
INTERACTION PARADIGMS OF DECISION-MAKING

ELNA A. ORLOVA

As is known, human interaction is accomplished in specific forms. To interpret this specificity, it is necessary to understand the facts it depends on. The term "interaction paradigm" singles out the main normative psycho-sociocultural factors influencing the pattern of an interaction process. We can distinguish three types of paradigms: cooperation, competition (conflict), and dialogue. This essay attempts to prove that the dialogical paradigm is more adequate to the situation of political decision-making than the cooperative and competitive ones.

Strategic decisions concerning various social units are a very important determinant of sociocultural development. Decision-making is, therefore, also a fundamental form of human interaction. The general state of modern society and culture gives rise to several difficulties in the processes of political decision-making. On the one hand, the adequate formulation and solution of a problem is complicated by the complexity and dynamism of modern everyday life. On the other hand, it is difficult to predict the possible consequences of long-term decisions. It is clear that the time and place of decision-making, and its content, depend on an interaction process. Some considerations of that aspect of the decision-making situation are presented below. The key term for the normative sociocultural and psychological frameworks of the process is "interaction paradigm."

I relate the term to the form, strategy, and tactics of interaction. However, I also use it to single out a level of sociocultural and psychological factors on which certain specifics of human interaction process organization depend. That level may be considered as a basis of the interaction that is indifferent to its subject matter and cultural content.

Political decision-making is an interpersonal process. That is why there are two levels of interaction paradigms: personal and structural. Or, the form of the process development depends on the psychic and cultural idiosyncrasies of its participants on the one hand, and on the sequence of its stages on the other.

The personal aspect of an interaction paradigm is connected with some psycho-sociocultural matrix of actions, beliefs, and values that an individual internalizes as a member of a culture, a society, a social class, or a group. In the interaction process, that matrix works to generate the strategy and tactics of the participants' behavior. It is also a source of criteria for an individual evaluation of the interaction process development. Thus, on the personal level, an interaction paradigm generates the pattern of the process organization and construction.

Turning now to the form and structure of the interaction process as such, the relevant elements of an interaction paradigm are:

- (1) The normative principles of the participants' behavior in the interaction situation. Such principles are psychologically heterogeneous: Among them we find fully conscious and rational normative units as well as unconscious preferences and predispositions.
- (2) The general intentions concerning the aim of the interaction. They generate the criteria for the assessment of the effectiveness of the interaction process.
- (3) The participants' expectations with respect to each other and to the interaction process. These generate the criteria for the assessment of the process structure.
- (4) The specifics of the organization of information exchange and the related tensions in the participants' relations.

The content of such paradigm components indicates whether to classify the paradigm as cooperative, competitive (conflictual), or dialogical.

SPECIFICS OF A COOPERATIVE PARADIGM

The main principle of cooperative interaction is consensus among participants about the aims, general strategy, the means to reach these aims, and the evaluation of the process. The main intention of the partners, specific to the paradigm, is to reach the objective without disturbing the consensus. Their main expectations are total mutual understanding, identity of positions concerning the matter of the interaction, and the normative criteria to evaluate its development and effects. The structure of the informational exchange within the framework of the paradigm is created by cumulation of consensus and the tendency to avoid questions which are potentially dangerous to the consensus reached. Thus the ideal type of a cooperative paradigm displays the minimal interpersonal tensions.

SPECIFICS OF A COMPETITIVE (CONFLICTUAL) PARADIGM

The main principle of the paradigm is disagreement among the participants in the interaction process about the definition of the situation, the aims of the interaction, and the evaluative criteria. The main intention of the participants is to reach their own objectives and to prevent the success of the others. The main expectations specific to the interaction participants are based on commitment to conflicting interests, incompatibility of normative criteria concerning the matter of interaction, its aims, evaluation of its effects, and possible consequences. When opting for the competitive interaction paradigm the participants are ready to devote their maximum efforts to competition with each other. First, the process of information exchange is very tense: In such a case, all participants try to keep secret their own real intentions, tactics, and recourses, or misinform the others about them. Second, we know that the conflict relations generate a great inner and interpersonal psychological tension.

SPECIFICS OF THE DIALOGICAL PARADIGM

The main principle of an interaction according to this paradigm is acknowledgment by the participants of the divergence of their points of view concerning the matter of interaction and the persuasion that such a divergence does not mean a total incompatibility of their positions. The main intention of the interaction participants is to reach some constructive decision in spite of the divergences concerning the matter of interaction. In a dialogical interaction the participants do not expect total consensus on the evaluation of the effects and consequences of the interaction process. Each of them is ready to compromise. The paradigm generates some psychological tensions: They are less high than in a conflict paradigm, but much higher than in a cooperation one. This is natural because the participants must compare their positions and evaluations of the situation to that of the others and observe the limits of consensus and dissent. They must also control their own emotional states and be tolerant of the disagreements that may emerge.

THE PARADIGMS OF COOPERATION, COMPETITION (CONFLICT), AND DIALOGUE IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Now, when social life has been democratized generally, and cultural contacts have been broadened, the participants in political decision-

making are representatives of different cultures, social classes, groups, and organizations. Consequently, their cultural norms and values, and their aims and interests in the political interaction also differ. I would like to show the possibilities of each interaction paradigm in the typical modern situation of political decision-making, taking account of the differing interests and cultural backgrounds of its participants.

DECISION-MAKING PATTERN IN THE COOPERATIVE PARADIGM

The total consensus orientation among the decision-making participants concerning the normative-evaluative context of the interaction works as a specific selective mechanism. It rules out all information about which there is serious disagreement among the participants. Thus they may disregard some aspects relevant to the adequate solution of the problem.

Such an interaction process therefore suffers from one-sidedness and the decision taken may turn out to be rather narrow, rigid, and much too universalistic. Certainly such decisions—especially with long-term consequences—may be inadequate to modern sociocultural dynamics and diversity.

The paradox of the cooperative paradigm is based on the consensus principle. On the one hand, there is plenty of room for conflict points. The real dissimilarity between the norms and values of the partners and at the same time their commitment to total consensus make any divergence of opinions and any disagreement the psychological source of tension and conflict. On the other hand, such a commitment causes the paradigm to become the mechanism of establishing and supporting the system of interpersonal interaction rather than the many-sided analysis of the problem.

Thus, while appearing to be adequate to the process of decision-making, the cooperative paradigm displays some serious limitations concerning the content of decision itself.

DECISION-MAKING PATTERN IN THE COMPETITIVE PARADIGM

The tensions of the conflict situation, the structure of informational exchange (the mood of secrecy, mutual distrust, misinformation), and the partners' belief in the incompatibility of their positions in the context of interaction are favorable conditions for interpersonal aggres-

siveness. We know only too well that such a psychological state renders an individual less capable of perceiving, evaluating, and processing relevant information adequately.

Any solution of the problem under conflict is a form of constraint: The stronger side imposes its solution on the weaker one. It is obvious that the consequences of such a state of affairs are very uncertain because of the inner resistance to it of the weaker partner and the related intention to continue the competition.

The paradox of the conflict interaction paradigm is a tendency to make conflict the permanent state of the partners' relations: Each of them tries to be a success and to weaken the opponent's position.

Thus the conflict paradigm is inadequate to the decision-making situation. First, the partners' orientation toward contradiction prevents them from perceiving the points of common interest concerning the matter and results of the interaction. Second, the paradigm generates the partners' commitment to gain individual advantages rather than to solve the problem. And such an orientation reproduces, supports, and stabilizes the conflictual form of interaction.

DECISION-MAKING PATTERN IN THE DIALOGICAL PARADIGM

The dialogical paradigm highlights the critical-constructive dimension of the interaction process. Specific to the paradigm is the stage-by-stage comparison by the interaction participants of their situation definitions and evaluations and the elucidation of the zones of consensus and disagreement. The analysis of the problem under such conditions is many-sided and the partners have no illusions about the perfection and finality of the decision reached.

The partners assume as natural their different situation definitions and evaluations of the possible solutions to the problem. Thus those differences may form the object of a critical analysis. Because of some zones of consensus, such analyses make it possible not only to continue the decision-making process, but also the redefinition of the problem itself.

The dialogue paradigm of interaction determines the constructive pattern of a decision-making process. There is plenty of room there to follow the evolution of the process, to evaluate the interaction situation and its result from several sides, to watch the change not only of the structural, but also of the dynamic aspects of the process, to understand clearly the sociocultural meaning of the question under con-

sideration. The paradigm is open to resemblances and discrepancies between the partners' ideas and proposals concerning the subject matter of the interaction, to the stable and changing features of the process, to the possibility of redefining the problem. Under such conditions there is no solution that could be considered final or the best as there is always room to improve it.

CONCLUSION

The comparison of the three paradigms allows us to consider the dialogue paradigm as adequate to the decision-making process under the complex conditions of modern sociocultural life. On the one hand, the paradigm is sensitive to the partners' cultural and social differences. Partners are ready to take into account each other's cultural and personal idiosyncrasies. It favors the prevention of inner aggression and acute conflict. On the other hand, such an interaction does not orient the partners to the final and absolute solution of the problem. They begin to understand—implicitly or explicitly—the temporal nature of any solution in the changing sociocultural world. And they are ready to review their decisions under new conditions. Therefore, the paradigm may be relevant to the modern pace of sociocultural dynamics.

Elna A. Orlova is Professor in the Department of Philosophical Problems of Culture at the Institute of Philosophy of the USSR Academy of Sciences, Moscow.