

MINTZBERG'S FINAL PARADIGM

Paradigm. I finally found out what it means. I actually went back and read Kuhn (1970) from cover to cover. I even found out that Kuhn doubts the appropriateness of the word for the social sciences. (See, for example, p. 165.)

That's curious because the word is everywhere in the social sciences. How many papers have I read that, after accepting Kuhn's definition of paradigms as "universally recognized" lines of scientific thought (p. viii), proceed to propose "new paradigms"? (Were the authors seeking recognition for new "universally recognized" lines of scientific thought?) A few years ago I read in an article by Georgiou in *ASQ* that "paradigm denotes an overwhelmingly accepted conceptualization" and that it is "an article of faith, rejected only when it loses its potency following the occurrence of a quasi-religious conversion experience" (1973: 291-292). Curiously, Georgiou then proposed a "counter paradigm." (Was he really calling for a new article of faith, requiring another quasi-religious experience to change?)

The Georgiou piece prompted me to pick up my pen and write an angry piece about paradigm. But it seemed too angry and so I put it away. Now there is a Swedish fairy tale about a locket of hair that, no matter where it was put, insisted on glowing in the dark. No matter how many less angry papers were put on top, my paradigm paper continued to glow. It blinded me when I read in an *ASQ* article by Benson (1975: 233) about an "agency's paradigm," and it nearly set fire to the manuscript I was working on when I came across a reference to an individual's paradigm (Parks, Siemens, and Watson, 1976: 841). Something had to be done. A rereading of the fairy tale provided the answer: give the paper its due. Today I could almost hear the sigh of relief (probably from the manuscript) when I lifted the paper out of the pile to write the following paragraphs.

Two points could be put forward to explain the ubiquity of the word. First, it is "in." (Or, in this week's vernacular, everybody's "into" paradigms.) Such a nice buzzword for social scientists, especially those frustrated by the inherent ambiguities of human systems. Too vague to be pinned down, so it pops up everywhere. Webster tells me that it came from the Greek (*paradeigma*: to set up as an example), and passed through "Late Latin," then into French, and finally reached contemporary English where Kuhn took up its cause. (Is there anything to the fact that "paradise" follows it in the dictionary? "An intermediate place for the departed souls of the righteous awaiting resurrection," says my Random House dictionary.) The tragedy is that Kuhn makes such good sense. Too bad so few read him carefully. So much easier to bastardize a word than to read a complex argument. Four thousand years of history gone to hell.

Second, since a paradigm is an article of faith, to be accepted without question, how nice to have one's own paradigm. Never could I say in print, "Listen, I have a theory [or model, hypothesis, proposition, idea, angle] that should live unto eternity, clearly worth accepting as an article of faith." So, instead, I propose a *new* paradigm. Maybe they'll name it after me.



Well, if that's the game let me play it, too, but explicitly. I propose "Mintzberg's Final Paradigm." According to 'MsFP,' ASQ (and all the other journals still worth saving) reject out-of-hand any submitted paper with the word "paradigm" in the title (after this one is published, of course), and insist on deletion of the word wherever it appears in the text of an otherwise acceptable paper. Now there's an article of faith well worth preserving unto eternity.

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#### REFERENCES

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