Re-asserting Paradigm Plurality: Pragmatism and Co-production in Management and Organisation Studies

Mihaela Kelemen, Keele University (m.l.kelemen@keele.ac.uk)
Nick Rumens, Portsmouth University (nick.rumens@port.ac.uk)

Introduction

Burrell and Morgan's (1979) paradigm model has made an enduring impact on management and organisation studies (MOS). Indeed, in a review of its influence and on-going relevance for MOS scholars, Hassard and Cox (2013) reply in the affirmative, extending 'the Burrell and Morgan framework to account for a third-order paradigm based on post-structuralism and postmodernism'. In particular, Hassard and Cox (2013) acknowledge the 'paradigm soup' (Buchanan & Bryman, 2009, p. 4) that has been cooked up within organization theory, and seek to provide a classificatory framework for the contemporary multiplicity of competing paradigms within MOS. Hassard and Cox (2013) is a noteworthy contribution that continues to sustain academic debate about paradigms in general, and Burrell and Morgan's (1979) seminal paradigm framework in particular.

It is against this backdrop that we explore whether the concept of paradigm is useful in the current context of generating academic research that increasingly asks questions and demands accountability from scholars about how research can impact meaningfully on wider society (Beebeejaun, Durose, Rees, Richardson & Richardson, 2014). This so called 'impact agenda' has seen collaborative/co-produced research assume importance and become more accepted in many disciplines within the social sciences, including management (Aguinis, Shapiro, Antonacopoulou, & Cummings, 2014; Kelemen & Hamilton, 2015). Co-production aims to dissolve the boundaries between and across communities of practice and, in the process, can problematize the use of paradigms to classify theories, leading to productive academic/practitioner collaborations (Antonacopoulou, 2010). Various forms of co-production have been explored and developed within MOS: engaged scholarship (Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006; Van de Ven, 2007), relational scholarship (Bartunek (2007) and dialogical research (Beech, MacIntosh & MacLean, 2010; Avenier & Parmentier Cajaiba, 2012; Lorino, Tricard & Clot, 2011; MacIntosh, Beech, Sims & Antonacopoulou, 2012).

We draw on John Dewey's notion of democratic experimentalism to question the fundamentals of such collaborative work and of knowledge co-production. As such, this paper asks the following questions: Can these fundamentals be packaged as yet another paradigm to be subsumed within the original paradigm taxonomy? Do these fundamentals translate into specific tools and techniques (methodologies) which, if applied correctly, lead to power shifts in knowledge co-production? Are these fundamentals a way of being in the world, a particular ethos that can only be learned by trial and error? We suggest that the latter can be the case and that the paradigm concept remains useful in this context, for it alerts us to the variety of worldviews held by academics and practitioners who engage in collaborative research. Dewey's democratic experimentalism gives extra weight to the notion of paradigm plurality by focusing on inquiry as a lived activity (Dewey, 1925[1981]). Admittedly, this article covers a lot of ground within a limited space, but we aim to excite debate in so doing. We begin by outlining briefly the paradigm debates in MOS.

Paradigm debates in MOS

Academic debate on paradigms and paradigm frameworks has a varied history that has been explained at length (Deetz, 1996; Hassard & Cox, 2013). It is not our intention to convey the history of these debates in detail here, but to outline some of the germane issues and developments surrounding the paradigm notion that have circulated within MOS over the last few decades or so.

The academic understanding of paradigm has been greatly influenced by Thomas Kuhn. The term was deployed by Kuhn (1962) to describe comprehensive models of understanding the social world. For Kuhn, paradigms are said to provide theories and laws, but also methodologies for applying theories to solve important problems. Paradigms provide guidance to communities of researchers for identifying acute problems, asking particular types of research questions, applying specific methodologies and techniques of data analysis. Kuhn's (1962) paradigm notion has influenced the work of MOS scholars engaged in paradigm development and refinement, including Hassard and Cox (2013). Yet, incontrovertibly, the most influential work on paradigms within MOS is Burrell and Morgan's (1979) *Sociological Paradigms and Organizational Analysis*. In this book the authors map out four research paradigms that represent major 'belief systems': radical humanist; radical structuralist; interpretive; functionalist. Here the nature of science (objective/subjective) and the nature of society (stability/change) influence the positions researchers take within the two-by-two matrix in which the four paradigms are organised. Rather than outline the content of each paradigm, of more interest for this paper is the ensuing debate provoked by Burrell and Morgan's (1979) typology within MOS.

Some of the most heated discussions have centred on Burrell and Morgan's contention that 'one cannot operate in more than one paradigm at any given point in time, since in accepting the assumptions of one [paradigm], we defy the assumptions of all others' (1979, p. 25). The effects of these discussions regarding paradigm (in)commensurability, dubbed the so called 'paradigm wars' (e.g. Deetz, 1996; Morgan, 1984), are still felt today. As Hassard and Cox (2013) point out, numerous empirical approaches have been developed in the wake of the paradigm wars. For example, Lewis and Kelemen (2002) champion the notion of paradigm plurality, articulated in their account of multiple paradigm research (see also Hassard, 1991), whereby researchers can adopt a pluralist epistemology that 'rejects the notion of a single reference system in which we can establish truth (Spender, 1998, p. 235). As such, on a pragmatic level, multiple paradigm research can facilitate the development of knowledge more in tune with the ambiguities and paradoxes of organisational life. Philosophically, multiple paradigm research is said to encourage reflexivity regarding ontological and epistemological tensions and contradictions, enabling richer portraits of organisational life to emerge (Lewis & Kelemen, 2002; Kelemen & Rumens, 2008). Other developments within organizational theory have also complicated the paradigm notion.

Poststructuralist and postmodern approaches that have formed the lynchpin of the linguistic turn within the social sciences, have questioned the desirability of paradigms as a classificatory framework. Decentring the subject through its prominence on discourse, poststructuralist and postmodern theories have shattered the idea of a stable fixed subject and the notion of scientific objectivity, leaving MOS scholars with a problem: how to classify a set of theories within a paradigmatic model they would seek to problematize and transcend. Hassard and Cox (2013) suggest such theories can be accommodated within a revised version of Burrell and Morgan (2013), not least for the possibilities of methodological innovation and triangulation they condition by remaining within and not external to Burrell and Morgan's (1979) paradigm framework.

Operating in a similar vein to Hassard and Cox (2013), we retain the paradigm notion, suggesting that it continues to hold value for MOS researchers. In particular, we suggest that the paradigm debate remains useful in this context, for it alerts us to the variety of

worldviews held by academics and practitioners who engage in collaborative research. Modes of collaborative research within MOS have regained importance and relevance in the context of the 'impact agenda' concept, which we outline in the next section.

The impact agenda in collaborative research

The persistence of the word 'impact' and its continuing significance within the current funding environment in, for example, the UK (via the Research Excellence Framework) and beyond (for example, The Excellence in Research in Australia and Evaluating Research in Context in the Netherlands) suggests that there is renewed emphasis on the need to build bridges between theory and practice and the pursuits of stronger collaborations between scholars and practitioners. Even those critical of 'impact' as a term, suggest that if re-framed in more sympathetic terms, the underlying sentiment of generating research that has meaningful relevance within wider society remains of clear value for scholars (Aguinis et al., 2014; Kelemen & Hamilton, 2015).

Discussions about research impact most commonly focus on research use, such as the impact of findings, how they are used, what people learn from them, how they influence others in their thinking, decisions and actions. We may consider also the impact of participation in research as a core aspect of research impact as is the case, for instance, in action research, as well as participatory and community based research. Kelemen, Phillips, James, & Moffat (2017) argue that one needs to be more proactive about what is left behind within the field of research so that others could benefit from, for instance, tangible legacies such as research outputs, assets, artefacts and resources that may be 'reusable'. Additionally, there can be intangible legacies such as changes in attitudes or culture, new connections or working relationships, new approaches or ideas that others might build on or practices they might adopt.

While the meaning of research impact remains a highly debated topic, there is some agreement that collaborative research that involves end users in the research process yields theories that are more relevant and useful (see Vo & Kelemen, 2017, for a comprehensive review of forms of collaborative research). For example, Gibbons, Limoges, Nowotny, Schwartzman, Scott, & Trow (1994) advanced 'Mode 2 Research' to bring together varied stakeholders including academics and practitioners in the quest to produce knowledge that serves practical purposes. Introduced to the management field by Tranfield and Starkey (1998) and Starkey and Madan (2001), as a possible strategy for bridging the academic-practitioner gap, Mode 2 management research calls for academics and practitioners to work in teams and focus on problem solving in particular environments. Here, inquiry is guided by consensus as to what counts as appropriate methodology, research questions and modes of engagement. The consensus is conditioned by the context of knowledge application and evolves with it. Research results must be not just meaningful and comprehensible to users but also relevant for achieving organizational and managerial goals and improving decision making. Mode 2 research focuses on concrete and particular processes and systems and downplays the need for theoretical contributions in the form of general, unifying principles (Gibbons et al., 1994).

Various other forms of collaborative research have been proposed in recent years such as engaged scholarship (van de Ven, 2007; van de Ven & Johnson, 2006), a collaborative form of inquiry in which academics and practitioners leverage their different perspectives and competencies to co-produce knowledge about a complex phenomenon that exists under conditions of uncertainty found in the world. While maintaining the differences between academic and practical knowledge, it aims to connect them via the process of arbitrage - a strategy of exploiting differences in the kinds of knowledge that scholars and practitioners

can contribute to a problem of interest. Researchers and practitioners collaborate across the basic stages of the research process, including formulating problems, building theory, designing research, and solving problems. Within this process, a range of possible activities are recommended, including soliciting advice and feedback from practitioners during the research process, sharing power in collaborative researcher - practitioner teams, and evaluating policies and programs (Van de Ven, 2007). In the same vein of thinking, Bartunek (2007) developed relational scholarship which goes beyond engaged scholarship by fostering a positive relationship between academics and practitioners, exploring the types of difficulties likely to be experienced in accomplishing these relationships, and providing some examples of structures that might help these relationships develop.

Elsewhere, drawing on pragmatic constructivism, Avenir and Cajaiba (2012) propose a dialogical model for developing academic knowledge for and from practice, with a focus on the issue of constructing research questions capable of enhancing research relevance for practice. The caveat here is that researchers engaging in a dialogical model tend to drift towards exchanges about pressing practical problems, and at times they get distracted from building conceptual knowledge. Co-production has also been advocated by Antonacopoulou (2010) as a means to stimulate practice-relevant scholarship as a foundation for delivering impact through powerful ideas.

Scholars have provided practical recommendations for facilitating academic-practitioner collaboration to improve the relevance of academic knowledge. Examples include the Network for Business Sustainability (Bansal et al., 2012), robust actor networks (Knights and Scarbrough, 2010), effective cross-profession collaboration (Amabile, Patterson, Mueller, Wojcik, Odomirok, Marsh, & Kramer, 2001) and generative dialogic encounters (Beech, MacIntosh, & MacLean, 2010). One observation is that these attempts tend to conflate relevance with impact, and assume that collaboration by definition leads to research that captures the needs and voices of end users and, therefore, to research which is more relevant and useful. Although current theories of impact (see Pettigrew, 2011) aim to bridge the divide between academia and practice and enhance the relevance of academic work, there is little consensus as to what constitutes impact. According to Antoncopouolous (2010, p.222), 'impact could be both a cause, consequence and context of research and it may be at outcome, output and process at the same time'. Accordingly, MOS could benefit from multiple conceptualisations of impact (Aguinis et al., 2014). Notably, one paradigm that supports this approach, both theoretically and methodologically, is American Pragmatism, which can be illustrated in particular by mobilising John Dewey's notion of democratic experimentalism.

American Pragmatism

According to Bartuneck and Rynes (2014, p.5), the majority of literature addressing the academic-practitioner gap posits a dichotomy between the rigour of academic research versus the perceived need for relevance on the part of practitioners. Although the overwhelming view is that rigour and relevance are mutually exclusive, some commentators suggest that rigour and relevance may not be opposed but rather complementary (Gulati, 2007). Hambrick (2007, p. 1344) notes that 'theories are not ends in themselves', but they must serve a practical purpose, a view that finds deep resonance with the pragmatist tradition. Pragmatist theorizing seeks the most plausible explanations to a problematic situation by using creativity and insight. What matters is that the resultant explanation is useful in some way to the community of practice affected by the issue at hand. According to Schultz (2010, p. 275), 'the virtue of the pragmatist tradition has been its ability to address issues in organizations that matter to people and point to different ways of organizing'.

At the height of its influence during the first three decades of the twentieth century, American pragmatism shaped many intellectual currents within politics, public administration, policy development, education and philosophy. This is not altogether remarkable given American pragmatism's conceptualisation of theory in terms of its practical consequences. Indeed, American pragmatism distanced itself from modes of intellectualising that proffered empty abstractions, preferring instead to link together theory and action so that one shapes the other continuously (Lorino, 2018; Kelemen, & Rumens, 2013). Despite its emphasis on understanding theory to help improve the human condition, American pragmatism struggled to maintain its influence at a time when logical positivism was rapidly colonising American philosophy (Baert, 2003). Our point of entry into American pragmatism is at the canon of classical American pragmatist tradition that was primarily shaped by work of Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914), William James (1842–1910), and John Dewey (1859–1952), amongst others. American pragmatism can be understood as a complex and assorted constellation of competing ideas, theories and perspectives. Indeed, this plurality is a striking feature of American pragmatism (Lorino, 2018). It is not our intention to detail particular versions of American pragmatist philosophy and their impact on MOS (e.g. Simpson, 2009). Instead, we restrict ourselves to providing selective insights into the work of John Dewey, whose ideas are particularly useful for aligning paradigm plurality more closely to the current agenda of impact within MOS.

John Dewey and democratic experimentalism

John Dewey was born in 1859 in Vermont. A graduate of the University of Vermont, he obtained a doctorate in philosophy from Johns Hopkins University. Widely regarded as one of the most controversial philosophy professors of his generation, he taught at a number of places such as University of Minnesota, University of Chicago, and Columbia University. His views on democracy and social reform were seen as revolutionary: he considered American democracy the best form of government but saw it challenged by the effects of the industrial revolution which had led to too much wealth in the hands of a few men. A prolific writer, he published over 300 articles and books spanning a variety of fields including philosophy, education, religion, ethics, logic and social reform. Despite the risk of over-simplification, we regard Dewey's democratic experimentalism as three fold.

First, Dewey conceives of knowledge not as an ensemble of absolute truths and certainties but as a series of practical acts judged by their consequences. All judgments are practical in as much as they originate from an incomplete or uncertain practical situation which is to be resolved. Thus the aim of knowledge is not to correspond to the world but to anticipate future experience, taking as its material experiences the present and the past. Furthermore, the truthfulness of knowledge is ultimately assessed by its usefulness. Second, his take on morality is not as obedient to universal principles but as a contingent, social and deeply human affair that has far reaching implications for what counts as useful knowledge, and therefore as 'truth'. The consequences of theory could not be appraised according to an *a priori* schema but only with respect to the values and norms of the community of practice from which theory emerges and is applied to. Third, Dewey sees the relationship between researchers and practitioners as necessarily democratic. In Dewey's ideal, experimental inquiry and democratic behaviour are intertwined (Gouinlock, 1990). In experimenting, researchers and practitioners put forth positions based on reasons, but they also go further to reconsider their claims in light of the reasons suggested by others. They not only learn from each other about ways of attaining their goals, but also are inspired to consider and reconsider their goals.

Democracy thus encourages and takes into account a broad range of evidence and perspectives. Dewey writes: 'democracy is concerned not with freaks or geniuses or heroes or divine leaders, but with associated individuals in which each by intercourse with others somehow makes the life of each more distinctive' (Dewey, 1919 [2000], pp. 46-47). In this form of knowledge co-production researchers and practitioners solve conflicts by discussing their values and interests and by constant re-examining of their values and interests in light of those of others. Co-production is more constructive than mere bargaining, where the end is reached through concessions and consensus. For it 'bring[s]… conflicts out into the open where their special claims can be seen and appraised, where they can be discussed and judged in the light of more inclusive interests than are represented by [any] of them separately' (Dewey, 1939[2008], p. 56). Pappas (2008) describes Dewey's approach to co-production as more than the taking, adding or subtracting of viewpoints to reach a decision: its ultimate goal is to generate a transformation of the views of those who are knowledge co-producers. For Dewey, experimental inquiry is not a formalized model, but a *lived* experimental activity (Dewey, 1925[1981]). It represents what the researchers and the practitioners do together, not what they assert as their findings. In this lived activity, they have to decide what to observe, what experiments to carry on, and what arguments and lines of reasoning to pursue.

Although Dewey applauded science for offering rigorous methods for solving problems and acquiring information about how the world works, science was not regarded as the ultimate or the only way to know the world. Dewey maintained that the process of inquiry began with and ended in experience. Thus, scientific inquiry is not a means or method to find the truth: it is merely the means/method to reduce doubt and restore clarity to an indeterminate situation. Moreover, knowing the world through experience is instrumental to changing it, and giving it a form that is more useful to one's purposes (see Vo & Kelemen, forthcoming). Accepting the centrality of experience in inquiry processes implies 'a willingness to question, investigate, and learn, a determination to search for clarity in discussion and evidence in argument, and a readiness to hear and respect the views of others, to consider alternatives thoroughly and impartially, and to communicate in a like manner in return' (Gouinlock, 1990, p. 267). It also entails an implicit agreement between researchers and practitioners that everyone remains equally vulnerable to the lessons of experience. This ensures that 'each individual shall have the opportunity for release, expression, fulfilment, of his distinctive capacities, and that the outcome shall further the establishment of a fund of shared values' (Dewey, 1932 [2008], p. 350). We see this as central to knowledge co-production for it provides 'the only possible opportunity for all to develop rich and diversified experience, while also securing continuous cooperative give and take and intercommunication' (Dewey, 1933 [2008], p. 101).

At this juncture, some pertinent observations need to be noted. First, issues of power and conflict that have often been at the core of paradigm debating remain on the side lines in Dewey's theorising. This is a criticism levelled repeatedly at Dewey's writing because he offers an overly optimistic account of power and conflict, in particular how it can be resolved at a micro-level through dialogue and communication without questioning the structural power asymmetries that exist in society. Second, Dewey's ideas about democratic experimentalism and the link we proposed here with paradigm thinking can be triggered only with reference to the version of the latter refuting the incommensurability thesis. As such, co-production can only be enacted by embracing the paradigm plurality thesis. Third, it cannot be overstated that, whereas paradigm theorizing focuses on ontology, epistemology and methodology as key traits of theories, the proposed Deweyan approach gives a central role to

the practical relevance of (co-)produced knowledge; specifically, co-produced knowledge that is not merely intended according to a managerial instrumental and performative logic.

Concluding discussion

John Dewey's democratic experimentalism provides us with a useful but partial lens for questioning the fundamentals of collaborative work and of knowledge co-production. Rather than repackaging them as yet another set of paradigmatic assumptions or translating them into specific tools and techniques (methodologies), we see them as a way of being in the world, a particular ethos that can only be learned by trial and error. In this context, and similar to Hassard and Cox (2013), the paradigm notion remains useful, for it alerts us to the variety of worldviews held by academics and practitioners who engage in collaborative research and to the consequences they may have upon carrying out co-production activities. Indeed, Dewey's democratic experimentalism gives extra weight to the paradigm plurality thesis by focusing on inquiry as a lived activity and as a form of knowledge co-production which can ensure that theories have consequences upon a multitude of parties.

Significantly, Dewey's philosophy does not provide a normative solution for how researchers and practitioners should behave. Instead it calls for a way of collaboration that 'accepts life and experience in all its uncertainty, mystery, doubt, and half-knowledge and turns that experience upon itself to deepen and intensify its own qualities' (Dewey, 1934[1987], p. 41). Although Dewey's work has had a profound impact on disciplines such as public administration, education, political sciences, religion and the arts, there has been a great deal of methodological resistance in the social sciences to his ideas of democratic knowledge creation (West, 1989). Critics have argued that his understanding of democracy is naïve and utopian. He has been criticized for his over hopeful view of how democracy can be achieved at a societal level, for not seeing power and politics as part and parcel of transformational change, whether locally enacted or on a wider scale. While we accept this criticism, we argue that his democratic experimentalism could provide a useful tool to re-engage with the paradigm plurality debate and align it more closely to the current agenda of impact.

Indeed, by acknowledging and self-reflecting on the assumptions and experiences of all the parties engaged in collaborative research, the conditions for a democratic dialogue are created to allow new relationships to be formed based on trust and mutual respect. This ensures that the theories and solutions co-created respond to a particular need as identified in the dialogue and impact is embodied in both the process of knowledge co-creation and its outcome. We see impact taking place at a micro, mezzo and macro level in terms of the consequences of the collaborative research process on the individual participants, their networks and the community at large. Research participants may change their individual beliefs and/or practices as a result of collaborative research, their networks may expand, become more diverse and/or more durable and finally, communities may benefit from the insights/theories that have been co-produced via improved services or problem solving.

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