...objects, events, and situations do not convey their own meanings, [rather] we confer meaning on them.

Herbert Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism*, 1969

One of the key criticisms of the recent national security design movement has been how to translate divergent, seemingly boundless, multiparadigmatic, and transdisciplinary social science concepts—a continuously open array—into effective professional practice. On one hand, design theorists complain that due to the underpinning postmodern and antipositivist philosophies associated with the movement you cannot create institutionalised frames of reference that inappropriately result in a relatively stable, ‘how-to’ design doctrine. On the other hand, national security practitioners protest that without a design methodology complete with well-articulated standards of performance, professional schools cannot train and educate their members in a replicable and assessable fashion.

This tension between being open to exploring unrestricted and incommensurate ways of framing and desiring a technique-based, standardised learning framework is a perplexing and recurrent issue that must be addressed by design-oriented members of the national security community. I attempt to do so here by applying Donald A. Schön’s decades of work dedicated to finding ways to address this contradiction (he calls the ‘crisis of professions’), which culminated in his seminal two volumes describing his theory of reflective practice. Centred on creative design and critical reasoning, the logic behind Schön’s theory of reflective practice is well suited for the multi-disciplinary field of national security and is based in the following two assumptions.

The first is contextuality. As Herbert Blumer asserts in the epigraph above, professionals should acknowledge that objects, events, and situations involving national security do not convey meaning; rather, national security practitioners and their institutions construct and impose meanings on them. The national security professional would not need to address ambiguous and unique challenges if institutionalised frames of reference were sufficient to guide their practice across all situations; they would then simply be technicians. The metaphoric idea of ‘framing’ (like that of a ‘window’ through which we ‘see’ the ‘world’—a worldview) indicates the ways we are socialised to interpret objects, events, and situations. Reflective practice requires (1) the never-ending morphing and designing of meanings we use to conceptualise objects, events, and situations and (2) demands that professionals make heedful judgments about institutionalised frames, and when necessary strive to deinstitutionalise them, and that they seek to create modified or replacement frames while reflecting in- and on- action.
The second assumption is *transdisciplinarity*. Reflective practitioners critically explore frames that purposefully go beyond the otherwise stove-piped applied arts and science disciplines that typify professional schools; that is, Schön examines the learning strategies required *across* and *beyond* professions, highlighting applications in music, divinity, psychiatry, social work, architecture, urban development, law and others in his books and related articles. He draws attention away from using the so-called ‘proven’ techniques of professional practice as the sole source of teachable methods. Schön demands that the educator’s responsibility rises above such ‘technical rationality’ that unbendingly demands performance with institutionalised frames of reference, extant knowledge, and pre-set competencies.

My purpose henceforth is to present some practical ways to achieve reflexivity in practice that can be facilitated in professional schools associated with national security, namely describing ways to help student-practitioners learn how to become better *inquiring*. Professional schools that embrace reflective practice emphasise the faculty’s facilitation role in exposing *frame rigidity* and encouraging *frame reflection*. This coaching role helps the practitioner (1) reflect critically on their personally or institutionally accepted concepts that guide their professional practice i.e. frame awareness; and, (2) cope creatively with unfamiliar situations by (a) learning to extend and displace old frames into new frames and (b) conducting thought experiments with a multiplicity of non-traditional frames i.e. *frame innovation*.

**Facilitating frame awareness and innovation**

*When a practitioner becomes aware of his frames, he also becomes aware of the possibility of alternative ways of framing the reality of his practice.... Once practitioners notice that they actively construct the reality of their practice and become aware of the variety of frames available to them, they begin to see the need to reflect in action on their previously tacit frames.*

Donald A. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner*, 1983

Frame awareness begins by exposing frame rigidity. Frame rigidity refers to a blindness to alternative conceptualisations of objects, events and situations that artificially set ‘a boundary that cuts off part of something from our view while focusing our attention on other parts’. Reflective practice offers a holistic antidote, entertaining multiple and simultaneous frames, that is to say it embraces a plurality of concepts that seek to assist the practitioner to recognise frame rigidity and insightfully design revised or new meanings onto objects, events and situations. The intent of design in professional practice, then, is to emancipate oneself from, or at least remain sceptical about, personally—and institutionally—habitualised frames and purposefully diverge into the process of innovating new meanings while facing or anticipating unique situations where traditional frames do not seem to work.

To stimulate frame awareness and innovation, I recommend four approaches to facilitating andragogy in professional school settings; two are *linguistic* and two are *relational*. To be clear, these stem principally from a meta-philosophy associated somewhere among the neighbourhoods of postmodernism and antipositivism, and particularly with the interpretivist methods derived from the Sociology of Knowledge discipline and the Social Construction of Reality theory. I must caution the reader that I am not suggesting these approaches are mutually exclusive as there are neither logical borders among them nor do they represent a complete set of
approaches to frame awareness and innovation. There are other philosophies, disciplines and theories that may yield important and disruptive understandings. Linguistic approaches involve (1) having students explore how they may reflexively exercise onomasiological exposure as an antidote to frame rigidity; and, (2) exposing practitioners to their tendency to frame while they are uncritically exercising metaphoric framing. Relational approaches involve (3) multiparadigm inquiry by students; and, (4) exploring how paradoxical reasoning provides values-based ways to detect conflictual interpretations of the same phenomena.

**Onomasiological exposure**

And so in every way they would believe that the shadows of the objects we mentioned were the whole truth…..Then think what would naturally happen to them if they were released from their bonds and cured of delusions.

Plato, *The Republic*, ~360BC

Detecting onomasiological meanings refers to methods of linguistic historiography that expose how theorists produce variants on an extant concept conveying roughly the same meaning. What better exemplar could I employ here than one of the principal subjects of this article, that is, to onomasiologically expose the repeated use of the concept frame rigidity? We can arguably go back in textual history to at least 360BC, when the Athenian, Plato, wrote *The Republic*, and find more evidence of the same idea of human false consciousness framed with shared objectivations about reality. Plato’s allegory of the cave tells the story of groups of ‘prisoners’ who believe they are witnessing the real world not knowing that these were but ‘shadows of the object’.

In other words, the allegory speaks to the problem of concepts that become rigid precepts indicating an unreflective process of reality construction. Fast forward two millennia, onomasiological analysis reveals Max Weber’s simile, the ‘iron cage’, which he uses to describe how bureaucratic rationality (legalistic, mindless rule-following) may blind practitioners from considering other ways of framing their social world. Figure 5.1 is a sample of how writers across history and many social science disciplines have published variants on the same logic of Plato’s ‘shadows of the object’ that ‘imprison’ our minds from seeking alternative conceptualisations of objects, events, and situations.

One classroom approach would be to have student-practitioners research the onomasiological historiography of national security concepts that convey the same basic meanings with different words. Modern militaries have a history of operational frames that mean roughly the same thing. For example the US Marine Corps published its *Small Wars Manual* in 1940, framing war through the logic of a scaled continuum; that is, if you have small wars then you must also have medium and big wars. In 1959, Rear Admiral Eccles, while on faculty at the Naval War College, produced a ‘spectrum of conflict’ graphic (Figure 5.2). In his 1960 book, *The Uncertain Trumpet*, General Maxwell Taylor developed a similar idea that led to the Kennedy Administration’s ‘flexible response’ and the establishment of the Green Berets for the ‘irregular’ wars.
Figure 5.1: Onomasiological exposure of the meaning of frame rigidity. These are different naming conventions of roughly the same concept of Plato’s shadows of the object

1. “shadows of the object” Plato (~380 BC/1974)
2. “signs of mind” Poirce (1865)
3. “iron cage” Weber (1921/1938)
4. “schema” Piaget (1923/1938)
5. “artifactification” Lukács (1926/1971)
6. “ideology” Mannheim (1936)
7. “frame of reference” Sherif (1936)
8. “standard operating procedure” War Department (1942)
10. “orientation of action” Parsons & Shils (1951)
11. “logic of action” Austin (1957)
12. “paradigmatic” Kuhn (1962)
13. “organizational imprinting” Stinchcombe (1965)
17. “technical rationality” Schön (1983)

Figure 5.2: The Scaled Continuum Frame from Henry Eccles’ 1959 book

In 1962, the US Army published its operations doctrine that included a ‘spectrum of conflict’—where at ‘one end of the spectrum, are those conflicts in which the application of national power short of military force is applied’. Using the same logic, by 1986, doctrine spoke to a scaled continuum ranging across ‘high-, mid-, and low intensity conflicts’. Today, US joint operations doctrine describes the same basic concept of ‘the range of military operations’ as a hallmark idea, which is another variant of the original scaled continuum idea. US Special Operations Command contends that the ‘Gray Zone’ (the space between the peace and war continuum) is a concept innovation worthy of a white paper (usually reserved for ground-breaking concepts). The latest Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff publication, Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning, makes claims to a ‘new’ framework in this, presumed futuristic, document (see Figure 5.3).
Onomasiologically, the idea of a scaled continuum of conflict has been repeated in several variants in US operational doctrine for almost 80 years.

The unreflexive learner may view ‘ROMO’, ‘Gray Zone’, and ‘The Competition Continuum’ as recent frame innovations if they are not versed in frame awareness through the onomasiological historiography of like-meanings. The value of this form of research is to create ‘aha moments’ as the more reflective practitioners begin to realise that the technically-rational professional school of thought may be ‘stuck’ in the ‘same old’ concepts from the past and that frame innovation, fostered by neologisms that mask ideas already expressed. The onomasiological approach leads student-practitioners into critical frame awareness thereby recognising when a proposed frame has the qualities of being truly innovative. They can learn to allegorically step outside the shadows of ‘Plato’s cave’ and into the ‘sunlight’ of imaginative framing. Highly related to allegories, the next linguistic approach involves creative excursions through metaphoric reasoning.

Metaphoric reasoning

_In reading…organizations it is important to place ourselves in an active mode. We are not passive observers interpreting and responding to the events and situations that we see. We play an important role in shaping those interpretations, and thus the way events unfold._

Gareth Morgan, _Images of Organization_, 2006

In the last three decades, we have begun to see the value of studying metaphors that serve as frames of reference. While not yet a mainstream approach in professional schooling in national security or international relations programs, some pioneering
I have employed Gareth Morgan’s book, *Images of Organization*, as part of a quest for achieving frame awareness and to stimulate frame innovation as part of reflective practice. Morgan recommends having a compounded view of organisations, relating many views on the same phenomenon. Student-practitioners choose at least two of Morgan’s eight images to compare and contrast their last job setting and write a three
Designing meaning in the reflective practice of national security

...to five page assessment describing dominant cultural values, decision making, change management, leadership, and overall beliefs about organisation effectiveness from those points of view.\textsuperscript{23} The learning outcome is focused on the student-practitioners gaining confidence and competence in interpreting organisations from several very different perspectives and learning how such appreciative inquiry can serve them well as reflective practitioners in sizing up their own and other stakeholders’ organisations in their careers ahead.

Similar to linguistic approaches, relational methods may serve as a source of frame awareness and innovation in at least two other ways: multiparadigm inquiry and paradoxical reasoning.

**Multiparadigm inquiry**

\textit{Multiparadigm inquiry fosters intense reflexivity\ldots, helping researchers examine their work and selves at new depths. This is not to say that reflexivity is the ultimate goal, as it may, if taken to its extreme, encourage the formation of 'navel-gazing' scholarly communities - excessively introspective and egotistical. Given such precautions, however, one of the greatest values of multiparadigm inquiry is the potential for personal learning, even enlightenment. From our own, first-hand experiences as well as the writings of other multiparadigm researchers, we believe that the exploration of alternative worldviews opens powerful doors of perception. Researchers often note that multiparadigm inquiry forever altered their perspective, impacting their future research even when attempting to return to more single-paradigm concerns.}

Marianne W. Lewis & Mihaela L. Kelemen, \textit{Multiparadigm Inquiry: Exploring Organizational Pluralism and Paradox}, 2002\textsuperscript{24}

Figure 5.5 shows four sociological paradigms developed by Gibson Burrell and Gareth Morgan, each having very different purposes, logics and methods associated with a particular worldview.\textsuperscript{25} In other words, relationalism requires conceptualising national security empathetically, giving voice to contrarian ways while demanding that no paradigm is ignored.

Application is possible in a professional school setting. One technique is to divide a graduate seminar into four groups and assign each group to inquire into a national security issue (such as US involvement in the recent Syrian civil war) and ask the student-practitioners to argue for a policy based on their assigned paradigmatic position. When student-practitioners present their findings to each other, in written or oral form, they experience relational empathy while interpreting situations and events through profoundly different frames. The target learning outcome is not only to improve frame awareness but also to realise frame innovation can emerge through the ‘bracketing’ of paradoxical perspectives, which is also the intent of the next relational approach.
Figure 5.5: Four sociological paradigms for national security inquiry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sociological Paradigms</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Assumptions</th>
<th>Methods of Inquiry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Functionalism</td>
<td>Remove dysfunctionalities or untruths in an otherwise stable national security system</td>
<td>The world is objectively deterministic and the restoration of system equilibrium is ineluctable (e.g., a realist view that contends a balanced nation-state ecology exists to prevent chaos)</td>
<td>Argue how nations (agents or actors) strategize decisions to deter, deter, or win war and procure human and material means as needed. This sort of inquiry should be familiar for staff and war college students as it represents the rational actor model of how national security functions as a system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radical humanism</td>
<td>Sweeping emancipation the masses from alienating and oppressive power arrangements</td>
<td>Reality is subjective and radical social change is motivated by emotional and voluntaristic collective action in response to existential power/knowledge (like colonialism, empire-building, occupation, etc.)</td>
<td>Deconstruct text or dominant narratives; conduct post-territoriality/colonial analyses; expose powerful institutional objectifications that are tied to social injustice (like spending too much on defense and too little on socialistic programs); give voice where voice is being suppressed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radical structuralism</td>
<td>Anticipate transformative, material changes in systems of warfare due to economies and technological &quot;weaves,&quot; and the emergence of national power asymmetries</td>
<td>Reality is objective and systemic; radical change in the system is possible usually associated with breakthroughs with both technological ways and economic means</td>
<td>Investigate historic discontinuities or revolutionary disruptions of national security status; find the surprising irregularities (such as non-state actors, terrorists, hackers, and covert foreign defense industrialists) that punctuate the otherwise regularity of national security; project that there will be more surprises in the future; look for the next technological breakthrough that will change national security as we know it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretivism</td>
<td>Induce or confirm repeating patterns of meaning in the stream of human events over time</td>
<td>Reality is subjective; hence, cultural constancy and habits of mind are appreciable, particularly if viewed over long periods</td>
<td>Conduct hermeneutic studies of national security documents and history texts; pay attention to onomasiological meanings, uses of metaphor as frames of reference; and, employ anthropological methods to make sense of contemporary human conflict and national security issues.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Paradoxical reasoning

Relationalism is a thought system in which concepts and entities enjoy no final definition, but are constantly redefined by their context. In such a system, paradox is not an irrational state; that is, a paradox need not be rendered rational through the cancellation of one or the other of opposing entities of which it is composed. Instead…entities simply exist with respect to and within the context of another.

Ming-Jer Chen & Danny Miller, The Relational Perspective, 2011

Similar to the reasoning through simultaneous and conflicting paradigms, the use of paradoxical reasoning can be traced at least to 18th and 19th centuries' German philosophers Immanuel Kant and Georg Hegel, who also had a strong influence on Carl von Clausewitz's portrayal of metaphysical contradictions or dialectics in the study of war. These are not 'either-or' propositions, rather, these are polar opposites 'with-respect-to' (wrt) each other.

How does one go about shifting from expecting categorical ways of framing to a more flexible, patterned way of framing?

One technique is to create a four-square demonstrating simultaneous yet opposing frames. For example, Chris Paparone and James Crupi published a 2005 article portraying the principles of war as paradoxical patterns, demonstrating that when two continua are crossed (external-wrt internal-opposites; initiative-wrt command and control-opposites), they create relational patterns which one can apply to referential situations. These patterns become useful for creating multi-frame awareness, showing graphically when principles of war (a.k.a. values) relationally 'compete'.
One idea is to have a seminar facilitator direct their students to plot historic campaigns on a ‘radar-like’ scale and, in lieu of the typical comparative ‘campaign analyses’, have them conduct comparative ‘campaign syntheses’. For example, Figure 5.6 compares a pattern associated with the 1942 Marine Corps Guadalcanal campaign with the Desert Storm campaign’s ground force operations in February 1991. Note how economy of force (particularly for logistics support) was relationally a trade-off for mass in the initial battles of Guadalcanal while mass (force build up) was achieved before offensive operations commenced in Desert Storm. Compare the relationships between security and manoeuvre for both campaigns. Examine the ‘patterns’ when considering all of the principles in relation to the others.

**Figure 5.6: The principles of war as paradox: comparative campaign patterns**

The same could apply to whole-of-government patterns associated with interagency approaches to both domestic and foreign interventions if we were to create a four-square with two crossing continua: interdependency wrt independency and competition wrt human rights. While military and homeland security professionals may be framing with *security* as the dominant purpose for which the institution is designed to upkeep, patterning would require them to ‘step out’ of that institutional frame to consider other ways of appreciating the messy situation at hand. For example, one relational frame to *security* wrt *liberty*. For instance, the more security forces provide the more people may feel their locale is securely ‘occupied’ (i.e. they are not at liberty to do as they please), such as when community organizing in Los Angeles, California went badly (leading to urban rioting) or in a foreign province experiencing a violent insurgency.

The Defense and Justice departments, perhaps now pleased that the locale/target area has greater *security*, may see a need for a ‘pattern shift’, bowing to the American Civil Liberties Union (representing domestic social justice) or US Agency for International Development (overseas assistance encouraging human rights) values to reframe toward more liberty. At the same time, the Departments of Education, and Health and Human Services tilt their programs associated with *equity/welfare*: that is, ensuring the central and local governments are legitimately providing services common to all the population, regardless of social and economic status (e.g. providing funds for public schools and assuring basic ‘safety net’ income
and health care for those in need). The more liberty and equity/welfare conditions that the community organises or the counterinsurgents set the less there seems a chance for a market economy to develop, which is arguably more sustainable because of its comparative market-based efficiency.

So perhaps the departments of Commerce and Treasury professionals have to ‘weigh in’ with suggested actions associated with free market values that lean toward building a sustainable and growing economy. As a result of these competing values across diverse institutions, various laws and policies emerge to balance their otherwise conflicting agendas (the result of political processes). As facilitators, we can charge our students to construct a four-square diagram that demonstrates the mosaic framework that exceeds our stove-piped, institutionally-focused, single frames like those shown in Figure 5.7. The Pre 9–11 ‘policy paradox’ is indicated in the solid line, showing emphases on equity and liberty, while the post 9–11 policy paradox is shown with the dotted line, showing emphases shifting more toward security and efficiency. Think of the policy pattern metaphorically—like a live amoeba continuously reshaping over time.

**Figure 5.7: Paradoxical reasoning that seeks ‘balance’ among four simultaneous opposing views of us institutions, laws and policies**

[Diagram showing the Pre 9–11 and post 9–11 policy paradoxes]

Key to successful ‘whole-of-government’ sensemaking would be to notice pattern shifts and perhaps diagnose when policy patterns need to shift. Leadership in this complex political milieu becomes more like the music playing of an improvisational jazz band (an analogy signifying that designation of the ‘lead agency’ must be dynamic, both in light of the pattern shifts and also to shape the emergence of new patterns) than the carefully directed music of an orchestra and a single designated conductor (a metaphoric frame about leadership that strives to get everyone on the
‘same sheet of music’ that does not convey the same complexity and need to improvise as does the jazz band).

Conclusion

I have presented Schönian reflective practice to address frame rigidity, specifically through facilitating frame awareness and frame innovation. I have offered four approaches in the professional schooling of student-practitioners: two from the field of linguistics and two from the patterned view of relationalism. Onomasiological exposure involves having student-practitioners perform a historiography of concepts. This enables the unmasking of claims of frame innovation to reveal them, more accurately, to be promoting an old logic with a new linguistic twist. Metaphoric reasoning is about helping student-practitioners become aware of the use of metaphors in many extant concepts and theories associated with national security institutions and that metaphors also serve as the roots for frame innovation.

The relational approach for multiparadigm inquiry facilitates empathy-building (essential to frame awareness and innovation) as it forces student-practitioners to argue positions, at least temporarily, through very diverse sets of purpose and logics that underlie sociological paradigms. Likewise, the investment in paradoxical reasoning helps the student-practitioner employ patterned approach to frame awareness and innovation that incorporate competing principles or values.

These Schönian attitudes are philosophically underpinned by postmodernism and antipositivism, and the interpretivist methods drawn from the Sociology of Knowledge discipline and the Social Construction of Reality theory. Professional schools that undertake this turn toward a ‘designing meaning’ school of thought should prepare the faculty, as well as the student practitioners, with a basic understanding of the inherent assumptions associated with these approaches to framing. They are: (1) contextuality (that we socially construct meaning on objects, events and situations); and, (2) transdisciplinarity (that this critical and creative construction effort must be across and beyond traditional disciplines). These underpinnings are intended to purposefully disrupt the traditional notions of technical rationality, presently overemphasised in professional schools associated with national security. Openness to unrestricted and incommensurate ways of frame innovation is a key to reflexivity in, and an aspiration toward, professional reflective practice.
Notes

1 Disclaimer: The views expressed herein are the author’s and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the National Defense University, the US Department of Defense or the US Government.


6 The meaning of reflexivity has been debated widely in philosophy (e.g., relational interpretation), sociology (e.g. reflexive anthropology), linguistics (e.g., the study of anaphor) and, for the last thirty years, organization and management literature. From a Schönian constructionist view, professional inquiry must exceed a quest for proven technique and relies also on scepticism about the state of professional knowledge and correspondent ontological and epistemological assumptions about how professionals should perceive and conceive of reality and practice (how they should improve their ‘thinking in action’). In this regard, the present article focuses on frame reflexivity.


14 Below are the corresponding citations for Figure 5.1 in last name and year order.


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30 Paparone & Crupi, ‘The principles of war as paradox’, p. 43.

31 Adapted by the author from the five goals contained in: D. Stone, *Policy Paradox*, chap. 2-6. I placed equity and welfare in the same quadrant as they share similar attributes, such as belief in basic human rights and the role of nondiscretionary government spending. In this book, Stone’s third edition, welfare was an added goal to the original four.

32 See endnotes 3, 9, and 10 for suggested primers.