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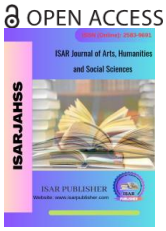

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How to Save the World:
How Learning to Use the Bureaucratic Paradigm and Its Three Conditions Can Solve A Personal Problem and Lead to the Solution of Intractable Social Problems

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Abstract: The existence of paradigms, defined as society's and its individuals' most fundamental assumptions concerning the structure of both the physical and social world, lie behind people's personal issues, as well as society's most troubling problems. Such problems range from nuclear terror to racism. Invisibly lurking behind these problems, supporting them and making them difficult to solve, are our paradigms. One paradigm in particular, the bureaucratic paradigm with its rigid hierarchy, division of labor and knowledge, and strict conformity of its managers and workers, is the origin of the aggression that causes all of our intractable social problems. This essay shows that attacking these problems by attempting to change the structure of bureaucracies cannot succeed, since nearly everyone who lives in a bureaucratic modern society has been taught to think bureaucratically; therefore, we are unable to envision less bureaucratic institutions that can foster the creativity required to solve social problems. Alternatively, however, by learning to see how the bureaucratic paradigm and three of its concomitant conditions can be used to solve our individual problems, we can become more capable of solving worldwide social problems. Once we begin to change our individual bureaucratic paradigm, we will then be able to make our organizations less dependent on the bureaucratic paradigm so that we can make progress in solving our most threatening social problems.

Keywords: Paradigm, Bureaucracy, Dichotomy, Values-Fulfillment Gap, Outward Orientation, Personal Problems, Social Problems.

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Introduction

In the middle of this article, the reader will learn how I solved a personal problem that points toward the solution of a myriad of pressing social problems. Specifically, I will describe how I learned to use the concept of paradigm—a society's most fundamental, yet invisible, assumption—to overcome anxiety and panic to sing my part in a song that I would need to perform for an audience with an a cappella quartet in its first public performance.

To learn how the resolution of this personal problem could possibly lead toward a direction for solving many of society's problems—racism, sexism, inequality, poverty, homelessness, terrorism, crime, environmental degradation, illness, nuclear threats, and rising authoritarianism, among many others—we must first delve into the roots of these problems.

The notion that the social problems of modern society arose from rapid historical changes involving the visible phenomena of technology, material goods, and money has been around for quite a while, but the idea gained increasing attention in the last century and a half. Our poets and artists were among the first to point out this relationship with their clarion calls. Emerson and Thoreau are but two examples:

> Things are in the saddle, and they ride mankind. –Emerson, R. W., June 1864, "Ode; inscribed to William H. Channing"

> This world is a place of business. What an infinite bustle! I am awaked [sic] almost every night by the panting of the locomotive. It interrupts my dreams. There is no sabbath. It would be glorious to see mankind at leisure for once. It is nothing but work, work, work. I cannot easily buy a blank-

> book to write thoughts in; they are commonly ruled for dollars and cents. –Thoreau, H. D., October 1863, "Life Without Principle," *The Atlantic Monthly,* 12 (71), pp. 484-495

Similarly, many Impressionist and Expressionist artists showed the horrors of war and the grimy pollution of fossil fuel industries. Two of perhaps the most powerful artworks depicting the agony and angst of modern industrial life is Edvard Munch's *The Scream* (1893) and Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* (1937). Edna Hibel, in her United Nations postage stamp *Mother Earth* (1983), offers an antidote with a moving suggestion of love across all nations, ethnicities, and races for bringing about world peace. This article points in a direction for bringing about this vision.

Before we can solve these all-too-visible problems, we need to realize two key facts. First, these problems were ushered in by human activity. Therefore, they can be solved by human activity. Secondly, though, this is easier said than done because the social and cultural forces that cause these problems, unlike technology and material goods, are invisible and intangible.

One particular force that can neither be seen nor touched, but which lies behind many, if not all, of our social problems, is our bureaucratic paradigm and its various characteristics, also invisible and intangible. As a result, prior to forging solutions we first need to examine the nature of paradigm more generally, and then the bureaucratic paradigm and its characteristics more specifically. After this brief examination, I shall draw attention to how this knowledge can lead to solutions to individual problems—using myself as an example—as a pathway to solving social problems.

A Brief Review of the Nature of Paradigm

Alvin W. Gouldner, in his *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* (1970), noticed that social scientists argued past one another because different schools of thought were based on what Gouldner referred to as often diametrically opposed domain assumptions. These assumptions are so ingrained in their respective proponents that they go unnoticed; therefore, Gouldner determined that theorists were unaware of how these domain assumptions affected their thinking and their modes of research because their minds were closed to other perspectives.

Gouldner's conclusion about how to mitigate the effects of these domain assumptions is to be reflexive about how one uses them, not only in one's work, but in one's everyday life. Bernard Phillips (April, 2025) in his recent article, "How to Save the World: Mounting an Evolutionary Social Movement" (*ISAR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3(4), 83-90), extends Gouldner's approach by showing how such reflexivity can not only be applied to the social scientist's life, but to everyone's life, regardless of occupation, education, and social class.

Gouldner based his theory of domain assumptions on an earlier work by Stephen C. Pepper (*World Hypotheses: A Study in Evidence*, 1942). In this book, Pepper noted that our invisible assumptions are actually hypotheses embedded in what he called root metaphors that people unconsciously harbor in order to explain the nature of the world.

Thomas Kuhn, in his *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), referred to these world hypotheses and domain assumptions as paradigms, which he variously defined as worldviews and intellectual frameworks that are assumed to be true.

Standing on the shoulders of these giants, **I have come to define paradigms as the most fundamental assumptions embedded within a society and its individuals about how the physical and social worlds are structured and how they operate. Furthermore, our innate paradigms not only inform us about the structure and processes of the world, but also define how the world *ought* to be structured and how it *ought* to operate. (**Andy Plotkin, 2024, "Fulfilling the Promise of Sociology: A Paradigmatic Approach," Eastern and Southern Sociological Associations Annual Meetings).

Not only is the intellectual framework of intangible paradigms a major obstacle behind our inability to eradicate social problems, but the emotional vein coursing through a paradigm stubbornly drives us to resist any other points of view, often viscerally and vehemently so.

The remainder of this essay will suggest that the most salient paradigm of bureaucracy silently lurks behind three closely interrelated bureaucratic characteristics or conditions—Dichotomy, Values-Fulfillment Gap, and the Outward Orientation. These conditions shape people's patterns of behavior entrenched in modern life, resulting in our myriad interrelated and complex social problems threatening to upend our civilization. After describing the bureaucratic paradigm and its three characteristics, we will be in a better position initially to solve our personal problems, and then subsequently our social problems.

Bureaucracy: How an Invisible Paradigm Covertly Affects How We Think, Feel, and Act

The paradigm of bureaucracy and its interrelated characteristics make it difficult for both individuals and groups to change. One of the leading proponents of the notion that our bureaucratic way of life lies behind our threatening social problems is Bernard Phillips and his coauthors (2024, *Creating Life Before Death: Before Disaster Strikes the Ship of State,* 2nd ed.).

In this book, Phillips and his colleagues note how bureaucracies, with their specialized division of labor and unintegrated knowledge, their inflexible hierarchical rules, and their high degree of conformity of the individuals who operate within these rigid social structures, not only lie behind our intractable problems, but prevent people from solving them. This inability is caused by the fact that the interaction required to share ideas and come up with solutions is limited among specialized workers and their hierarchy of executives, managers, and workers.

Bureaucracies and Aggression

Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly when speaking about social problems, people enmeshed in these hierarchies often feel demeaned by their bosses, which leads to aggression, the root of social problems involving violence. As David Graeber (2015) flatly states, bureaucracies unleash frustration, anger, and aggression (*The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy*). This combination of hierarchies and aggression result in our inability to diminish racism, sexism, ageism, and classism—all forms of aggression.

The following short paragraphs describe closely related, and equally invisible, characteristics of the bureaucracy paradigm.

Dichotomy

Closely integrated within bureaucracies is the characteristic of dichotomy. Dichotomous thinking leads people to categorize individuals in terms of inferiority and superiority, which reinforces the hierarchy just mentioned between executives and executives and their workers. This dichotomous condition reinforces aggression, which on a wider scale leads to terrorism and war among different tribes, religions, language groups, nationalities, races, and ethnicities.

The dichotomous way of thinking is deeply entrenched in our culture (Alfred Korzybski, 1933, *Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Thinking and General Semantics*). This mode of thought, which all of us have as individuals since it is the basis of all language, implicitly divides the world into two opposite characteristics; for example, there is right and wrong, truth and falsity, good and bad, winners and losers, us and them, and inferior and superior statuses.

Values-Fulfillment Gap

The dichotomous condition lies behind yet another fundamental bureaucratic characteristic, namely the values-fulfillment gap. This condition was posited millennia ago by the Buddha as the cause of widespread misery among India's population. The Buddha noted that when people are told to achieve various values, such as material possessions, power, and prestige, they often realize that they are unable to achieve them, and probably never will, and so they become mired in misery (*The Four Noble Truths,* 2018). As the reader may have noted, this characteristic is bolstered by the dichotomous condition, since it compares one's low levels of what one has achieved to one's high levels of what one wants but cannot achieve.

Outward Orientation

Both of these bureaucratic characteristics are further supported by the outward orientation, a third bureaucratic characteristic advanced most cogently by P. D. Ouspensky in his *The Fourth Way* (1957). This characteristic of bureaucracy conditions people to think that our purpose in life is measured by how we think about and act toward others. David Riesman, in his *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (1950/2001), noted that individuals settling America's western frontier had to be inner directed, but that people working in contemporary bureaucratic offices developed outer directed personalities. The idea that personality structures are linked to the social structures within which individuals live points convincingly to the fact that social problems are difficult to change because the paradigmatic root behind our problems lies not only in the bureaucratic structure and processes of society, but also within individual personalities.

Eric Fromm in his *Man For Himself* (1947/1976) also noticed that this outward characteristic is not confined to Americans, but is prevalent throughout Western culture, where one is taught to help others, be kind to others, and adhere to all the norms that guide one in accomplishing the goals of all the groups in which one is a member. For example, we are expected to do chores for the family, tasks for one's employer, altruistic work for one's religious organization, homework for school, and so forth. In addition, we are told to follow the example of the celebrities we admire, which only reinforces our values-fulfillment gap between what we want and what the celebrities possess that we will never have.

Our society's emphasis on the most visible technological and materialistic phenomena initially alluded to above is reinforced by the least visible bureaucratic paradigm with its three characteristics. Money, however, is deceptive in that it masquerades as what I refer to later in this article as a gradational characteristic, since money can be measured in intervals and not in dichotomous categories. However, people in America, and in the West more broadly, are taught to use an outward orientation to dichotomously compare their money and possessions to the wealth of others. They are also taught to revere celebrities and other "glitterati" who have more than they will ever have, thereby setting themselves up for the unhappiness they feel as a result of the values-fulfillment gap.

How can we begin to change the patterns of behavior that culminate in all of our social problems? One answer is that once we understand how the bureaucratic paradigm undergirds our problematic patterns of thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, we might be able to enlarge our thought patterns, thereby adding a less bureaucratic condition to individuals and their organizations that could lead us to solutions.

Paradigms and Social Policy

Paradoxically, changing bureaucracies and their three characteristics cannot effectively be achieved by attempting to change hierarchies and divisions of labor through the use of social policy. This is because our own bureaucratically paradigmatic thought patterns are so deeply embedded within all of us that any policy suggestions we offer most likely will also have these problematic conditions hidden within them. I believe this fact leads to many of the unintended consequences that occur with many policy changes: Bureaucratic thought only reinforces our bureaucratic behaviors.

Therefore, we need to work as individuals to bring our paradigms to the surface of our thoughts, emotions, and actions so that we can work to change them. Then, individuals in interaction with others will be able to reduce their bureaucratic personalities. This in turn will allow them to create less bureaucratic structures, at which time solutions to our plethora of personal and social problems can emerge.

Using the Bureaucratic Paradigm to Solve a Personal Problem

In his recent article, "How to Save the World: A Better World Begins with the Full Potential of One," Sergio M. Sanseverino (April, 2025), noted that "the work of evolving the world is inseparable from the work of evolving the self." Following this advice, I will now show how I solved a problem I personally encountered by using the bureaucratic paradigm and its characteristics, and then I can show how this strategy may also apply to solving social problems.

My newly formed a cappella quartet had been selected to sing a song by memory in front of an audience in an event that was celebrating a church's 150th anniversary. To make matters even more difficult for me, I had never heard of the song, and I was singing bass, a part for which I was not that familiar. I struggled mightily with the notes and words, leading to panic given that the performance was only three weeks away.

At first, my panic occurred because of the combination of my bureaucratic conditions, dichotomy and the values-fulfillment gap. I assumed that I would have to go from no knowledge of the song to knowing all the notes and words perfectly, thereby creating within me a huge values-fulfillment gap. These hidden paradigmatic conditions impacted me emotionally, since it sapped my confidence in being able to learn the song in only three weeks.

Once I realized how these paradigmatic conditions prevented me from solving the problem of learning the song, I realized that I could change the dichotomous into a gradational or dimensional condition briefly mentioned above. This less bureaucratic condition, which focuses more on progress toward a goal than on its perfection, was developed between 400 and 500 years ago when the early natural scientists endeavored to accurately measure their observations. (Cf. David Wooten, 2015, *The Invention of Science: A New History of the Scientific Revolution*.) The use of measurement—the heart of the scientific method—introduced to society the idea that truth about phenomena could be approached gradationally, one step at a time. In other words, truth did not have to be immediately grasped, but could be approached incrementally, little by little.

When I applied this mode of thought to my own personal singing crisis, I began to focus on learning just one part of the song at a time. I sang the first few measures multiple times. Then I sang the next few measures multiple times. Then I sang both sets of measures multiple times, and so on through the chorus and two verses.

Still, I noticed that internally I began to get angry with myself—just as a bureaucratic boss externally takes out anger with a worker—because I was using wrong words occasionally, and even singing a few wrong notes, and pacing the song too quickly. Then I realized that I was still creating a values-fulfillment gap between where I was in learning the song and my idea of perfection.

In addition, I realized that I was also harboring the outward orientation in which I feared more about how I would sound and appear to the audience, than about how much enjoyment I receive from singing a song, any song, even this one. Once I realized how these bureaucratic conditions lurked inside me, I stopped beating myself up for every little mistake, and proceeded to find the errors and correct each one, gradationally, one at a time.

It is worth noting that I sang the song successfully with the other members of the quartet, and received a nice round of applause. However, more importantly I had already learned to become less outward oriented and more inward oriented, depending less on what the audience thought of me and more of what I thought of myself.

Changing the Conditions within Bureaucracies

Still speaking gradationally now, once being able to apply paradigmatic knowledge to taking steps for solving one's personal problem, I could now ask how we can apply this knowledge to reduce the conditions of bureaucratic structures that reinforce aggression, resulting in a plethora of social problems.

Almost everyone in modern societies works, studies, consumes, and plays within bureaucratic structures. The college I work in, the city I live in, the stores I shop in, and even the beautiful nature trails I hike, are all organized and maintained by bureaucratic entities. This fact can actually be celebrated, since no activities like these are possible without such bureaucracies.

However, these types of rigid organizations, in their attempts to be efficient—serving as many people and making as much money as possible within the shortest period of time—can only take us so far in directing people toward developing their innate human abilities to the greatest extent possible. Phillips et al. (2024) suggest that the reason this is true is due to the overarching inflexible bureaucratic hierarchies, over-specialized divisions of labor and knowledge, and conformity to often overbearing rules and regulations.

Interaction as a Key to Increasing Problem-Solving Capacities of Bureaucracies

As Phillips and his colleagues continue (2024), people who work within these organizations have limited opportunity to interact, and are often not encouraged by their managers and owners to do so. By increasing interaction among individuals, both horizontally with fellow workers, and vertically with their bosses, knowledge from diverse disciplines can be learned by everyone and brought to bear on solving an organization's challenges.

By making organizations more fluid with increased interactions, both horizontally and vertically, into learning organizations (Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 1990), the increase in shared knowledge may lead to greater problem-solving capacities of such an organization's individuals.

Future articles by me and my colleagues will delve into how these learning organizations can lead to greater problem-solving communities that can help to solve social problems. With such achievements, it will be possible to scale up so that progress toward solutions to national and worldwide problems can be achieved.

For now though, I hypothesize that with a more fluid and dynamic structure, bureaucracies will be able to change their predominant paradigm and its conditions: **They will be able to approach their actions gradationally as well as dichotomously; they will add an inward orientation to individuals' personal development; and they will reduce people's values-fulfillment gaps leading to more confident, happier, and less aggressive individuals.**

At that point, I believe that these new types of bureaucracies will allow people to develop their innate abilities so that they will be able to begin to solve some of society's most intractable and threatening problems.

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