

Chapter Two

Readings in Business and Professional Writing

A large part of your success in this course depends upon understanding some important concepts, including “culture,” “paradigm,” and “leadership.” These concepts are best grasped in the context of discussing readings that offer commentary on the social situation of writing, descriptions of the paradigm concept, and examples of paradigms and paradigm shifts in action.

Each reading is chosen to help reinforce a major lesson of the course. Joel Arthur Barker’s discussion of “paradigms,” for example, offers an accessible representation of Thomas Kuhn’s ideas. Without understanding the paradigm concept, you may have trouble conducting your research and successfully supporting your argument. You will also have trouble envisioning ways of making change within an organization, which often depends less on what Kuhn calls “normal science” than on what he calls a “paradigm shift.” John T. Bowen and Stowe Shoemaker’s discussion of “loyalty” helps us see how a paradigm—in this case “relationship marketing”—can shape business strategy and improve practices. Importing paradigms is one way to bring about change within an organization. Malcolm Gladwell’s essay on “designs for working” demonstrates that the paradigms that guide our plans can come from theoretical sources we might not expect to find useful. Who would have thought, after all, that the ideas of sociologist and urban planner Jane Jacobs would be so useful in designing office space? Ronald Heifetz and Donald Laurie’s essay on “leadership” helps us understand the larger social implications of making change within an organization and respond to them appropriately. And Ian Parker’s essay on PowerPoint helps us to recognize some of the limitations of relying on standardized forms of business writing to shape our presentations of ideas.

We hope that you find these essays worthwhile both in the course and in your professional lives.

Acknowledgements

Barker, Joel Arthur. “Defining a Paradigm.” Chapter 3 from *Paradigms: The Business of Discovering the Future*. New York: Harper Business, 1993. 30-41.

Bowen, John T. and Stowe Shoemaker. “Loyalty: A Strategic Commitment.” *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly* 39.1 (February 1998): 12-25.

Gladwell, Malcolm. “Designs for Working.” *The New Yorker* (December 11, 2000): 60-70.

Heifetz, Ronald and Donald L. Laurie. “The Work of Leadership.” *Harvard Business Review* (January-February 1997): 124-134.

Parker, Ian. “Absolute PowerPoint: Can a Software Package Edit Our Thoughts?” *The New Yorker* (May 28, 2001): 78ff.