Introduction

The study of policy processes is growing and diversifying both in numbers of scholars and in theoretical and methodological approaches. Scholars are increasingly developing established theories and creating new theories, studying public policies in a variety of contexts that span the globe, and applying a diversity of methodological and analytical techniques. If communication among policy scholars is essential for lesson learning and advancing the field then clear vocabulary lies at the fulcrum of progress. A key way to improve that communication process is to describe and compare, in great depth, the language of key concepts and theories.

To that end, the purpose of this chapter is to compare and contrast the conceptual definitions and theories associated with policy paradigms and ideas (Hall, 1993) with the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) (Jenkins-Smith, Nohrstedt, Weible, & Sabatier, 2014; Sabatier, 1988). The goal is not an integration but rather a communication between the two approaches to clarify some of the differences and similarities and to suggest areas and strategies for improvements and future research.

Challenges immediately arise, however, when comparing and contrasting Hall’s (1993) policy paradigms and ideas to any other theoretical approach or concepts found in public policy. The source of the challenges lies in the obscure ontological origin of both paradigms and ideas, which manifests in overly stretched and poorly defined definitions that have befuddled communication and research among policy scholars for decades. As such, two sets of questions must continue to be asked. The first set is descriptive: what are ideas and paradigms and how do the definitions of ideas and paradigms relate? The second set is
explanatory: what is paradigmatic policy change, what causes it, and how long does it take?

Both sets of questions about paradigms and ideas remain largely unanswered. The principal reason is that ideas and paradigms are ontologically obscure and, therefore, any attempt to draw explanatory leverage and generalizable knowledge will be problematic. Yet, scholars continue to study them. The popularity of ideas and paradigms stems probably from their intuitive appeal, for the concepts are flexible enough to capture the imagination of what is and what ought to be. Thus, policy scholars often adopt an ‘I know it when I see it’ approach. As a result, they see what they want to see in ideas and paradigms, and what they see is not always the same. Despite plenty of attention among talented scholars, the definitions and relationship among paradigms and ideas remain nearly as confusing and ambiguous today as they were more than two decades ago.

Given past efforts in attempting to clarify the meaning of paradigms and ideas and strengthening the theory involving paradigmatic policy change, this chapter takes a different path that involves an exploration of Halls’ paradigms and ideas and the ACF. This exploration shows that, while some commonalities can be identified, non-trivial differences exist between the two approaches. It would be counterproductive to the study of policy processes to overlook the nuanced differences in the hope of building studies based on their similarities.

**Descriptions of ideas and paradigms**

For more than two decades, Hall (1993) has inspired and motivated scholars to clarify the elusive meaning of paradigms and ideas. Recognizing these past efforts and not wanting to replicate them, this section starts with a brief summary of Hall (1993) to enable a later comparison with the ACF. Fuller descriptions and interpretations of Hall (1993) can be found in this volume and in, for example, special issues devoted to his work (including *Governance*, 26, 2, 2013).

Hall’s (1993) article now commands 4,000 Google Scholar citations and has become a key reference point in the field. If scholars want to define a policy paradigm, or find a point of departure to present their own argument, they usually start with ‘Policy Paradigms, Social Learning, and the State’. Many discussions of ideas and paradigms start with this quote:

[P]olicymakers customarily work within a framework of ideas and standards that specifies not only the goals of policy and the kind of