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### The politics of policy anomalies: bricolage and the hermeneutics of paradigms

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## The politics of policy anomalies: bricolage and the hermeneutics of paradigms

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This article addresses three issues troubling predominant models of paradigmatic policy change and proposes an alternative perspective on the subject. The first issue pertains to the conflation of very specific, but difficult to operationalize, types of policy change in Peter Hall's standard three-order typology for understanding policy development. The second has to do with the view that exogenous phenomena, namely shifts in the locus of decision-making authority, are necessary for 'paradigmatic' policy change to occur. The third issue stems from Hall's strict adaptation of Thomas Kuhn's ideas concerning the (in)commensurability of succeeding paradigms. All three problems are shown to be derivative of the fact that policy change is more complex than often assumed. Instead of conceiving of policy change in definite or 'ordered' terms, it is argued that analytical focus should be directed toward the hermeneutic contest that unfolds as agents patch together ideas in the attempt to identify and explain the sources of policy problems. This largely discursive conflict takes place as agents vie to influence the structure of 'solution sets' in a process of 'policy bricolage'. The article advances a revised and more actor-centered formula for understanding types of paradigmatic and intra-paradigmatic policy change by developing a more precise understanding of different types or 'orders' of policy anomalies and the role anomaly definition plays in the construction of new paradigms.

**Keywords:** policy paradigms; policy bricolage; policy ideas; policy anomalies

### Introduction

Accounting for the role of ideas in processes of policy change has been a challenge for policy scientists since Hecló's epoch-defining work in the mid-1970s (Hecló 1974, 1979). Recognizing that policy-making may be just as much about learning and ideas as it is about interests and institutions gave rise to numerous empirical and conceptual puzzles that continue to be subjects of investigation for policy scientists (North 1990, Goldstein 1993, Blyth 1997, Bradford 1998).

While efforts to explain the influence that ideas have on policy-making have ranged from the 'macro' to the 'micro' level of analysis (Blyth 2003, Jacobs 2009, Schmidt 2010), the concept of 'paradigmatic' policy-making introduced in the early 1990s by figures such as Jane Jenson (1989), Peter Hall (1993) and John Campbell (1998) continues to be the most well-known method for reconciling ideas with interests and institutions. Peter Hall's (1990, 1993) concept of policy paradigms, in particular, remains the most influential and widely used means of theoretically integrating ideational influence with other well-known determinants of policy behavior (see Skogstad

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1998, Hodson and Mabbett 2009, Larsen and Andersen 2009, Baker 2013, Orenstein 2013).

Basing his model on Kuhn's (1962) earlier work in the sociology of science, Hall (1990, 1993) rendered the concept of paradigms operable in a policy-making setting by focusing on three specific policy components – settings, instruments and goals – differentiating between the types of change resulting from alterations to one or more of these elements. Despite the utility and intuitive appeal of Hall's framework, it has not been without its conceptual detractors, with some arguing that the model is curiously apolitical (Campbell 2002) while others challenge specific aspects, such as the three-part disaggregation of public policy that lies at its base (Howlett and Cashore 2007).

Surprisingly, rigorous tests of the paradigm model have been few and far between despite the fact that applications of Hall's framework have revealed discrepancies in the model's ability to conform to the historical reality of policy development (Howlett 1994, Coleman *et al.* 1996, Capano 2003, Kay 2007). In what have been the only two replications of Hall's (1990, 1993) study of twentieth century British monetary policy, Hay (2001) and Oliver and Pemberton (2004) arrived at considerably different conclusions than Hall concerning the nature and process of policy change in this instance. Their findings about the apparent inability of the Hall-inspired paradigm framework to fully capture the complexity of the empirical policy dynamics upon which it was founded are responsible for more attention now being paid to Hall's theoretical premises and mode of theory construction and conceptualization (Capano 2009, Howlett and Cashore 2009, Baumgartner 2013, Berman 2013, Blyth 2013).

Building on this research, the purpose of this article is to explore three main theoretical issues raised primarily by Oliver and Pemberton (2004) in their work and to propose a new method for explaining how ideational paradigms develop and impact the policy-making process. Following Carstensen (2011a, 2011b), this method considers policy-makers less as strategic thinkers and technical problem-solvers, and more as 'institutional bricoleurs' engaged in a set of hermeneutic and discursive practices of ideational and knowledge construction as they attempt to reconcile policy means and ends in the pursuit of policy goals (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1966, Campbell *et al.* 1997, Carstensen 2011a, 2011b, Johnson 2012, Lejano and Leong 2012). Specifically, the method introduced here focuses attention on the hermeneutics of policy anomalies; that is, upon the interpretive struggle that surrounds policy-makers as they both identify and react to discrepancies between policy expectations and outcomes.

### **Three problems in the current use of paradigm-change models in the policy sciences**

The first problem identified in the work based upon existing paradigmatic models of policy change concerns the conflation of what are actually distinct policy phenomena in the three-component understanding of public policy first put forward by Hall.<sup>1</sup> This three-part notion of policy has been criticized for artificially limiting the possible types of policy change and thus for consequently failing to provide a thorough account of policy dynamics (Cashore and Howlett 2007). Overcoming this issue is a critical step in improving the operationalization of policy change, but is an enterprise taken seriously by only a limited number of policy scholars (see, for example, Rueschemeyer 2006). As Skogstad and Schmidt (2011) point out, many policy scholars are content simply to make reference to paradigms for purely heuristic purposes or as otherwise under-operationalized determinants of policy outcomes without much regard for their empirical or conceptual origins and veracity.

The second problem involves Hall's view that a change in the locus of decision-making authority following exogenous shocks is a necessary precondition for paradigmatic change to occur (Hall 1990, p. 61, 1993, p. 280). This theme is consistent with much of the literature on policy dynamics in general (Sabatier 1988, Baumgartner and Jones 2002), but is an assumption that has been frequently challenged by accounts of endogenously propagated paradigm change (cf. Rose 1993, Coleman *et al.* 1996, Dolowitz and Marsh 1996, Howlett and Cashore 2009, Larsen and Andersen 2009). While Hall (1990, 1993) suggested that new ideas must be championed by influential politicians for meaningful change to occur, doubt has also been cast on this view by subsequent studies that highlight the role played by administrative actors in fomenting change (e.g., Baker 2013). Discrepancies such as these stem partly from the misspecification of relevant actors as well as from the fact that very few scholars have explored, in an operative sense, the cognitive processes that yield policy change (cf. Schmidt 2010, Considine 2012, Considine *et al.* 2014).

The third issue uncovered by Oliver and Pemberton, though one whose theoretical significance does not receive discussion by them, relates to their suggestion that paradigms may overlap, indicating a tacit abandonment of the Kuhnian incommensurability thesis that is characteristic of Hall's work (see Phillips 1975, Weaver and Gioia 1994, Daigneault 2014). Oliver and Pemberton in particular stress that 'partial' acceptance and rejection of new policy goals was a common outcome of political and administrative 'battles' to institutionalize new paradigmatic frameworks in the UK case Hall first examined in developing his own model (Oliver and Pemberton 2004, p. 419). This view is consistent with the recent literature emphasizing the significance of processes such as policy layering, conversion and drift in affecting policy change (Thelen 2004, Hacker 2005, Béland 2007, Kern and Howlett 2009). However, it is based on the idea of the continual coexistence of multiple sets of policy ideas and practices over relatively long periods of time and, as such, is anathema to the idea put forward by Hall that paradigmatic policy shifts are tantamount to policy 'gestalt-switches' (Hall 1990, p. 59, 1993, p. 279). Related to their implicit abandonment of the incommensurability thesis, paradigm change is not considered by Oliver and Pemberton to be absolute as it was for Kuhn and Hall. While Hall viewed second- and third-order change as constitutive of changes to all lower order elements of policy, Oliver and Pemberton's logic of iterative intra-paradigmatic cycling suggests that change to paradigmatic goals may occur independently of changes to instruments and their settings and that all of these aspects of change may be reversible (cf. Hay 2001, Howlett 2009, Baker 2013, Daigneault 2014).

### ***The source of problems and paradoxes in Hall's Kuhnian foundations***

The sources of these three problematic aspects of contemporary thinking on paradigm change can be traced to Hall's adoption of most aspects of Kuhn's (1962) sociohistorical theory of the development of scientific paradigms. Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* provided the theoretical means for addressing many of the questions about policy dynamics in which Hall and other policy scientists were interested. It did this by demonstrating that processes of ostensibly value-free puzzling in scientific domains are significantly mediated by sociological factors such as power, career and reputational considerations, rendering judgments of the accuracy and significance of empirical observations contingent upon the outcome of struggles over the construction of metatheories of causation (Kuhn 1962, pp. 92–94, Latour and Woolgar 1986, Stone 1989b).

Hall seized upon these Kuhnian parallels, situating his discussion of policy paradigms in terms of Hecló's earlier questions about the relative importance of 'puzzling' versus 'powering' in policy development (cf. Hecló 1974, Krasner 1984, Evans *et al.* 1985, Hall 1993, pp. 305–306). For Hall, the reason that episodes of large-scale 'social learning' mooted by Hecló rarely occur was explained by Kuhn's idea that such episodes appear only in transitions between operative paradigms, when a tightly crystallized coalition is unable to dominate the discourse articulating policy goals and the appropriate means of achieving them, allowing room for alternative visions to flourish (see Sabatier 1988).

Though Kuhn's early epistemological relativism was blunted in his subsequent work that elevated the significance of the role played by empirical observation in driving processes of scientific change (Kuhn 1982, Nickles 2002), his initial 1962 conceptualization of paradigms was the one maintained by Hall in his translation of the paradigm concept into terms compatible with the policy sciences. Hall's formulation is predicated on the early Kuhnian assumption that:

policymakers customarily work within a framework of ideas and standards that specifies not only the goals of policy and the instruments that can be used to attain them, but also the very nature of the problems they are meant to be addressing. Like a *Gestalt*, this framework is embedded in the very terminology through which policymakers communicate about their work, and it is influential precisely because so much of it is taken for granted and unamenable to scrutiny as a whole. (Hall 1993, p. 279, italics in original)

It is evident in the above passage that for Hall policy means and ends are connected according to the epistemology of a given paradigm. Policy problems, and therefore problem-solutions, are viewed through perceptual frames that are paradigm contingent and paradigm exclusive: major policy change thus requires a change in frame or paradigm. This insight is linked to a theory of policy dynamics (i.e., patterns of stability and change) in that it suggests that as long as the definition of a given problem and its solution remains constant, policies will be stable. Changes to existing solutions (changes to policy instruments and instrument settings in Hall's terms) are thus described as constitutive of incremental policy-making, a style of policy-making which characterizes intra-paradigmatic dynamics (cf. Lindblom 1959, Hall 1993, p. 277, Howlett and Migone 2011), while changes that involve the articulation of new policy problems and the formulation of new accompanying solutions are understood to be paradigmatic in nature.

Continuing in the Kuhnian tradition, Hall (1993, p. 280) further theorized that, while incremental first- and second-order change (change within a paradigm) routinely occurred endogenously, wholesale paradigm change would typically be prompted by exogenous events that destabilized the existing consensus. The first type of exogenous event identified by Hall involved what Kuhn termed 'anomalies' or discrepancies occurring between expected and actual outcomes of scientific or policy experimentation. The second type of exogenous event is one in which the community of decision-makers itself changes (Merton 1979). This second type of exogenous event was linked by Kuhn to the first in so far as anomalies were seen to discredit and delegitimize scientific elites and provide room for adherents of new ideas to attain positions of influence. It is the adoption of this Kuhnian notion of anomalies, their origins and their role in policy dynamics that has proven problematic in studies of paradigmatic change undertaken since Hall's development of the concept in the early 1990s. This is because discrediting a policy paradigm is a much more contested and interpretive process than the one which lies behind scientific refutation (Kuhn 1962, Jobert 1989, Sural 2000).

### Oliver and Pemberton's alternative model: specification and problems

In their replication of Hall's study, Oliver and Pemberton (2004) were less concerned with developing or refining Kuhnian analogies and more interested in assessing the accuracy of Hall's model given the empirics of the historical development of British economic policy over the past 80 years. Their findings are significant, particularly with respect to the alterations they suggest should be made to existing treatments of policy paradigms.

Oliver and Pemberton ultimately repudiated the strong version of the incommensurability thesis adopted by Hall with their observation that two paradigms were able to coexist in UK economic policy for some length of time. Further, they suggest that such paradigms are not incommensurable but often may be joined in synthesis (Palier 2005, Kay 2007). This revised model also moots the possibility of a slight rather than wholesale paradigm shift if there is no clear winner in the administrative struggles they argued were critical to the consolidation of paradigmatic policy change in the case they examined (see also Coleman *et al.* 1996, Baker 2013). This is apparent in their concession that 'the evidence of our analysis is that such change can result in alterations to the prevailing framework of policy that, while insufficient to justify the term "paradigm shift," are certainly much more significant than the "second order change" of Hall's typology' (Oliver and Pemberton 2004, p. 436, cf. Skogstad 2005). Oliver and Pemberton also demonstrate that 'third order' change did in fact materialize endogenously, rather than exogenously, in at least three instances in the case of British macroeconomic policy since 1930.<sup>2</sup>

In consolidating these conceptual departures from Hall, Oliver and Pemberton make two important amendments to existing models of paradigm change and stability. First, they allow for significant change to be accomplished internally, so that even when new paradigmatic ideas are developed elsewhere, these ideas need not be imposed from without by a shift in the locus decision-making authority or a change of decision-making venue (Baumgartner and Jones 1991).<sup>3</sup> Second, whereas, following Kuhn's lead, alternatives are paradigmatically discrete for Hall, this is not the case for Oliver and Pemberton, who instead allude to ideational bargaining as an important characteristic of contests to institutionalize alternative policy trajectories.

These modifications to Hall's model of paradigmatic change processes are depicted in box 6 and path B in Figure 1. These amendments represent a considerable departure from Hall since the processes leading to paradigm change following 'third order' anomalies are not linear or deterministic as they were for Hall, but are rather dependent upon experts' renditions of an alternative paradigm (see also Surel 2000, pp. 508–509). The possibility of defeat in such battles to institutionalize ideas also raises the possibility that many elements of the existing paradigm may be retained and not replaced.

These findings have important implications for the understanding of paradigmatic change processes in the policy sciences. The most significant consequence of these revisions to Hall's work is that policy change, and especially paradigmatic policy change, may be much less sudden and all-encompassing than originally surmised, reflecting instead a more gradual, hermeneutic and discourse-intensive activity (Ricoeur 1981, Gadamer 1989, Lejano and Leong 2012). Specifically, Oliver and Pemberton's allusion to cross-paradigm learning and paradigmatic syntheses raise several questions that must be addressed about the nature and interpretation of policy anomalies and their impact on policy actors and their activities.

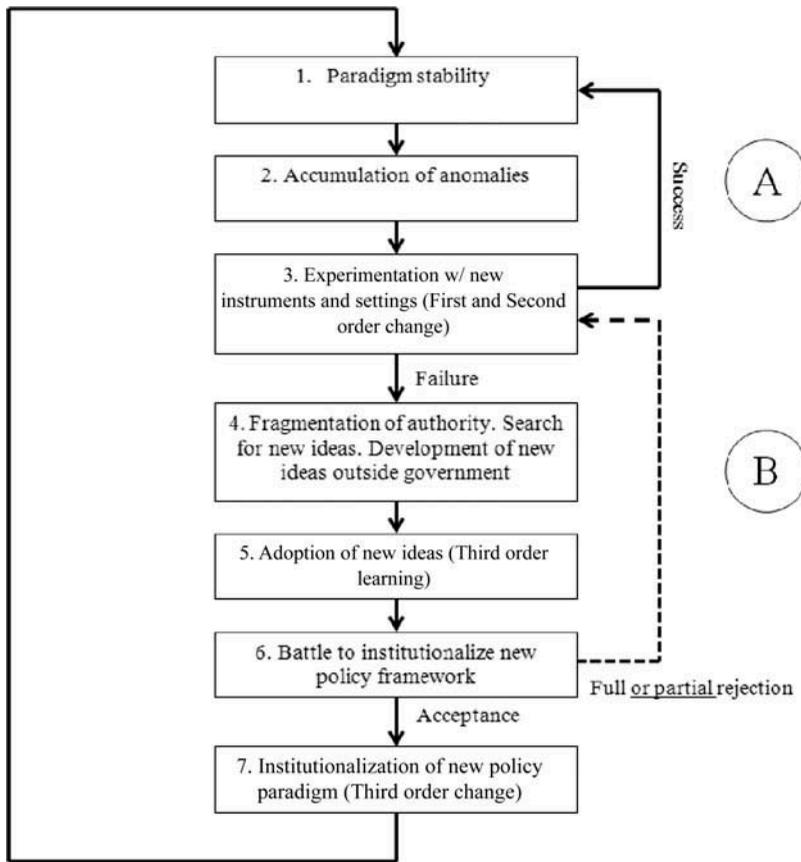


Figure 1. Oliver and Pemberton’s evolutionary iterative framework. Source: Adapted from Oliver and Pemberton (2004).

**Analysis and critique of Oliver and Pemberton’s findings: the hermeneutics of paradigms and paradigmatic change**

Oliver and Pemberton’s reformulation is an improvement upon Hall’s original ideas in so far as it avoids the central problems of exogeneity and incommensurability Hall inherited from too closely relying upon Kuhn’s ideas and presuppositions, but it has its own difficulties linking policy-change processes to specific policy components. For example, how are we now to know which order of change follows from a partial rejection of a new paradigm? A related and very significant problem in need of clarification also now has to do with what exactly constitutes a paradigm, as Hall’s original use of the term was significantly eroded by Oliver and Pemberton’s modifications (cf. Field 1973, Kordig 1973).

***A reconfigured model of paradigmatic bricolage: solution sets, policy gatekeepers, and the construction of policy anomalies***

Investigating what key policy actors do in processes of paradigm formation and replacement is a good place to begin revising existing models since both Hall and Oliver and

Pemberton stress the importance of ideas rather than agents in their models. While his discussion of state-structuralism suggested that the state is not a neutral transmitter of policy preferences as it is assumed to be pluralist accounts, Hall (1993) also reminded us that the state is not as autonomous as state-centric theorists might have it (cf. Evans *et al.* 1985). In the era of decentralized governance, it would be erroneous to assume that influential actors always or even typically represent state authority. The large literature on epistemic communities informs us that the accumulation of expertise is a common means for non-state actors to gain legitimacy (Haas 1989, Jenkins-Smith and Barke 1993).

In reconceptualizing paradigms in these terms, it is useful to turn to the similar concept of ‘solution sets’ put forward by Jones and Bachelor (1993) in their work on community-level policy-making. Solution sets are schemas and causal stories which encompass cognitive resources which policy-makers draw upon in formulating their positions (Stone 1989b, Nadkarni and Shenoy 2001, Jacobs 2011). Jones and Bachelor argue these are means–ends policy configurations intentionally made congruent with the current problems facing policy actors. The task in understanding paradigmatic policy-making and change is therefore to account for political influence in what is, generally speaking, solutions-oriented policy-making. Here it is important to note that whatever monopolies of expertise might exist, not all subsystem actors are equally positioned to affect changes to dominant solution sets. For this reason, we define the agents who possess institutional authority to strongly influence or otherwise make binding decisions as ‘gatekeepers’.<sup>4</sup> These actors not only influence the direction that solution set formation takes, but may also forbid these and other solutions from taking on specific tones or content.<sup>5</sup>

These solution sets approximate Hall’s conception of paradigms in the sense that solution sets possess a regime structure but differ from paradigms in the sense that they are definitionally susceptible to cross-paradigm bricolage and synthesis in the effort to overcome or resolve apparent anomalies. Bachelor (1994), for example, finds that policy anomalies can threaten the political position of dominant coalitions, but that this threat can be defused if the actors involved are willing to amend their solution sets to a degree deemed satisfactory by important observers.<sup>6</sup> Faced with this conundrum, the most predictable outcome is one whereby decision-makers will attempt to make necessary adjustments with as few modifications to the policy regime as possible. While this is consonant with Hall’s thoughts on the prevalence of first- and second-order adjustments, policy regimes are often characterized by significant investment in delivery systems, in which case the re-articulation of goals is often the least costly method by which previously disenfranchised groups may be placated (Baker 2013). In this sense, the layering of otherwise incongruous policies on top of one another can be seen to be closely related to logics of co-optation and compromise which lie behind process such as layering or drift (Thelen 2004).

Recognizing that anomalies are constructs, our approach takes seriously Carstensen’s (2011a) argument that policy proposals are not bound by dominant, interlocking and coherent sets of ideas, but are rather the products of ideational ‘bricolage’ in which policy-makers cobble together paradigms in a disjointed process of ideational construction. Like processes of bricolage found in anthropological studies (Lévi-Strauss 1966), policy bricolage leaves in place many loose logical ends and hanging threads, discordances and outright contradictions. As Carstensen (2011a, p. 147) puts it ‘actors face a complex array of challenges in getting their ideas to the top of the policy agenda, which makes it all the more important to act pragmatically, putting ideas together that may not be logically compatible but rather answer political and cultural logics’.

Limitations of time, energy and resources, as well as institutional bottlenecks all constrain policy-makers at various stages in the overall policy process (Jones and Baumgartner 2005) and make the nature of ideational bricolage much more problematic or interpretivist than commonly viewed through a Hallsian or Kuhnian lens. This view of the hermeneutics of paradigm construction suggests that influential actors will be particularly suited to adjust anomalous observations to fit their preferred solution sets and policy schemas. Consistent with Kuhn, gatekeepers are considered to be politically motivated (cf. Latour and Woolgar 1986), but since gatekeepers' preferences may be determined by any number of considerations, including norm-adherence and the pursuit of policy preferences, their interests should not be assumed *a priori*.<sup>7</sup>

### *The politics of anomalies*

A major question, however, remains surrounding how gatekeepers and other participants involved in the assessment of policy problems and solutions come to view changes to specific elements of policy as being either necessary or desirable. Here a critical component of paradigmatic change processes requiring further elaboration is the manner in which actors perceive and interpret policy anomalies, a process taken largely for granted in earlier models.

While anomalies contribute to the perception and definition of policy problems, it is important to stress that anomalies are not synonymous with problems. Anomalies are rather metrics that assist in diagnosing problems, and are therefore analogous to medical symptoms, the monitoring of which lends policy-makers insight into the nature of an ailment and provide direction as to which may or may not be working, which may be producing unwanted side-effects and which alternative may be more effective.<sup>8</sup> It is precisely along these latter lines that both neo-classical economists and public choice theorists argued, for example, that due to the incidence of government failure, macro-economic policy 'cures' put in place in fiscal policy regimes such as that found in the UK in the 1960s and 1970s were often 'worse than the disease' they were expected to cure.

The most significant implication of this approach to understanding paradigmatic policy processes is that it reorients the focus of analysis toward policy anomalies and their discursive articulation and construction, rather than toward the analysis of policy ideas and tools alone. All anomalies are subject to at least some degree of social construction; and understanding that anomalies are not self-evident but rather subject to a process of interpretation is central to understanding how they affect processes of ideational and paradigmatic change (Sherman *et al.* 2000).

This insight can be advanced further by recalling Campbell's (2002) conceptual distinction between abstract and programmatic ideas. A revised typology of policy anomalies would include at least four different types of anomalies corresponding to the four elements of policy outlined by successors to Hall (see Cashore and Howlett 2007).<sup>9</sup> That is, one category of anomalies can be associated with instrument settings, one with the choice of instruments themselves, one with programmatic objectives and one with abstract societal goals.

A revised sequence for understanding the general processes of paradigmatic policy change can be constructed on these principles and is illustrated in Figure 2. The most consequential amendment to Hall's conventional framework is introduced in the middle-stage, where hermeneutic contests between policy actors over the nature and significance of anomalies occur. This stage incorporates (and at least partially endogenizes) both the agents and mechanisms ultimately responsible for policy change, and allows for more

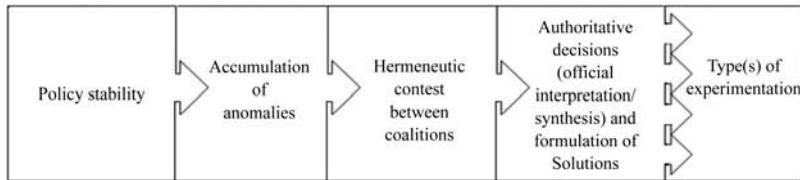


Figure 2. An amended process of policy change.

potential outcomes than simply the success or failure of paradigm transition (cf. Toulmin 1972). The process of actually formulating policy that follows these stages involves decision-makers' interpretation and re-articulation of policy anomalies, their significance in terms of the continued utility of existing definitions of policy problems and the merits of proposals to resolve them.<sup>10</sup> As suggested by Thomas (2001), it is during this process that the coherence of policy ideas and paradigmatic tenets are reinforced, weakened or layered onto one another in a process of synthesis rather than declaration.

While the processes yielding specific combinations of means- and ends-related components are deliberative according to the model, why specific actors decide to take the positions they take, make the arguments that they do and align with particular coalitions or issue groups relies upon those actors' perceptions of the political, economic and technical feasibility of a given group's proposals, given their prior assessment of the seriousness of observed perceived or reported anomalies (Meltzer 1972, Majone 1975, Hall 1989, May 2005). Deliberative processes allow and encourage coalition formation in this effort, by coupling previously marginalized actors' solution sets to current problems, and through coalition defection and 'bandwagoning' (Kingdon 1984, Ikenberry 1990, Zafonte and Sabatier 2004). There are limits to this kind of constructivism, however. As Hall (1990, 1993) reminds us, the convincingness of policy proposals will be highly contingent upon how accurately they address perceived problems, especially in instances where deliberation is subject to public and media scrutiny, albeit according to what is an intersubjective definition of accuracy and necessity in the assessment of existing policy efforts and the level of anomalous results they entail (Majone 1989, Teisman 2000).

Differing interpretations of these policy contexts during deliberation suggest that any coherence between preferred policy means and preferred policy ends will often be precariously maintained (Kern and Howlett 2009). The implication here is not only that processes of (recurrent) formulation will be experiment-oriented, as both Hall and Oliver and Pemberton argued, but that the micro-processes within bouts of policy formulation allow for unusual and cross-paradigm pairing of means- and end-related components, contributing to incidences of layering, conversion and drift that may occur rapidly or come about gradually over time (Thelen 2004, Hacker 2005, Skogstad 2005, Béland 2007, Kay 2007, Carstensen 2011b). The result is that policies will often take the form of solutions sets that embody contradictions and conflicts within them and will appear much less 'rational' or logical than would be expected in a world of Hallsian-Kuhnian paradigms.

### Discussion: the politics of anomalies and the role of institutional gatekeepers therein

Given that this analysis has significantly departed from the Kuhnian-inspired notion that paradigms are logical constructions which drive policy in specific and preordained directions, one might question whether it is appropriate to continue to speak of paradigms

at all in an anomaly-centered model. The answer to this question is a qualified yes, though it is probably more accurate to speak of paradigms in terms of their cogency rather than their precision or causality. A focus on anomalies and their policy discourses necessitates a closer examination of the rationales given by stakeholders and authorities to legitimate the programs for which they advocate. Although the durability and very existence of ideational cores has been questioned by Carstensen (2010), policy rationales – the ends-related elements of public policies contained within solution sets – do possess something of a paradigmatic or theoretical core so long as one is careful to distinguish the more pronounced bricolage of programmatic ideas from the more abstract elements of policy which are inherently more susceptible to a logical or instrumental form of analysis and development (Kuhn 1962, Lakatos 1968, Barthes and Duisit 1975, Campbell 2002).<sup>11</sup> The core of a policy idea can be conceived of as the policy's purpose, or what Hall referred to as a policy's 'goals', while its achievement in practice depends upon the coherence of the structure linking together its means- and ends-related component parts.<sup>12</sup>

Introducing the idea of anomaly contestation into paradigmatic models abandons assumptions about linearity and cumulative change that had been maintained in most earlier models, including even Oliver and Pemberton's revised sequence of paradigmatic transformation laid out in Figure 1. As Simeon (1976, p. 573) pointed out:

It might be objected that the stress on ideas implies an unrealistic view of the policy process, seeing it as explicitly goal-orientated, in which some group of decision-makers with clear ideological purposes simply promotes policies that conform to its ideology. A contrasting view sees the policy process as much more chaotic and incoherent, with policy the result of the clash of many interests in which no central thread is discernible. This viewpoint also stresses the importance of unanticipated consequences, the possibility of people agreeing on policy even though they disagree on final ends, and so on.

The framework outlined in Figure 3 captures how anomaly interpretation and contestation yields the sort of nonlinear and multi-iterative process characteristic of policy bricolage. As this figure shows, the possible permutations and iterations of policy-making are less linear and systematic than those proposed by Hall and by Oliver and Pemberton. The horizontal axis from  $time_0$  to  $time_4$  is indicative of a linear sequence similar to that described by Hall. Backward iterative paths above the axis, however, highlight the common tendency toward iterative looping back to previous or existent policy designs as a result of efforts made by gatekeepers to correct anomalies while retaining the basic shape and structure of a policy (Hay 2001, Oliver and Pemberton 2004, Cashore and Howlett 2007). Such backward iterations may occur in spite of prior experimentation with, and even the partial institutionalization of, higher order changes in circumstances in which experimentation with new goals are argued to have been unsuccessful in practice or to have otherwise failed to gain total institutionalization. As discussed above, this latter situation introduces considerable complexity into ideational policy-making since it opens up the possibility that competing paradigms may operate in tandem. The addition of forward iterative paths below the axis also accounts for experimentation with programmatic or goals-related problem-solutions prior or even simultaneously to experimentation with new instruments or settings.

### **Conclusion: paradigmatic change and the hermeneutics of policy anomalies**

Hall (1990, 1993) can be credited with moving the understanding of policy dynamics and the role played by policy ideas a great distance forward. His development of the policy

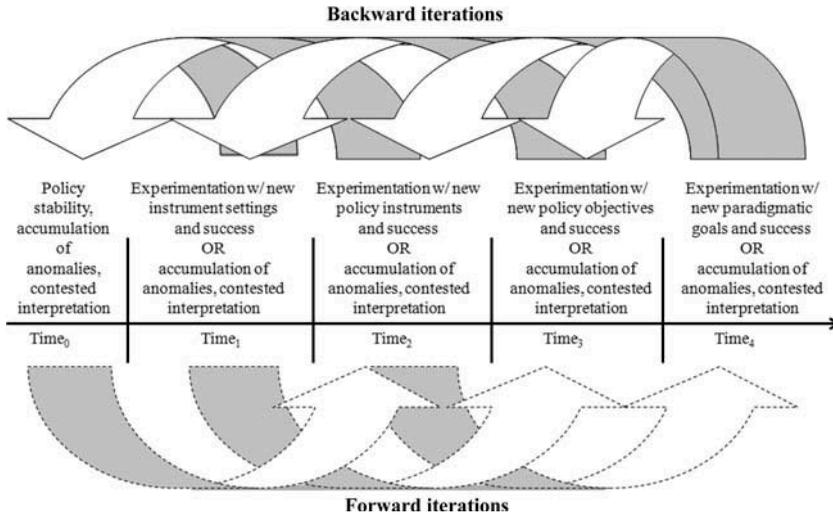


Figure 3. Taxonomy of possible processes toward 'paradigmatic' change.

paradigms brought with it several major contributions to the understanding of policy processes and the role of ideas, actors and institutions in processes of policy change. Rather than pitting ideational variables against material or institutional factors as previous work had tended to do (Schulman 1988), Hall's framework helped to explain problems that had plagued policy scholars for decades, such as how policy could be both change oriented and continuous as well as both incremental and revolutionary (Durant and Diehl 1989). This work was furthermore methodologically groundbreaking in its ability to render the constituent elements of policy more transparent by linking them to specific types of policy change.

In spite of these achievements, the areas in which Hall's framework gained its greatest heuristic purchase are also those in which subsequent studies showed that it lacked explanatory specificity (Blyth 2013). Interestingly, though subsequent studies replicating Hall's analysis of long-term change in British macroeconomic policy have brought these concerns to the fore, there have been few calls for a reformulation of the policy paradigms concept (cf. Schmidt 2011). As we have shown in the preceding analysis, however paradigmatic frameworks based on Kuhn's rigid model of scientific discovery suffer from several epistemological problems that necessitate their amendment or supersession.

That is the process of British macroeconomic reform in the twentieth century, far from being a case of straight-forward paradigmatic change, is replete with paradigmatic incongruencies that can only begin to be explained using a sequential model like the one outlined in Figure 1. Although Oliver and Pemberton describe the relevant processes they found in the UK case to be iterative and evolutionary according to a logic of experimentation, there are clear incidences of gatekeeper and stakeholder bricolage in the case much better portrayed by the multiple feedback loops outlined in Figure 3. For example, aside from Treasury officials' penchant for borrowing from pre-Keynesian economists in the initial construction of the Keynesian paradigm, a shift in the late 1960s toward what commentators describe as 'Keynesianism-plus' involved the abandonment of layered policy goals that were seen as complementary to the logic of the paradigm only one decade prior.<sup>13</sup>

Despite chaotic appearances, the sequence laid out in [Figure 3](#) should not be taken to suggest that policy development proceeds in a random inter-paradigmatic sequence of iterative trials between different combinations of settings, instruments, objectives and goals or in some kind of ‘garbage-can’-like process (Cohen *et al.* 1972, Mucciaroni 1992). Rather, the multi-iterative sequence suggests that regardless of the level of logical or ideological coherence between policy elements, the authoritative actors who ultimately decide upon the constituent makeup of policy do so purposefully but in a process of hermeneutic bricolage, focusing on the articulation and selling of policy anomalies of different kinds; whether their reasoning involves the persuasiveness, availability or feasibility of ideas, institutional constraints or material or electoral considerations.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the literature on policy paradigms paying little analytical attention thus far to such outcomes and processes, our aim has been to demonstrate that bouts of hermeneutic contest over the definition of policy anomalies are important events in processes of policy development that models of paradigmatic change ought to account for more fully. While it is well-established that decision-makers use political influence to structure policy outcomes, bringing about significant change or ensuring policy continuity, we have suggested that these actors control the policy process by behaving as bricoleurs and ideational gatekeepers who adapt evidence, either positively or negatively, to conform to personal preferences, amend existing solution sets or complement cognitive schemas, often resulting in a lack of coherence and consistency in either goals or means which is antithetical to a Hallsian-Kuhnian inspired notion of a policy paradigm.

In addressing these issues, the overall argument of this article has been that significant policy change is often much less logical in a paradigmatic sense than has traditionally been assumed, being instead much more interpretive in nature. Bringing the study of the manner in which policy-makers interpret reality to the theoretical forefront, we have argued that actor perceptions of policy anomalies serve as the key variables explaining paradigmatic and inter-paradigmatic change processes. Building on insights gleaned from Carstensen (2011a) and Thomas (2001), the specific institutional settings in which policy deliberation and bricolage takes place can be conceived of as formulation spaces where interactions between individuals and coalitions leads to ideational concessions rather than inevitably to the institutionalization of paradigmatically pure policies. These concessions frequently yield a mismatch between policy ends and the appropriate means of achieving them, contributing to policy layering, conversion or drift, resulting in contradictory and conflictual policies (Jones and Bachelor 1993, Béland 2007, Kay 2007, Feindt and Flynn 2009, van der Heijden 2011).

Analyzing policy-making and policy paradigms from this perspective provides a framework for understanding who the central actors are in paradigmatic and quasi-paradigmatic change processes, what they do, and the circumstances and processes under which ideas may be activated as causal mechanisms (Stone 1989b). This framework based on the concept of policy or ideational bricolage offers an account of solution-set development via the hermeneutic activities of key actors involved in the articulation of policy anomalies and policy alternatives that helps to overcome the problems associated with Hall’s original formulation as well as to address some of the questions raised, but not yet answered, by his critics.

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## Notes

1. Hall (1993, p. 21) did recognize the possibility of ‘fourth order’ learning, defined as ‘learning how to learn’ (cf. Argyris and Schön 1978). Nevertheless, the apparent arbitrariness of Hall’s consideration of change to policy targets as qualitatively equal to changes in policy instrument choice is looked upon skeptically by authors who wish to differentiate the more abstract elements of policy paradigms from the more concrete.
2. Oliver and Pemberton (2004, p. 435) purport these endogenous changes to have occurred in (1) the transition from classical–liberal to Keynesian economic theory, (2) in the processes involved in the movement toward what they term the ‘Keynesian plus’ paradigm, and (3) in the transition out of a purely monetarist paradigm into what they call the contemporary ‘neoliberal’ paradigm.
3. The exogeneity axiom has, however, only been partly relaxed by Oliver and Pemberton. This is to say, Oliver and Pemberton are cognizant of the internal positioning of relevant actors in ideational struggles as well as of the fact that institutionalization is generated from within, and so have modified Hall’s framework by internalizing the *process* of policy change. However, they continue to hold the view that policy ideas themselves are generated externally. This is an issue that is addressed by Howlett and Cashore (2009) in their development of thermostatic and neo-homeostatic types of policy transformation, and one that is critiqued by Carstensen (2011a, 2011b) as having erred in removing agency from explanations of policy change. This lack of theoretical integration of change agents in Oliver and Pemberton’s model is surprising given that they allude to interpretive contestation in battles to institutionalize new ideas.
4. While some of these actors have been dubbed ‘guardians’ of paradigmatic tenets in the literature (Orenstein 2013), we contend that the ‘gatekeepers’ label better captures how these actors attempt to control the relative paradigmatic purity of policy ideas during processes of ideational or paradigmatic (re)formulation (cf. McNamara 1998). These gatekeepers may be endogenous or exogenous to a particular policy subsystem, but work within institutional structures governing the policy venues in which they hold influence to control the predominant direction that policy change takes (Coleman *et al.* 1996). This ability renders paradigm construction much less a rational–technical or instrumental action than one featuring of one-off, idiosyncratic tinkering or ‘bricolage’ (Lévi-Strauss 1966).
5. Ideational gatekeepers influence the characteristics solution sets take on by opening and closing the iterative paths policy may follow in Figure 3, just as gatekeepers may operate locks in a canal system. These locks can be conceived of as belonging to one of two types: structural, which are largely beyond any actor’s ability to exert influence upon, such as economic constraints, the mode of governance, or constitutional arrangements (see Mucciaroni 1992); and institutional, which may be operated upon by institutionally privileged actors. High-ranking bureaucrats may, for example, affect what deLeon (1978) calls ‘low-level terminations’, or what translates to low-order iterations, while more institutionally privileged actors may affect high-order iterations with the stroke of a pen. Structural locks can only be destroyed, repaired, eroded, not opened and closed. Structural locks are therefore typically constraints on iterative experimentation while institutional locks may either constrain or provide opportunities for institutionally privileged gatekeepers to see that this or that type of iteration plays out.
6. Analytic attention to regime structure (i.e., institutionalized relationships among government and non-state officials) also assists in explaining regime durability and the resistance of policy regimes to change (cf. Stone 1989a, Bachelor 1994, p. 608). Theoretically, this perspective pits

pluralist and public choice notions about political incentives against each other given that, on the one hand, governing coalitions have an incentive to adjust their solution sets to match the ebb and flow of public or subsystemic opinion (Soroka and Wlezién 2010), while on the other, considerable investment in the extant policy regime discourages dissolution or significant reorientation of the policy machinery. While these two views are often framed as alternative perspectives, it is rather the case that each captures different facets of the complexity of political choice.

7. Actor preferences may, however, be inferred by examining the deliberative processes leading to decisions and by analyzing the coherence of what is ultimately advocated as policy. In other words, the level of discord between anomaly characteristics and type of policy solution pursued should serve as an indicator for whether preferences unrelated to policy (e.g., material incentives) predominate.
8. It is in this vein that Blyth (2013) investigated a Kuhnian paradox derivative from the fact that the paradigms model encompasses both a logic of rational Bayesian updating as well as a sociological process of knowledge accumulation, the latter of which is strongly related to what Masterman (1970) described as ‘metaparadigms’. Blyth attributes the power and success of Hall’s framework to its ability to straddle Bayesian and ‘constructivist’ logics, albeit identifying this paradox as a theoretical inconsistency. Neither Hall nor Kuhn, however, described social learning in strictly Bayesian (i.e., ‘rational’) terms.
9. A more thorough disaggregation of policy is necessary to accurately explain many types of policy change, particularly change that is more consequential than Hall’s second-order change but is by no means ‘paradigmatic’. Cashore and Howlett (2007), for example, have approached this problem in their discussion of the ‘dependent variable problem’ in the policy sciences. Distinguishing between different levels or orders of policy ends and means, Cashore and Howlett (2007) devise a six-part taxonomy that includes three means-related components and three corresponding ends-related components of the dependent variable public policy. Instead of viewing changes to instrument targets as an element of second-order change (see Hall 1993, pp. 278–279), Cashore and Howlett isolate changes to instrument targets, along with changes to implementation preferences and programmatic objectives, as specific components of policies subject to change. While disaggregating policy into six components adds sophistication and nuance to Hall’s model, a four-part disaggregation of policy into settings, instruments, programmatic objectives and abstract goals is sufficient to overcome the conflation of policy components in analyses of incremental or revolutionary change.
10. Thomas’s (2001) study of educational reform in the Baltic area provides an empirical example of such an hermeneutically informed analysis of policy bricolage by developing a four-part micro-process theory of policy formulation (cf. Brewer 1974, Anderson 1975). Thomas’s substages of the overall formulation process include a conceptualization and appraisal phase, a dialogue phase, a phase whereby policy is formulated in the literal sense and a consolidation phase. While conceptualization and appraisal involves the refinement of abstract notions prevalent during agenda setting and the specification of programmatic objectives and instrument designs, the following dialogue phase fosters discursive interaction, permitting advocates to adjust their proposals and allowing positions established during conceptualization to become more or less paradigmatically precise as a result of discursive interaction and ideational bricolage (see Garud and Karnøe 2003).
11. It is in this context that Campbell (2002, p. 28) contrasted programmatic ideas with cognitive paradigms (i.e., understandings of how the world works and how political institutions should be organized). For Campbell, programmatic ideas are ‘more precise guidelines about how already existing institutions and instruments should be used in specific situations according to the principles of well-established paradigms’. This idea resonates with Dryzek’s (1982, p. 322) hermeneutic approach to policy design, which he defined as involving ‘the evaluation of existing conditions and the exploration of alternatives to them, in terms of criteria derived from an understanding of possible better conditions, through an interchange between the frames of reference of analysts and actors’. Aside from adding agency to the creation and development of programmatic ideas, the purpose of the hermeneutic approach, according to Dryzek, is to explain ‘residual’ circumstances not captured by five conventional ‘niche’ models: rational evaluation, advocacy, social choice, and moral philosophy. Making the case against niche methods of inquiry, Dryzek argues that this residual category is pervasive,

- dealing with what have since come to be known as ‘wicked problems’ (Churchman 1967, Van Bueren *et al.* 2003, Conklin 2006, Levin *et al.* 2012).
12. There is thus an additional incentive-based distinction to be made between compromise done in the name of self-preservation and politics as brokerage. Although we do not rule out the possibility of brokerage, we are not advocating for a brokerage theory of politics, nor is it our aim to describe processes of policy-making in consensual systems. Rather, despite the fact that the sustained production of policy outputs will often involve considerable patching, interested parties will nevertheless tend to organize and coordinate according to policy core values (Sabatier 1988, Sabatier and Weible 2007). Beyond those defined by clear winners, policy areas that are or become competitively paradigmatic – as has come to be the case in the area of transport infrastructure (Dimitriou *et al.* 2013) – are especially suitable for paradigmatic analysis for they allow us to understand the specific tensions that exist between paradigmatically layered programs as well as the unusual or unexpected policy logics that emerge in synthetic paradigms (Kay 2007).
  13. To explain how such a pattern may emerge administratively, it is useful to distinguish between dominant and hegemonic paradigms as described by Capano (2003) given that, as Oliver and Pemberton (2004, pp. 425, 430–432) argue, both Keynesianism and monetarism held at times tenuous allegiances among policy-makers and administrators, some of whom continued to operate within the context of the antecedent paradigm. This tendency receives special emphasis by Oliver and Pemberton in making their observation that the dismantling of the monetarist paradigm had begun as early as 1981, ushering in what is arguably an era of synthetic economic policy that continues to the present (e.g., in both Conservative and ‘third way’ policies). This point is bolstered by Oliver and Pemberton’s (2004, p. 430) argument that even though the monopoly on expertise was partly transferred from the British Treasury to the International Monetary Fund in 1976, this should not be taken to indicate that Labour (the party in power at the time) accepted the intellectual case for monetarism.
  14. Oliver and Pemberton (2004, p. 426) argue, for example, that officials in the Treasury and the Office of the Prime Minister were able to manipulate the events surrounding the 1961 sterling crisis to persuade a reluctant Exchequer to support an interventionist growth strategy, which was later determined to fail – in spite of significant programmatic layering – due to resistance within ministries responsible for implementing the program (cf. Capano 2003). Similarly, Oliver and Pemberton (2004, p. 433) describe recurrent success on the part of the Bank of England officials to dissuade decision-makers, including Margaret Thatcher in 1980, from introducing monetary base controls.

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