



## Organization Science

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## Crossroads

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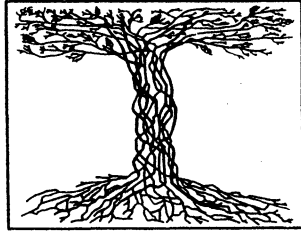
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# CROSSROADS

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It is 17 years since Burrell and Morgan's pathbreaking book, *Sociological Paradigms and Organizational Analysis*, was published by Heinemann. As Stan Deetz writes in the thoughtful essay that follows, "When Gibson Burrell and Gareth Morgan wrote *Sociological Paradigms* . . . I doubt that they, or anyone else, would have anticipated the widespread impact or resultant contestation that their four-paradigm grid would have." I know, personally, that it was a work that had a profound effect on my thinking and influenced significantly some of the research and teaching that I have done in subsequent years. Yet, as often happens to many important frameworks, its very power has led to a degree of reification that gives it a certainty in some quarters that is not warranted nor, I feel sure, was that status intended by its creators.

In time, influential frameworks can become as restraining and restrictive as those they originally challenged. It is productive, therefore, to examine critically their value. At the very least, such reflection and creative thinking might restore the original playfulness and vitality of a dominating model as it becomes seen, again, as but one thoughtful attempt to describe and understand a phenomenon. More importantly, we are sometimes presented through responses to a conceptual framework such as are provided in this essay, with a new, rich set of alternative perspectives through which we can continue our study and talk about our subject matter.

Deetz is not the first critique of Burrell and Morgan, nor is his the only framework proposed as an alternative to theirs. His perspective provides us with a contemporary and provocative frame of ideas that locates research differences in "... discursive moves and social relations rather than in procedures and individuals." He describes the dimensions that emerge from this set of assumptions, and he discusses the implications of this work for research and for dialogues between different groups of researchers. In the struggles for understanding and often for superiority among different groups of researchers, the ultimate point, Deetz points out "... is not in arguing it out to get it right, but to reclaim the suppressed tensions and conflicts among the many contemporary stakeholders to negotiate a life together based in appreciation of different and responsive decision making." This essay provides an important set of ideas to help us map pathways to such an end.

*Peter J. Frost*

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