «third order» of post-structural and postmodern analyses, which they suggest is based on a different set of intellectual assumptions to those underpinning the traditional theory orders of agency and structure.

In addition, we can single out contributions that, while reprising key claims and positions of the original paradigm debates (e.g. paradigm closure, integration and pluralism), have served to enrich these perspectives with new arguments and suggestions. Thus, we find «purist» writers who resist any attempt to refute paradigm incommensurability. Offering support for early principles of paradigm incommensurability, Jackson and Carter (2008) contend that today, even more than in the past, new or alternative knowledge paradigms must protect their identities from the epistemological imperialism of «mainstream» theorising, which they argue is associated primarily with practitioner-oriented «functionalist» approaches to OS – approaches commonly championed, they affirm, by major international business schools.

Other writers have developed arguments strongly opposing the idea of building or assessing theory from multiple paradigms; that is, developing arguments reminiscent of the earlier advancing of the dominance of «scientific» and «pragmatic» paradigms, for example, in high profile contributions by Lex Donaldson (1985) and Jeffrey Pfeffer (1993). This view is reflected in McKelvey’s (2003, 2008) plea that plu-
ralism should be «managed» and OS definitively converted into an integrated body of knowledge founded on the tenets of «Complexity Science» and the identification of practicing managers as the primary constituency for whom organisation theory has to prove relevant.

However, we can also recognise what might be called a «medial» camp in the form of commentators who (re-)emphasise the desirability and viability of thinking from the standpoint of multiparadigm research. An example can be found in the area of cross-cultural management research in the work of Romani et al. (2011), whose step-by-step method for bi-paradigm study proposes the potential of paradigm interplay not only for generating methodological innovations but also for innovative theory development.

Interestingly, the relevance of paradigm-related concepts for addressing sensitive issues of knowledge production in the field can be discerned even within recent works seemingly suggesting the futility of extending the paradigm wars debate. For instance, Tadajewski (2009), focusing on the politics of OS’s institutional context – and notably the influence of cognitive bias and belief perseverance – concludes that incommensurability of academic values in organisational research still remains unavoidable, thus rendering any attempt to adjudicate theories from alternative paradigms invalid. Differently, through a post-structuralist «micro-discursive» analysis of the rhetorical devices used in first-wave paradigm debates, Shepherd and Challenger (2013) come to reject the incommensurability thesis by placing stress on the dialogic character of the various intellectual positions held by «paradigm warriors» (i.e. not only do the arguments provided from these positions utilise similar rhetorical strategies, but they are also crafted to counter those of others).

II - WHERE CAN WE GO FROM HERE?

From the arguments outlined above we can see how many concerns central to thinking on theory development in OS today reflect concerns at the heart of the original paradigm debates. Generally speaking, it might be said that although the extent of recent thinking on OS paradigms and their development is more restricted, three strands of debate can be clearly discerned, and which serve to sustain this area of analysis in the field – i.e. the work of (a) those who would advocate a defence of paradigm incommensurability; (b) advocates of a timely and irrevocable decline for the concept of paradigm diversity; and (c) proponents of a development of paradigm theorising aimed at exploiting its further potential, particularly by means of multiparadigm approaches. More importantly, our contention is that further elaboration on paradigm-related themes can yield significant benefits for theory development in contemporary OS, and notably that thinking in this area can be developed in respect of a number of broad areas, such as the following.

A first way to reassert and further exploit the potential of paradigm thinking relates directly to the key purpose of Burrell and Morgan’s work on paradigm modelling; that is, the development of frameworks for defining and classifying extant or emerging paradigms through the identification of the meta-theoretical presuppositions that
underpin them. As implied by Hassard and Cox’s (2013) endeavour to include recent third-order theorising within an expanded version of Burrell and Morgan’s schema, this is likely to generate models for grasping the current evolution of OS, outlining the field’s main intellectual developments, and providing terms of reference against which future research can be compared.

A second area where paradigm thinking can generate additional contributions is in relation to the concept of reflexivity. A paradigmatic view of OS inherently entails a preparedness to recognise how all organisation scholars make conscious or unconscious choices regarding philosophies of science and theories of society in their research strategies and in the everyday practices of manufacturing knowledge. Practicing this sensibility reflects taking recourse to a tool not only for understanding and distinguishing significant meta-theoretical positions in the recent development of the field, but also for helping researchers to reflect on the unexamined premises of their scientific work. This may prove of particular relevance as a way of favouring «collective reflexivity» (Mehrpouya - Willmott 2018: 732), or the development of research values and options to challenge trends in the field that, for several commentators, are impacting corrosively on the distinctive core of scholarly work in our field as an autonomous, open-ended and inclusive endeavour. Two examples of such developments are worth mentioning here, both of which are relevant in that subtle mechanisms underlying them seem to suggest links between a lack of willingness to engage with peers’ knowledge products and conditions hindering self-awareness of one’s own scientific practices, in particular to the extent that these conform to more or less situated mainstream standards and expectations of «legitimate» scholarship. The first case refers to the institutionalisation of a system of incentives for early career academics that rewards short-term and selective performance, by which «the overriding focus on tenure and the need to publish in top-tier academic journals [bias] young scholars away from issues that might be controversial, contested and uncertain» (Hoffman 2004: 217). The second example regards the consolidation of «Knowledge Brands» (or KBs) (Mehrpouya - Willmott 2018), i.e. organisational research sub-fields linked to intensifying market pressures in OS, whose competitive (and «risk management») strategies in the academic and publication market are based – amongst other things – on the fact that «the pro-sumers of KBs acquire a trained and self-interested incapacity to be receptive to work that does not position it itself as a contribution to their KB, let alone to scholarship that challenges, and so threatens to disrupt, the KB’s assumptions» (ibid.: 731).

Third, paradigm thinking still appears to be key to unlocking opportunities for generating innovative research paths and theorising. This is particularly the case for multiparadigm studies and notably, drawing on Lewis and Grimes’ (1999) classification, «metaparadigm» approaches, which concern the interaction between paradigms (whereas multiparadigm research, in a strict sense, concerns conducting empirical work discretely from a number of paradigms). In the area of metaparadigm studies, the purpose of producing enriched knowledge can be found in recent perspectives using «paradigm interplay» strategies. In contrast to those based on «paradigm bridging», interplay strategies consider the specificities of the paradigms involved, rather than focusing predominantly on liminal theoretical zones between neighbouring paradigms.
They also attempt to establish creative tension between paradigms by simultaneously placing stress on their similarities and differences, rather than emphasising inter-paradigmatic commonalities. In this way, as convincingly shown by Romani et al.’s (2011) study deploying positivist and interpretive paradigms, interplay constitutes «a venue of respectful interaction between different paradigmatic analyses» (436). Here the integrity of each of the analyses is maintained and their mutual enrichment through creative tension is only an intermediate result for reaching «a different level of understanding» (ibid.: 448) towards theory development. With this in mind, we may suggest that there is significant space for further strengthening the role of pluralistic research strategies founded on paradigm interaction in permitting novel paths of study to arise or grow.

Fourth, a commitment to further developments in paradigm thinking and debate can provide scholars with singular opportunities to tackle the issue of «the politics of the institutional environment» (Tadajewski 2009: 476) in OS. This may be done by stressing the political function of paradigm diversity, somewhat in line with the approach of defenders of paradigm autonomy in the original paradigm wars. Whether or not one fully adheres to their strong argument for incommensurability, such a focus would represent a plausible endeavour for organisational researchers concerned about possible new hegemonies in the field. For example, based on personal discussions with a number of colleagues, we think this may be an issue in respect of the recent influence of US-based neo-institutional theory in OS. Furthermore, the relevance of paradigm thinking in terms of increasing awareness regarding «the politics of the situation» may be emphasised in light of stimulating reflections currently being proposed on the meaning and prospects of pluralism, and notably in terms of theories of organisation as well as research questions and methodologies. This is the case for the critical considerations outlined above in respect of the potential pathological effects of both market-oriented pressures favouring knowledge branding processes and «publish-or-perish» institutional pressures experienced particularly by young scholars. Another interesting track to follow might be attempting to analyse the role of paradigm-based moves within the «micro-politics» of scholars’ academic lives (Burawoy 2010; Ekman 2016). That is, how they navigate tensions between various objectives, purposes and audiences related to different «value spheres» in social sciences, such as in Burawoy’s (2004) view the spheres of profession, critique, policy and public debate.

The previous point leads us to suggest that continuing to engage with paradigm thinking, and especially paradigm pluralism, is likely to contribute to generating significant questions and insights with respect to fundamental issues concerning the main constituencies and stakeholders of organisational research, and ultimately to the salience of knowledge production in OS. This should represent a key focus of attention within the field, if we consider what Stern and Barley (1996), some time ago, viewed as contemporary organisation theory’s neglected mandate: namely, the need to address constantly «the impact of organizations on the broad social systems in which they [are] embedded» (146). In this vein, Mir and Mir (2002) provide a provocative perspective aimed to stimulate organisational scholars to assume a more explicit social agenda. Drawing on C. Wright Mills’ (1959) famous notion of the «sociological imagination», their proposal places stress on the possibilities for an «organisa-
tional imagination», i.e. the capacity both to think outside prevailing frameworks and grasp unsuspected connections between isolated issues and entities. In other words, a resource for making linkages between the findings of organisational research and forms of engagement vis-a-vis their transformative implications for the constituencies and stakeholders involved. From this view, as Mir and Mir observe, theoretical heterogeneity in the field – and a pluralistic vision of it – can be regarded as fundamental for any «transformative comprehension» of the social conditions underlying, or fuelled by, organisational phenomena.

Albeit an issue we could have addressed much earlier, a final way to explore further the potentialities of paradigm thinking and debate would arguably be to return for inspiration and guidance to Kuhn’s (1962) original formulations in the history and philosophy of science. Much has been written, in OS as elsewhere, on the ambiguity of Kuhn’s early explanations of the paradigm notion. Commentaries on Kuhn’s writing have often focussed in this respect upon how in his later work (e.g. Kuhn 1970, 1977) he outlined two very different meanings of the paradigm concept – «exemplar» and «disciplinary matrix». While the former referenced the exemplary puzzle solutions that are concretely used by scholars of a scientific community as models for practice, the latter – a broader sociological use – concerned the constellation of metaphysical beliefs, symbolic generalisations, values and exemplars that are routinely shared by a community’s members. In addition, many works have drawn attention to the shift in Kuhn’s theorising from use of a strong version of incommensurability – according to which there are no general criteria enabling us to compare different paradigms (since arguments supporting each paradigm’s theories are crafted from within the paradigm) – to a mitigated position that considers inter-paradigmatic communication as viable through researchers’ efforts to learn different paradigm languages. And, needless to add, within OS considerable space has been dedicated to discussing the similarities and differences between Kuhn’s notion of paradigm and Burrell and Morgan’s elaboration of it. This said, we may identify several interesting issues to expand in this area. For instance, the idea of disciplinary matrix appears to be worth exploring to delve into sociological dimensions largely omitted in Burrell and Morgan’s framework. As suggested by Hassard and Cox (2013), this could be done through analyses focusing on how the «logics of action» of specific academic communities or networks of scholars in OS operate interdependently with the intellectual and value orientations held within these situated social contexts. With regard to incommensurability, we have already suggested that adopting a less radical view of incommensurability is a pre-requisite for developing innovative research in the vein of multiparadigm studies. In addition, however, continuing to give attention to the incommensurability issue can enable scholars to address other meaningful questions. One such is whether there can be mutual understanding between researchers from strongly incommensurable paradigms if we maintain that contradictions between their positions cannot be resolved – since, as Jackson and Carter (2008: 407) suggest, «understanding does not entail belief». And if so, the question arises of how we deal with the embeddedness of their vocabularies in paradigm-specific systems of meaning. As regards learning different paradigm-specific languages for enabling inter-paradigmatic dialogue, we must ask
about the social, philosophical and intellectual factors that make researchers inclined to «immerse themselves in different paradigm languages» (Tadajewski 2009: 473), rather than stick to the lexicon – and notably underlying assumptions – of a distinct paradigm.

III - THE ARTICLES OF THIS SPECIAL ISSUE

The articles included in this issue contribute to enriching a discussion that we believe is still very much worth engaging with. And they do so in a variety of ways: by offering fresh perspectives on crucial points of passage of the original paradigms debate; by connecting with some of the themes discussed in the preceding review section on paradigm-related concepts; or by reframing issues pertinent to the general discussion of paradigms in the OS landscape, and often at times critically.

Broadly speaking, the first three papers pick up on core themes that have characterised paradigm discussions from the beginning. Olivier Ratle focuses on the reception of Kuhn’s theory in OS, casting new light on the politics of its interpretation and use in organisational researchers’ work. His key claim is that Kuhn’s concept of paradigm has been «politically appropriated» due to its ambiguity and polysemy. As such it can be considered a rhetorical resource capable of being mobilised to construct arguments and constitute positions in struggles for intellectual dominance. After discussing how this use of ambiguity can be identified in knowledge disputes within the social sciences in general, the author illustrates his thesis through a rhetorical reading of two texts from the paradigm wars literature, by Donaldson (1995) and McKinley and Mone (1998) respectively. What follows from this intriguing exploration is an invitation to acknowledge that concepts like «paradigm» and «incommensurability» remain naturally ambiguous, and to consider how any attempt to remove ambiguity appears to be not only unrealistic but also, perhaps, undesirable for the development of innovative arguments.

Laurence Romani and Henriett Primecz simultaneously provide an original and evocative exemplar of development for two areas we have mentioned above, namely multiparadigm research and analytical reflexivity. Their starting point is a bi-paradigm study of Turkish professionals working in Sweden and in Hungary, which they conducted through the multiparadigm strategy of «interplay» and using the interpretive and radical humanist paradigms (in Burrell and Morgan’s terms). They illustrate how this multiparadigm form of analysis, aimed to foster paradigm interaction towards theory development, is accomplished in practice. At the same time, in unfolding their account, the authors engage in a reflexive exercise which reveals how this knowledge production process is inscribed, for example, not only in one’s own background but also in dialogue between the researchers doing the interplay and exchanges with their «empirical material» and the community of scientific peers. Based on the authors’ reflexive textual practices, these are circumstances that not only influence the direction of theorising, but also are capable of changing researchers scholastically and personally.

From a different perspective, the paper by Norman Jackson firmly restates the case for paradigm incommensurability in OS, which is supported by combining traditional
arguments from this position (e.g. stressing the differences between Kuhn and Burrell and Morgan’s models) with further ideas from contemporary sociology and politics. To this aim, he first deals with the use of the term paradigm in ordinary language and with specific reference to two recent political events (the UK’s Brexit vote and the election of Donald Trump to the presidency of US), focusing on the emerging opposition between «facts» and «alternative facts». Jackson then relates such arguments to discussions about the use of the concept of paradigm in OS. The author’s central contention is that in both cases facts presented to consumers of knowledge are being manufactured, not discovered – as the same information can be crafted into contrasting knowledge products, depending on intentions, values and forms of power. What follows from this analysis is the argument that in our field – whose subject matter, organisation, concerns attempts to generate arrangements of human coexistence that are open to conflictual interpretations – admitting the existence of paradigms necessarily implies accepting the existence of (incommensurable) alternative facts.

The four ensuing articles advocate an extension or a reframing of the paradigm debate and can be divided into two groups of two papers each. In the first, we find an invitation either to step back from or go beyond the analysis of paradigms in OS. Initially Robert Chia tackles what he conceives as the main problem in paradigm thinking, that is, the failure to address the underlying issue of theoretical representation. Building on the work of philosophers such as Whitehead, James and Wittgenstein, he makes two key points. First, he emphasises how acts of theorising framed by a paradigmatic system of comprehension involve representational abstraction, resulting in a process of knowledge production that separates researchers from reality and invariably distorts their understanding of the world in a reductionist way. Second, to resolve this problem, the author finds an answer by suggesting the relevance of going back to the «rough ground» of pure experience, wherein observers can saturate themselves with the integrity of the phenomenon investigated before moving to theoretical speculation. Chia propounds a form of pre-ontological comprehension as a starting point of paradigmatic theorisations. In this vein, he revisits Robert Cooper’s concept of the «zero-degree of organisation», a theoretical condition of no meaning, and discusses its implications for pointing to organisation as an order-making process.

The article by Catherine Casler and Paul du Gay, while starting from concerns with the paradigms debate somewhat similar to Chia’s, calls for a different kind of development. In their view, the paradigms debate, by privileging paradigmatic classifications and abstract theoretical thinking, has mostly overlooked the role of personhood in contemporary organisational research, namely, what kinds of intellectual personae are called into being through the exercise of specific theoretical programmes. To remedy this oversight, the paper draws inspiration from ideas offered by Ian Hunter, Pierre Hadot and Bas van Fraassen. It is particularly through the notion of «stance» – seen as a constellation of attitudes, values and commitments that sustain our ways of engaging in inquiry – that the authors suggest how we should dedicate more attention to the problematic of the cultivation of personae in organisational scholarship. The argument is made that values-based criteria related to different stances (e.g. interest in theory as an end in itself or as used in practical organisational concerns) could be used to reclassify the field to the benefit of applied relevance.
For their part, the two papers we have placed in the second category consider questions of paradigm thinking by more directly silhouetting it against the backdrop of current agendas and trajectories in OS scholarship. The direction taken by Mihaela Kelemen and Nick Rumens leads them to retain the paradigm notion and reaffirm the importance of paradigm plurality through a focus on the increasing role of two connected developments in the field: the «impact agenda», concerned with the creation of knowledge relevant to the needs of end users, and «co-produced research», which emphasises collaboration between academics and practitioners (e.g. in research teams) to the aim of generating theories that are relevant for specific communities of practice. Taking recourse to American Pragmatism, and in particular John Dewey’s concept of democratic experimentalism, the authors propound a view of the collaborative inquiry process founded on lived experience in participated activities. Here, scholars and practitioners can not only learn from each other, but may also change their aims and goals in light of such interaction. In this context, Kelemen and Rumens argue, the paradigm notion remains meaningful as it alerts us to the variety of worldviews that knowledge co-creators bring to the generative process of collaborative research.

Dean Pierides and Stewart Clegg offer a thought-provoking interpretation of current problems they identify at the core of the sociology of organisations, a subfield of the broader area of OS. Their starting point is that, traditionally, sociologists of organisation were provided with a social ordering based on the institutional codes of deference and honour, upon which legitimate knowledge could be developed. In this perspective, Burrell and Morgan’s work on paradigms should be thought of as an attempt not to disrupt, but instead expand, the bases for social order, in that it proposed a more inclusive disciplinary system. Pierides and Clegg’s key concern is that the fabric of the sociology of organisations is presently being eroded by powerful «individuating forces», most acutely expressed in market and audit cultures aimed to enhance and measure individual scholars’ productivity. In the authors’ view, if on one hand this attack on social order has not been countered – but rather, in various respects, accommodated – by critical management approaches, on the other hand it operates to the detriment of the production of legitimate disciplinary knowledge in the form of paradigm thinking. Under such conditions, they claim, a deeper understanding of the importance of social order represents an obligatory passage point for ensuring the survival of the sociology of organisations as a collective endeavour of social inquiry.

The final piece, by Martin Parker, might be read as a sort of afterword for the special issue. In a sense, it brings us back to where we started from, that is, Burrell and Morgan’s *Sociological Paradigms*. Also dwelling on personal experience, Parker invites us to consider the framework provided by that seminal book as a «map» that has been predominantly used as a positioning device, i.e. a way of situating oneself and other researchers, rather than a tool that might take organisational scholars to a different, more desirable, world in the future. For the author, this partly revolves around Burrell and Morgan’s ontological definition of the «political» axis in their two-by-two typology, turning issues of regulation and conflict into assumptions about how the social world is constructed rather than intimations of the way it could or should be. Parker goes on to suggest this difficulty in turning the political dimension of *Sociological
Paradigms into palpable «politics» is even more pronounced in the present, for their 1979 model essentially represents a guide that boxes-in the past. Therefore, Parker wonders whether we can add the dimension of time – and, so, utopia – to the paradigm grid for better exploiting its potential as a map explaining current knowledge production.

The piece by Martin Parker, therefore, brings this special issue on paradigms in OS to a conclusion. All that is left to say is that we would like to thank once again all of our contributors for their insightful, creative and thought-provoking pieces. We hope above all that this collection will contribute to facilitating a renewed focus on the implications and development of paradigm thinking in our field.

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