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ABSTRACT

This essay describes benefits of the Learning Paradigm and discusses policy governance as an example of this paradigm. In education, the current dominant paradigm is known as the "Instruction Paradigm." According to this paradigm, instructors should serve to transfer information and offer some practice using this information in such a manner that allows acquisition of material. Information presented in the proper manner will bring about a "paradigm shift" on the part of the student. The problem with the Instruction Paradigm is that students are not able to give meaning successfully to new information because the information is outside their current realm of thinking. In contrast, the "Learning Paradigm" described by Robert Barr and John Tagg suggests that instructors should have a more hands-off approach. Instructors should create learning environments and situations that will elicit student self-learning and development of knowledge. In the Policy Governance model employed by many community college boards, the board members primarily develop the organizational mission and operating policies. The CEO is responsible for implementing policies and managing the organization. Policy Governance is a type of Learning Paradigm since the board (like the instructor), should oversee goals but allow the CEO (like the student) to develop solutions through independent actions. The appendix contains a comparison of the two educational paradigms from "Teaching to Learning: A New Paradigm for Undergraduate Education" (Barr and Tagg). (RDG)

POLICY GOVERNANCE -

AN EXAMPLE OF THE LEARNING PARADIGM IN ACTION

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Policy Governance - The Learning Paradigm In Action

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The title of this essay was intended to capture the reader's attention by putting in close association two ideas or concepts which would, normally, not be assumed to have any relationship at all. If, to the contrary, there is some relationship, it must be a consequence of either obscure features of one or both of the concepts or a relatively uncommon interpretation of the concepts. In either case, support for the assertion of a relationship requires, first, a careful discussion of each of the concepts.

This essay will begin with an examination of the Learning Paradigm which will entail, first, a look at what is meant by the term, "paradigm." That will be followed by a discussion of the features and characteristics of the Learning Paradigm, particularly those which distinguish it from the Instruction Paradigm. The examination will conclude by considering the conditions necessary to effect a paradigm shift.

The focus of the essay will then turn to Policy Governance which is a model that governing boards of not-for-profit institutions are encouraged to adopt in order to improve their performance. The model is not difficult to describe but one feature is so different from the conventional model that adoption of Policy Governance will require what amounts to a paradigm shift on the part of both the governing board and the CEO. Moreover, analysis of the Policy Governance Model from the perspective of the CEO also shows that the Model creates a "learning environment" for the CEO which has some implications for the job description for the CEO.

The Learning Paradigm

The starting point for a discussion of the Learning Paradigm has to be some definition of the term, "paradigm." The dictionary defines a paradigm as a model or a pattern. That would have been quite adequate prior to 1962 for it was a word seldom used. But in that year, "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions," [1] by Thomas Kuhn was first published. It was this book which introduced, "paradigm," and the phrase, "paradigm shift," into the popular language. Kuhn was an historian and a philosopher of science who was interested in how the science community, or particular portions of it, could undergo drastic transformations, i.e., revolutions, in thought and practice such as exemplified by the Ptolemy to Copernicus switch and the transition from Newtonian or classical physics to the world of quantum mechanics.

For Kuhn, the paradigm was the collection and structure of the basic assumptions, fundamental principles, and sets of accepted methods and practices underlying the operation of a community such as the researchers and scholars in a particular area of physics. The paradigm, according to Kuhn, serves to give meaning to information that becomes available to the group. It also identifies the kinds of questions which are worthy of investigation as well as the types of answers which are considered to be appropriate. Clearly, all members of the group would have to be operating with essentially the same paradigm if there was to be free-flowing communication between and among members of the group.

As important as the paradigm is to a given group, it is unlikely that more than a few, if any, of the group could articulate a description of the paradigm. Any efforts to do so would probably amount to little more than, "This is the way we do things around here." This is easy to understand, again according to Kuhn, because the paradigm developed out of efforts to make sense of information coming out of the experimental work in the area. An idea is suggested and begins to attract attention, not because it makes sense in its own right, but because it seems to work,i.e., it begins to make sense of the information. As it becomes more successful, it begins to identify, and then structure, the problems which need to be solved and it begins to define what successful solutions should look like. Consequently, the workers will be well versed in the problems which have been solved and theories which have been developed but may be quite unaware of some undergirding assumptions with which they are operating. Newcomers to the group are indoctrinated by watching others operate in the field and by studying the solutions to problems which have already been solved. Eventually, the individuals begin to wrestle with the problems which have not yet been solved and it is at this point that the individual is regarded as having joined the ranks of the researchers and scholars of the field.

Thomas Kuhn's efforts, out of background and interest, were aimed at trying to understand the formation of the paradigm which served to define and characterize a group in the science area and, at the same time, to serve as the glue

which held the group together. As such, there was little concern for the perspective of any single individual nor was there any effort to broaden the treatment to areas outside of science. In fact, again because of background and interest, there was little attention paid to the life science areas either. With the success, and popularity of the book, however, it was inevitable that the concepts would spread to other areas and, indeed, they have. Interestingly enough, the emphasis on the paradigm as a group phenomena has diminished while the major focus has been on the development of the paradigm for the individual.

With this shift in focus has come, also, an increased awareness of the importance of the paradigm in giving meaning to information. Information received by an individual, whether through direct observation by the senses or through communication with other individuals, is filtered and interpreted, and thereby given meaning, by the mental structure which the individual has developed. To illustrate what the last sentence was trying to say, consider the drawing below:

Clearly, there are two lines which could be two sides of a triangle if they were extended to their intersection point. If, now, someone says, "railroad tracks," the two lines will suddenly seem to be two parallel lines receding into the distance. Thus, the information being received by your eyes, which has not changed in any way, takes on an entirely different meaning. With that as a start, it does not take much reflection to realize that our perception of the world outside is not dependent on just the information received by the our senses. Rather, it is also strongly influenced, if not dominated, by the mental structures we have created in our minds to interpret, and thereby give meaning to, that information. We all may like to think that we deal with facts, but a fact is a meaningless piece of information and we don't deal with meaningless information willingly. We certainly do not communicate with meaningless information so if individuals are to communicate effectively, they must be interpreting information with nearly the same set of paradigms. Therefore, it must be possible to create in the mind of an individual new paradigms and that is what the phrase, "paradigm shift," refers to. Sometimes the new paradigms are expected to resemble, if not duplicate, the paradigms in someone else's mind in order that effective communication can take place. Sometimes, the paradigms are really new which is the situation when people are doing research.

Based on the preceding discussion, it should be obvious that the education of a student must involve, not only the acquisition of new information, but it must also bring about paradigm shifts. Achieving this goal is the major problem facing the teacher, particularly at the secondary and undergraduate level, and that is what the Learning Paradigm is all about.

The most definitive article on the Learning Paradigm appeared in the Nov/Dec, 1995 issue of "Change." [2] The authors, Robert Barr and John Tagg, presented an analysis of the Learning Paradigm by comparing and contrasting it with the Instruction Paradigm; currently the dominant paradigm in the educational community. This "compare and contrast" approach was carried out along six dimensions identified as follows: Mission and Purposes, Criteria for Success, Teaching/Learning Structures, Learning Theory, Productivity/Funding, and Nature of Roles. (See Appendix). The treatment was extensive and well done. It certainly provided the reader with a useful description and valuable perspective of the two paradigms and their differences in emphasis and focus.

As the author of this essay, however, I would propose that a rather deep-seated assumption should be added to the description of the Instruction Paradigm. The assumption is simply that the fundamental, and only, mode of learning is through personal experience and information transfer coupled with some practice in using the new information. The implication is that paradigm shifts on the part of the students, as well as the acquisition of new information, can both be brought about through this mode. The task for the teacher, then, is to find the right information, presented in the right format and in the right form, to bring about a paradigm shift in the mind of the student. Presumably, the information would be designed to give the students some idea of how they would be expected to change their way of thinking about an area of study.

It is precisely here that the Instruction Paradigm demonstrates a fatal flaw. If, indeed, one of the primary functions of the paradigm is to give meaning to incoming information, then how will the paradigm fulfill its function with information designed to describe a paradigm that is outside the realm of the current one. The inevitable conclusion is that the new

information will not be given any coherent meaning at all by the current paradigm and, therefore, it becomes virtually impossible for information transfer to bring about a significant paradigm shift.

An example of this difficulty can be found in the shift to the Learning Paradigm. Here it is the teachers who must undergo the paradigm shift on the issue of how to bring about a paradigm shift on the part of the student. The Instruction Paradigm assumes this can be done through information transfer while the Learning Paradigm assumes something else. The teacher, who is looking for information about what that something else might be, will find in the text of the Barr and Tagg article, the following statements:

"In the Learning Paradigm, on the other hand, a college's purpose is not to transfer knowledge but to create environments and experiences that bring students to discover and construct knowledge for themselves, to make students members of communities of learners that make discoveries and solve problems."

And further on,

"The Learning Paradigm frames learning holistically, recognizing that the chief agent in the process is the learner. Thus, students must be active discoverers and constructors of their own knowledge."

Most teachers operating under the conventional, "Instruction Paradigm," will assume that the idea that students should,"construct their own knowledge," to be so far off base as to be absurd, i.e., it makes no sense at all. It is possible that a science teacher might assume that the phrase, "..bring students to discover and construct knowledge for themselves,.." could mean that the students should repeat the experimental work which led to the discoveries by the original investigators in the area of study. In this way, the students would "discover" the knowledge. Indeed, this was seriously proposed in the decade of the sixties but when efforts were made to put the concept into practice the results were quite unsatisfactory. If the science teacher is aware of those failures, he or she must then conclude that the statements by Barr and Tagg indicate that the authors do not understand the situation at all, or else that the statements themselves make no sense at all - exactly as would be expected if the statements were a reflection of a real paradigm shift.

Obviously, anyone seeking to switch to the Learning Paradigm is going to have a real problem here. Since the idea that students should construct their own knowledge doesn't make any sense, how should one proceed? Barr and Tagg are not of much help here for the only further comment they make suggests that a learning environment should be created. But, again, what is a learning environment?

At this point, it might be prudent to return to the Kuhn book to see what he has to say about a group of scientists bringing about a paradigm shift for the group. The first point he makes is that groups do not choose to adopt a new paradigm. Instead, they begin to abandon the current paradigm because it no longer gives sensible meaning to new information that is becoming available. As the amount of information which doesn't fit mounts up, the search for something better begins to look more and more like the response to a crisis. As members of the group try any idea which comes to anyone's mind, ideas that seem progressively less reasonable as judged by the old paradigm, some idea when tried will produce results that look a little promising. This attracts attention, others begin variations, and finally the idea assumes a form that really does begin to work. It attracts more supporters and, rather quickly, actually, the group has a new paradigm. During this whole process, it is unlikely that any member of the group was thinking about the paradigm they were using. Rather, they were thinking about the information that didn't fit their patterns, that is, it didn't seem to make sense and, as a consequence, it was not useful.

To be sure, Kuhn was concerned with groups of scientists, but it seems reasonable to assume that what was true about the group might well be true about individuals in the group and, further, it might also be true about groups or individuals in areas other than the sciences. Assuming this to be the case, the learning environment would be a situation where the student is faced with the necessity of taking some sort of action but the information available doesn't seem to suggest any possibilities. The student might proceed by looking for some meaning that might be attached to the information which would make the information useful in deciding what action to take. If now the student has available a way telling whether the action taken was successful or not, the student will be able to decide whether the proposed meaning shows any promise. If so, the student can begin to vary the meaning to find the best one for that particular information. By similar, "try it and see," approaches on other information, some general rules for attaching meaning to information might be developed. But that is exactly what the paradigm is supposed to do, give meaning to information which makes the information useful. Thus, through this process, the student has actually developed a new paradigm.

In summary, it is my contention that the Learning Paradigm assumes that the students bring about their own paradigm shifts through their own, "try it and see," approach coupled with reflective thought. I recognize that the explanation of how this comes about seems vague and confusing but I think I have seen it happen with some of my own students. I also recognize that the explanation is not going to be very informative to any teacher who is not already in the market for something new to try but that, of course, was just the point being illustrated. Significant paradigm shifts just don't happen as a result of information transfer.

Recall now that one of the primary functions of a paradigm is to give meaning to information and thus make it useful. Useful information is what we call knowledge. The student who develops a new paradigm will see new meaning in old information which means that the old information will appear to the student to be new knowledge. It is in this sense that the student is said to, " create knowledge."

Returning now to the process of bringing about a paradigm shift, if this, "try it and see," process is to work, there are two conditions that must exist. First, the student cannot be penalized for trying an idea that doesn't work because the student must feel free to try anything that might come to mind. Second, the student must initiate all of the ideas that the student tries. Clearly, if these two conditions are to exist, the teacher must be out of the picture. In other words, the Learning Paradigm says the student must change their paradigms through their own efforts and their own reflective thought. The instructor should create the conditions that allow this to happen and then step away and do nothing. That is a hard thing to do for a teacher who is operating under the Instruction Paradigm. Allowing the student to flounder without trying to help is almost unthinkable and that is an indication of how unlikely it is that the teacher would choose to try the Learning Paradigm approach unless the teacher were desperate to find something which would work.

The learning environment, then, consists of a problem posed for the student which is just beyond the reach of the student's working knowledge. The student is provided with the criteria for evaluating the success of any trial which the student initiates and the student is also provided with assurances that no penalty will be attached to any trial which fails to show improvement over the current situation. To this must be added two more elements. The first is an agreed upon set of rules which serve to restrict the choices which may be subjected to trial. These may include restrictions on the library resources which may utilized or the individuals who may be consulted or any of a number of other restrictions.

The second element is a set of dates on which progress reports are to be submitted and a date on which the final report is to be submitted with the understanding that the final report will be subject to evaluation.

If these elements at first glance seem to constitute a situation rarely encountered, it should be noted that they represent a fair description of most independent student investigation projects in the sciences, and term papers in other areas of the academic arena. While almost everyone agrees that these are great learning experiences for the students, their shortcoming lies in the fact that they do little toward covering the course content specified in the syllabus. Whether or not the learning environment could be so structured that most of the course content might be "covered" is an important question but it is beyond the scope of this essay.

In summary, the central contention of this essay is that the essence of the Learning Paradigm is the creation of the learning environment as described in the previous discussion. All of the other characteristics and descriptions of the learning paradigm which are indicated in the Barr and Tagg article are important and necessary but they actually are consequences of the establishment of an effective learning environment. Conversely, all of those other characteristics and descriptions could be applied to the Instruction Paradigm with an appropriate change in orientation but without, at the same time, giving up information transfer as the fundamental approach to learning.

Policy Governance

Policy Governance is a model for governance which was developed by John Carver [3] for use by governing boards of not-for-profit organizations. It has enjoyed considerable acceptance among the Boards of Trustees of community colleges as well as other not-for-profit organizations throughout North America and is becoming recognized in Europe and Australia The model presumes that members of the governing board are unpaid and are in their position, not because of any particular expertise in the area of interest of the organization but, rather, in order to ensure that control of the organization remains in the hands of the supporting constituents. Thus, community college trustees, particularly those elected, are not assumed to be experts in the educational enterprise but are expected to represent the interests and concerns of the public which is supporting the community college.

Very briefly, the major features of the model are that the Board is responsible for developing the mission of the organization, that the Board hires and fires the President or CEO, that the Board is responsible for developing operating policies while the CEO is responsible for implementing those policies, and, finally, the Board is responsible for developing policies which restrict the activities of the CEO, i.e., the executive limitation policies. This certainly does not exhaust the list of features and descriptions which characterize the model but it is sufficient for the purposes of this essay.

Adoption of the model by a board has always been viewed as way of improving board performance. It is effective in identifying the responsibility of the board and of the individual members. It directly addresses the problem of how an individual who is not knowledgeable about education can be effective in governing an educational institution. It makes very clear the obligation of the board to interact with constituents of the public elements which support and sponsor the institution in order to ensure that the mission of the institution is consistent with the direction desired by those constituents, which is in contrast to the usual inclination of the board to avoid public exposure. Finally, it clearly defines the line where the responsibility for implementing the mission is transferred from the board to the CEO.

Rarely, however, is the model viewed from the perspective of the CEO but doing so reveals some interesting features. First, the board has developed a mission statement and probably a set of goals which better articulate and define the meaning of the mission statement. These are handed to the CEO who is then challenged to find ways to achieve the goals. Thus, the CEO has a problem to solve.

At the same time, the board provides the CEO with a set of executive limitations. These policies, in effect, define in general terms those actions which are unacceptable. For example, illegal behavior would surely be excluded as would be any action which demonstrates a lack of fiscal responsibility. The implication is that the CEO is free to initiate, without further approval, any action which is intended to make progress toward achieving the goals but which does not conflict with the limitations.

This last statement brings to full view the central issue involved with the adoption of the Policy Governance Model. That issue is the matter of control of the CEO. The usual model assumes that the board supervises the CEO which means that the CEO should develop proposed actions to achieve particular goals and these proposals are then submitted to the board for approval before they may be implemented. This, of course, places the board in the position of judging the validity of the proposal which requires some degree of expertise but which the board members probably do not have. A frequent result of this situation is one or more very bad decisions by the board.

The Policy Governance Model corrects this difficulty by eliminating the supervisory model of control and putting in its place the control through the mission statement and the limitation policies. For many board members, however, this is equivalent to removing all control and they feel that they are not, therefore, fulfilling their obligation with regard to the CEO. Indeed, making Policy Governance work for these board members will require that they undergo a very significant paradigm shift on the matter of control. As indicated in the previous section, paradigm shifts of this degree are probably not going to be brought about through information transfer, i.e., through short term workshops or even day-long retreats. In fact, this may well be one of the reasons some boards have run into trouble when they put the Policy Governance Model into operation.

The CEO must also undergo a paradigm shift although one not nearly so severe. The old supervisory mode of control put responsibility for decisions on the board. The CEO did not then have to assume responsibility for actions which failed to achieve the desired ends as long as that failure was due to a faulty proposal and not incompetent implementation. With Policy Governance, the CEO is free to make decisions but then is responsible for their results and that is difficult for some to accept.

Under Policy Governance the CEO is also expected to evaluate the results of such actions and to report to the board on what was done and how well it worked. Implicit in all of this must be the understanding that the CEO will not be penalized for the failure of a particular action undertaken. Clearly, the combination of all these conditions is precisely the set of conditions which were identified as necessary for the creation of a learning environment according to previous discussion of the Learning Paradigm.

Thus, Policy Governance would seem to require that the CEO be a learner rather than an individual with ready made solutions to problems facing the institution. Perhaps, too, exercising control through mission and limitation policies might be a viable model for all levels of managers. Such an idea may well have considerable potential.

Much more could be said about further implications and ramifications of the discussion up to this point. For the

purposes of this essay, however, it would seem that sufficient support has been provided for the assertion stated in the title, that, indeed, Policy Governance is an example of the Learning Paradigm in action.

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Published by: Association of Community College Trustees
1740 "N" Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036

THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

1. The student (learner) must be faced with a task, project, or problem which is just beyond his or her current working knowledge.

2. The student must be provided with some criteria of success in order that the student be able to evaluate the outcome of each trial.

3. The student must be assured that failure of any trial during the, "try it and see," phase will not be penalized arbitrarily, that is, over and above the loss of time and effort resulting from the failure.

4. The student must be provided with a list of those things which are NOT to be tried. This list might include library resources which are off limits or an indication of certain individuals who should not be contacted.

5. The student must be provided with a schedule of dates for the submission of progress reports and some instruction concerning the format of those reports.

6. The student must be provided with the date on which the final report is due and, again, some instruction on the appropriate format of that report.

7. Beyond that, the student should be left alone.

APPENDIX

From, "Teaching To Learning - A New Paradigm for Undergraduate Education." Robert Barr and John Tagg

CHART 1
COMPARING EDUCATIONAL PARADIGMS

The Instruction Paradigm	The Learning Paradigm
Mission and Purposes	
➤ Provide/deliver instruction	➤ Produce learning
➤ Transfer knowledge from faculty to students	➤ Elicit student discovery and construction of knowledge
➤ Offer courses and programs	➤ Create powerful learning environments
➤ Improve the quality of instruction	➤ Improve the quality of learning
➤ Achieve access for diverse students	➤ Achieve success for diverse students
Criteria for Success	
➤ Inputs, resources	➤ Learning and student-success outcomes
➤ Quality of entering students	➤ Quality of exiting students
➤ Curriculum development, expansion	➤ Learning technologies development, expansion
➤ Quantity and quality of resources	➤ Quantity and quality of outcomes
➤ Enrollment, revenue growth	➤ Aggregate learning growth, efficiency
➤ Quality of faculty, instruction	➤ Quality of students, learning
Teaching/Learning Structures	
➤ Atomistic; parts prior to whole	➤ Holistic; whole prior to parts
➤ Time held constant, learning varies	➤ Learning held constant, time varies
➤ 50-minute lecture, 3-unit course	➤ Learning environments
➤ Classes start/end at same time	➤ Environment ready when student is
➤ One teacher, one classroom	➤ Whatever learning experience works
➤ Independent disciplines, departments	➤ Cross discipline/department collaboration
➤ Covering material	➤ Specified learning results
➤ End-of-course assessment	➤ Pre/during/post assessments
➤ Grading within classes by instructors	➤ External evaluations of learning
➤ Private assessment	➤ Public assessment
➤ Degree equals accumulated credit hours	➤ Degree equals demonstrated knowledge and skills

The Instruction Paradigm	The Learning Paradigm
Learning Theory	
➤ Knowledge exists "out there"	➤ Knowledge exists in each person's mind and is shaped by individual experience
➤ Knowledge comes in "chunks" and "bits" delivered by instructors	➤ Knowledge is constructed, created, and "gotten"
➤ Learning is cumulative and linear	➤ Learning is a nesting and interacting of frameworks
➤ Fits the storehouse of knowledge metaphor	➤ Fits learning how to ride a bicycle metaphor
➤ Learning is teacher centered and controlled	➤ Learning is student centered and controlled
➤ "Live" teacher, "live" students required	➤ "Active" learner required, but not "live" teacher
➤ The classroom and learning are competitive and individualistic	➤ Learning environments and learning are cooperative, collaborative, and supportive
➤ Talent and ability are rare	➤ Talent and ability are abundant
Productivity/Funding	
➤ Definition of productivity: cost per hour of instruction per student	➤ Definition of productivity: cost per unit of learning per student
➤ Funding for hours of instruction	➤ Funding for learning outcomes
Nature of Roles	
➤ Faculty are primarily lecturers	➤ Faculty are primarily designers of learning methods and environments
➤ Faculty and students act independently and in isolation	➤ Faculty and students work in teams with each other and other staff
➤ Teachers classify and sort students	➤ Teachers develop every student's competencies and talents
➤ Staff serve/support faculty and the process of instruction	➤ All staff are educators who produce student learning and success
➤ Any expert can teach	➤ Empowering learning is challenging and complex
➤ Line governance; independent actors	➤ Shared governance; teamwork

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