



# Rethinking the Theoretical Foundation of Economics

**Led by:** Dennis J. Snower (Global Solutions Initiative) & David Sloan Wilson (Prosocial World)

**Format:** Seven weekly sessions (90 minutes each, with optional 30 min extra discussion)

**Delivery:** Online, interactive, multi-stakeholder

## Purpose and Objectives

Multiple crises facing the world today have led to the realization that a new paradigm for economics and public policy is needed, not just a “nudging” of existing patterns of thought. We have articulated our vision of a new paradigm in a series of articles titled “Rethinking the Theoretical Foundation of Economics”<sup>1</sup> and have already started to build a coalition around the new paradigm<sup>2</sup>.

We are offering a Masterclass as the next stage of development for the New Paradigm Coalition. It will provide an intensive introduction to the **multilevel economic paradigm**, translating leading-edge theory into **practical tools** for researchers, policymakers, business leaders, and civil society. Notably, the Masterclass is designed to engage whole organizations—not just individuals—and for the development of action plans to take place as part of the class.

## Objectives

- 1. Research relevance** — equip researchers with conceptual and methodological tools for advancing new economic approaches grounded in evolutionary and systems thinking.
- 2. Policy relevance** — show policymakers how multilevel economics informs the design of institutions and incentives that align individual, group, national, and global outcomes.
- 3. Business relevance** — support corporate leaders in building governance and incentive systems that create long-term, multilevel value.
- 4. Civil society relevance** — enable NGOs and grassroots groups to apply multilevel insights in projects that integrate local agency with broader systemic change.

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<sup>1</sup> Go here for the first two articles of the series ([1](#), [2](#)).

<sup>2</sup> The [New Paradigm Coalition](#) is a joint project of ProSocial World and Global Solutions Initiative.

## Who Should Attend

This program is for leaders and teams from:

- Public institutions seeking to integrate systems-based approaches into policy and governance.
- Businesses aiming to align sustainability, purpose, and performance.
- Research organizations and think tanks exploring new frameworks for economic inquiry.
- Civil society and philanthropic organizations designing interventions that bridge local and global impact.

Participants may join as individuals or as organizational cohorts to co-develop action plans during the course.

## What You Will Take Away

By the end of the Masterclass, participants will have:

- A practical understanding of multilevel economics and its relevance to their organization's mission.
- Diagnostic tools for identifying systemic misalignments within policies, markets, and institutions.
- Draft action plans or proposals that apply multilevel design principles to real-world challenges.
- Access to a cross-sectoral learning network and continuing collaboration opportunities with GSI and Prosocial World.

## Format and Learning Design

Seven 90-minute weekly sessions, with optional 30-minute “after hours” discussions.

Three participant tracks—**Research, Policy**, and **Business/Civil Society**—each with tailored practical exercises and shared plenary discussions for cross-fertilization.

Learning methods include:

- Short, research-informed lectures.
- Small-group case labs for applied design.
- Plenary synthesis sessions.
- Optional “deep-dive” groups for developing pilot projects.

Evaluation will include a research evaluation on worldview transformation using surveys and AI-assisted language analysis.

# Syllabus and Weekly Plan

## Week 1 — Introduction: What is a Paradigm?

- **Content:** Understanding paradigms as containers for constructive disagreement; comparing neoclassical vs. multilevel economics.
- **Practice:** Each participant identifies a paradigm challenge in their own domain (policy, research, corporate, NGO).
- **Output:** 1-page reflection on paradigm relevance to personal/professional context.

## Week 2 — Economics under Generalized Darwinism

*Reading: Rethinking the Theoretical Foundation of Economics I*

- **Content:** Multilevel paradigm as integrative framework linking micro, meso, and macro economics. Contrast with neoclassical and pluralist approaches.
- **Practice:** Group diagnostic: Where are current policies/strategies “single-level optimized” but multilevel misaligned?
- **Output:** Case notes shared with cohort.

## Week 3 — Core Themes of the Multilevel Paradigm

*Reading: Article II*

- **Content:** Functional organization, distributed agency, radical uncertainty, embeddedness.
- **Practice:** Live case clinic (corporate / policy cases), using intervention design templates.
- **Output:** Group slide summarizing intervention proposals.

## Week 4 — The Workings of Functional Organization

*Reading: Article III*

- **Content:** Internal mechanisms (psychology, norms, narratives) & external mechanisms (institutions, policies, regulations).
- **Practice:** Policy lab: map internal vs. external mechanisms for one real-world challenge (e.g., climate finance, corporate governance).
- **Output:** Short diagnostic maps.

## Week 5 — The Embedded Economy in an Uncertain World

*Reading: Article IV*

- **Content:** Embeddedness in political, social, and natural systems; radical uncertainty; theory pluralism; multilevel flourishing.
- **Practice:** Simulation exercise — teams respond to an unexpected crisis (e.g., AI disruption, pandemic, energy shock) using multilevel tools.
- **Output:** Group scenario response memo.

## Week 6 — Putting the Multilevel Paradigm to Work

*Reading: Article V*

- **Content:** Practical design principles for evolving complex adaptive systems (CAS1 vs. CAS2); examples of best practice “hiding in plain sight.”
- **Practice:** Multi-track labs:
  - Policy track → draft policy brief (2–3 pages).
  - Business track → draft corporate governance playbook.
  - Research/NGO track → draft applied research or pilot project proposal.
- **Output:** Draft deliverables.

## Week 7 — Conclusion and the Way Forward

- **Content:** Extensions and applications of the paradigm; synthesis across tracks.
- **Practice:** Public-facing roundtable with invited G20/G7/B20/C20 stakeholders.
- **Output:** Final **“Way Forward” Memo** consolidating key findings and recommendations for international forums.

## Engagement & Dissemination

- **Before the course:** Outreach and co-design with policymakers, corporate partners, and NGOs to ensure relevance to participant contexts.
- **During the course:** Structured translation of insights into actionable briefs and toolkits.
- **After the course:** Ongoing support for embedding diagnostic frameworks and pilot projects within participating organizations.

## Sustainability

Alumni will form the nucleus of the Multilevel Policy Labs community. A living toolkit and dashboard—aligned with GSI’s recoupling indicators—will support replication and adaptation by governments, firms, and NGOs. Periodic “sprint sessions” will allow alumni to update and synchronize their deliverables with global policy cycles.

This syllabus sets up the masterclass as a bridge between high-level theory and real-world practice, producing outputs directly relevant to research agendas, corporate strategies, policy reforms, and international governance forums.

## Get in Touch

If you’re interested in participating, or would like more information, please contact us at [hello@prosocial.world](mailto:hello@prosocial.world).