Discourses and Paradigms: Editorial Comments
by Susanne M. Fest and Darin J. Arsenault

As co-editors for this issue on Discourses and Paradigms, we have selected four submissions. In the following, we will each introduce two articles, creating a postmodern collage of storylines and authorship.

When I (Susanne) proposed the topic for this issue, Discourses and Paradigms, I was in the last stages of writing my dissertation in which I analyzed discourses from multi-paradigm perspectives. I experienced a curious ambivalence: sometimes it seemed that social worlds could never be fully understood, no matter how many discourses and paradigms one postulated. At other times, it felt as though nothing new and interesting could ever be said by looking at phenomena through these two particular lenses. The process of guest editing this issue has resolved my ambivalence. We received a number of fascinating articles which interpret the theme in innovative ways. And they invite further exploration.

I would like to begin by providing a link between my study, which prompted this theme issue, and the four articles, which follow. I analyzed educational discourses delivered by professors who were part of a multi-disciplinary teaching team. The students were undergraduates in a program for human and organizational development. I was interested in the paradigmatic assumptions embedded in those discourses based on the idea that the educational process creates the student as subject. Similar to what Walkerdine expressed so well when she wrote about how developmental discourses create the subject "child",

What I mean here is that the "child" is a sign created within discursive practices. This is what Foucault meant by subject. What is important, therefore, is how actual children become "the child," in other words, the relation between the subject and subjectification. All practices are produced through the exchange of signs and are both material and discursive. They are not simply created in language. I am suggesting that the actual practices are created through their embodiment of the truths of child development, the way for example, in... the whole architecture of the school, the seating arrangement, the timetable, and so forth - all embodied the idea of the child developing in a facilitating environment (Walkerdine, 1997: 63).

I was interested in how actual young people become "students" in the educational context of their particular program. Using Burrell & Morgan's (1979) four paradigms as the lens, I found that professors showed distinct preferences in terms of what I called their "home paradigm," but that these preferences showed some variation depending on the topic. I also found that one professor employed what I called "code switches" between paradigms, while another almost consistently stayed within the same paradigm. Finally, I argued that the developmental subject "student" should be exposed to multi-paradigmatic educational discourses, if the goal was to prepare her/
him for participation in a multi-cultural, diverse so-
ciety.

I think Boje had a similar idea in mind when
he founded TAMARA. Walkerdine's subject “child,”
my subject “student,” and Boje’s subject “the
reader” all too easily get fixed in discourses which
are paradigmatically limited, static, and stable.
When he writes in his manifesto, “Tamara defines
space for dialog among wandering audiences who
chase fragmented storylines from room to room
in the mansion of science...” (Boje, 1995), he en-
courages us to permit him “to rattle our paradigm
cages” (Best, personal communication, 1998).

In “The Fetish of Change,” Christopher
Grey does just that. He undertakes “a polemical
critique of the current orthodoxy that the world is
changing at an ever faster rate.....”. He makes his
argument from the position of ‘radical skepticism,’
which, heading off potential accusations of being
merely negative, he convincingly contextualizes as
a historical and philosophical position whose pro-
gressive contribution is “to envisage a different
world” (p. 6). This is necessary, he argues, be-
cause the current day change discourse is like a “
totem before which we must prostrate ourselves
and in the face of which we are powerless” (p. 7).
At the same time, much time and money is in-
vested in creating the latest change technologies.
While this is done in the name of globalization and
re-structuring, it does little to change how people
suffer from what the late Pierre Bourdieu calls “the
weight of the world” (Bourdieu, 1999, cited in Grey,
p. 6).

Grey takes the reader for a wild ride, chal-
lenging some “sacred cows” of the organizational
change literature, such as uncontested assump-
tions that reify the phenomenon of resistance to
change, as well as the commonly cited cures, i.e.
leadership, communication, and consultation. To
quote one of the anonymous reviewers: “Simply
put, this is the best piece I have had to referee for
a long time (I referee for 25 journals). It is clearly
written, steeped in the relevant literature, and
makes an original and important point for manage-
ment theorists and practitioners.”

And while we are still breathless from read-
ing Grey, Böhm invites us on a walk through the
“Consulting Arcade,” an adventure which he lik-
ens to “walking through Fetish-Land.” Böhm com-
pares the world of global capitalism, which the
consultant encounters today, to the world of the
Paris Arcade one hundred years ago. More than
fifty years ago, the German philosopher, Walter
Benjamin, had taken those arcades as the cata-
lyst to “composing an urgeschichte, or ‘primal his-
tory,’ penetrating the essence of the society and
culture of the 19th century...” to be called Parisian
Arcades: A Dialectical Fairyland” (James Miller,
2000). Böhm, the modern subject, looks at his late
20th century consulting experiences through the
lens of Benjamin’s 19th century subjects: “the
flaneur who has special empathy with the com-
modity; the collector desperately trying to create a
whole out of the empty use value of the dead com-
modity; the gambler who thrives on the shock of
the commodity rush” (Böhm, 2002). Accompany-
ing Boehm on his walk, the reader is simultane-
ously confronted with a distanced, critical, philo-
sophical commentary, as well as closely wrapped
up in auto-ethnographic reflections of a 20th cen-
tury knowledge worker. A jolting, yet fascinating,
experience.

When Susanne offered me (Darin) an op-
portunity to work with her as a guest co-editor, I
was quite pleased to participate. Through my edu-
cation and research, too, has emerged an aware-
ness, an understanding, and at times, an over-
whelming awe at the plurality of perspectives that
social scientists and laypersons alike can espouse
and hook onto in order to make sense of the world.
I remember years ago how one of my courses in
contemporary rhetoric utilized Burrell and Morgan’s
text on sociological paradigms and Kuhn’s case
for scientific revolution as required readings. This
class drove home the point that we can often ar-
rive at conclusions that are equally valid, despite
the differing paths we might use. Indeed, how many
times have we been at professional conventions
and heard opposing viewpoints argued with con-
vincing surety, with aplomb, with gusto, yet with-
out resolution? We truly do put on our rose-colored
glasses and view the world in different ways.

But is it possible to gain a unified perspec-
tive? Perhaps it is, perhaps not. Graham Symon’s
treatise on the learning organization paradigm dem-
onstrates that discourses of unitarism can be defined and mapped out, but he shows that it is truly difficult to determine which are regulative against the backdrop of organizational life. Ideologies wax and wane, come and go, and the zeitgeist of the moment can impact which resistances will arise and which will continue on. Symon shows that learning organizations can function as post-modernistic in scope, and that resistances will continue to be difficult to manage in their reduction and nullification.

Jim Butler, Fiona Scott, and John Edwards discuss difficulties that arise when the evaluation of change within the organization is undertaken. This paper uses modernist and post-modernist perspectives to color changes within organization data. Butler, et al. note how groups pushing for change expect their members to achieve positive thoughts, feelings, and behaviors as they are persuaded to accepting the organizational tenets and become more effective members. In order to evaluate an organization, one must consider epistemological, as well as ontological, issues because they go hand in hand; one cannot be considered without an understanding of the other.

So, without further ado, Susanne and I are pleased to offer the aforementioned articles to readers to use as tools as they wander from room to room, from place to place. It is only by keeping abreast of new perspectives, by organizing ourselves, and by not keeping quiet if we think we have an organization of ideas helpful to others, that we can help to make sense of issues we face in the marketplace of ideas.

REFERENCES
