

Reframing Organizations

Artistry, Choice, and Leadership

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Summary and activities relating to educational

organizations by

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A frame is a mental model.

- A frame in this context is a set of ideas and assumptions that you carry in your head to help you understand and negotiate a particular “territory.” A good frame makes it easier to know what your are up against and, ultimately, what you can do about it. Frames are vital because organizations don’t come with computerized navigation systems. Instead, leaders and managers need to develop and carry accurate maps in their heads. Even with the right map, getting around will be slow if you have to stop at every intersection. The goal is fluid expertise so you can make decisions quickly.

The Four-Frame Model

Chapter 1

- Bolman and Deal use this model to set up the book. They believe that modern leaders need to use more than one lens in order to better understand and control organizations. The frames are:
- Structural: This deals with the rules, roles, goals and policies that drive behavior.
- Human Resource: Here we align human and organizational needs. Relationships are a focus.
- Political: Power, conflict, and competition are featured.
- Symbolic: Culture is the focus. The leader's job is to inspire.

Simple Ideas - Complex Organizations

Chapter 2

- Organizations are complex, surprising, deceptive, and ambiguous, which makes it a challenge to manage them. The three common fallacies used to explain problems are: blaming people, blaming the bureaucracy, and thirsting for power. To cope with ambiguity and complexity you need mental maps that anticipate complicated and unforeseeable problems. Your theories can tell you what is important and what can be safely ignored. They can also block you from recognizing your errors. The ability to reframe is one of the most powerful capacities of great artists. It can be equally powerful for managers.

Structure - Getting Organized

Chapter 3

- Clear, well-understood goals, roles, and relationships and adequate coordination are essential to organizational performance. Officially sanctioned expectations and exchanges form a blueprint for an organization. Tasks need to be differentiated and different tasks need to be integrated. Vertical coordination involves chain of command control. Lateral coordination occurs when peers communicate in a less formal manner. McDonald's and Harvard are examples of extreme cases for highly structured and loosely structured organizations. Business goals tend to be specific and easy to measure. Goals for schools are more diffuse.

Structure and Restructuring

Chapter 4

- School teachers working in self-contained classrooms feel lonely and unsupported. Efforts to create close teamwork have run aground because of teachers' difficulties in working together. This is an example of excessive autonomy. The opposite is excessive interdependence where people lose work time due to excessive coordination. If structure is too loose, people go their own way or get lost. If it is too tight, you stifle flexibility and people spend time trying to game the system. Schools are examples of professional bureaucracies. Reform efforts produce little impact as professionals view change efforts as annoying distractions. Efforts to exercise more control can do more harm than good.

Top Down Seldom Works

- A professional bureaucracy responds slowly to external change. Waves of reform typically produce little impact because professionals often view any change as an annoying distraction. (Doug: Trying to get teachers with masters' degrees to change is difficult as they think they know what they are doing and don't want administration to tell them how to teach. Teachers must see the need and reason to change. It also helps if they think it is their idea. This theory does not bode well for the success of changes found in various winning *Race To The Top* applications.)

Teamwork - Chapter 5

- Organizations often contain groups or teams that have a varying degree of autonomy depending on the task. Management can release collective energy by giving a team clear authority and getting out of the way. A powerful engine for performance can exist when purpose and goals are combined and team members are committed. Smaller teams feature less complexity. Use the smallest team that can get the job done. Teams need to agree on roles, tasks, and have access to necessary expertise. All team members need to be accountable. Work to avoid inequity, confusion, and frustration.

The Human Resource Frame

People and Organizations - Chapter 6

- Core assumptions of this frame are: 1) organizations exist to serve human needs 2) People need organizations for many intrinsic and extrinsic reasons. Organizations need people for their energy, effort, and talent. 3) When fit is poor, people feel exploited or they exploit the organization. 4) A good fit benefits both. People find satisfying work, and organizations get the talent and energy they need to succeed.
- Unions exist as workers desire a more equal footing with management. Union leaders, however, often run unions like factories, (theory X) because that is the only way they know how to manage. Employees' sense of powerlessness, therefore, doesn't change.

Human Resource Management

Chapter 7

- It is harder to get a job at Google than it is to get into Harvard. Realizing this, Google has many perks in order to help keep its employees. (Doug: While the finances of education constrain giving away anything not bargained for, leaders can reward staff by being flexible.) The main points in this chapter are: have an HR strategy, hire the right people, reward them well, provide quality professional development, allow for autonomy to redesign work, work as teams and make decisions, and hire people from diverse backgrounds. (Doug: Hire people who aren't like yourself.) They also make a case for promoting from within.

Doug on Diversity

- Bolman and Deal make a case for diversity, but it is mostly along the lines of, our society is diverse so your organization should be diverse. Be diverse so you don't alienate customers. These are good arguments but they leave out the idea that a diverse workforce is more likely to produce a diverse set of ideas based on the diverse cultural thinking brought to any situation.
- Exhibit 7.1 on page 142 is loaded with ideas for activities and group projects.

Interpersonal and Group Dynamics

Chapter 8

- The central argument in this chapter is that managers spend most of their time engaged in relationships and that relationships trump structure in terms of importance to organizational success. Managers think they are more rational, open, concerned for others, and democratic than they are seen by colleagues. Beliefs can be self-fulfilling. If you tell yourself it's too dangerous to be open and that you don't know how to deal with difficult people, you will probably be right.

Making Groups Click

- Higher consideration for employees is generally associated with lower turnover, fewer grievances, and less absenteeism. More Effective supervisors tend to be high on both consideration and structure. Managers should be most involved as groups get going and their informal norms begin to evolve. Absence of team building can be catastrophic. Strife can block progress and waste time. The larger and more diverse the group, the greater the likelihood of conflict. Effective leaders help group members communicate and work together. Less effective leaders try to dominate and get their own ideas accepted.

The Political Frame

The Five Propositions - Chapter 9

- Organizations are coalitions of individuals and interest groups.
- Members have enduring differences.
- Important decisions involve allocating scarce resources.
- Conflict is part of day-to-day dynamics. Power is the most important asset.
- Bargaining and negotiations are used to make decisions.

Where it comes from and What to do

- Political activity results from interdependence, divergent interests, scarcity, and power relations.
- Leaders need to acknowledge, understand, and manage political dynamics rather than shy away from them.
- Differences and scarce resources make power a key resource. Power is the capacity to make things happen.

Sources of Power

- Authority associated with position is the most common type of power. People who control rewards like jobs and money also wield power. If you can constrain, block, or punish you have power. Information, expertise, reputation, and personality offer power. Your network and alliances are a source of power. If you can control an agenda you have power, and if you can frame a discussion by controlling meaning and symbols you also have a type of power. Because position power is rarely enough to get the job done, you need to also resort to as many of these other types of power as possible.

Where to look for conflict.

- Conflict is more likely to occur at boundaries, or interfaces, between groups and units. Horizontal conflict occurs between departments or divisions. Vertical conflict occurs at the border between levels. Cultural conflict crops up between groups with differing values, traditions, beliefs, and lifestyles. Such conflict can seep into the work place. It is the price you pay for having a diverse staff (or student body). Culture at the leadership level is different from that at the follower level, which can make it difficult for people who move up the ladder. Managing conflict will determine how successful you are.

The Manager as Politician

Chapter 10

- Politics is part of social life, therefore, managers need to get good at it. They need to find a middle road between naivete and cynicism. You must set an agenda, which requires a vision that balances the long-term interests of key parties and a strategy for achieving the vision. You need to map the political terrain in order to know channels of communication, agents of influence, and each party's interests. Reason and relationship are both important. Success is more likely if the people in charge are perceived as credible, competent, and sensible. As you negotiate, be hard on the problem and easy on the people. Focus on interests, not positions. Openness works better than adversarial strategy. Leaders need to be whole people with capacities for thinking and feeling. You should be comfortable if your behavior were to be made public, be willing to be on the receiving end of your own actions, and take actions that would be good for society if everyone followed your lead.

Organizations as Political Arenas and Political Agents. Chapter 11

- Organizations operate in complex ecosystems. Not only are there active internal political processes that shape organizations, they also act as agents in the larger surrounding political ecosystem. Inside schools we find political battles among employees at all levels, the unions, and board of education. At the same time, schools must deal with parents, businesses, government, and taxpayers who all lobby for influence within the school. As organizations become entangled with outside forces to gain influence over the environment, they also see an erosion in their autonomy. There is no free lunch. They remain vital only by adapting to larger social forces and responding to the needs and demands of customers and constituents.

A typical school failure

An activity

- Central office learns of a grant opportunity with a big chunk of government funding. A small group of administrators meet to develop a proposal. When funding is approved, administration announces it with pride and praises what the project will do to improve instruction. Teachers are dismayed that administration committed to new teaching approaches without faculty input. The new program becomes a political football, producing more disharmony, mistrust, and conflict than tangible improvement in education.
- **If you are the superintendent how do you handle these situations?**

Cultural Assessment Activity

- On page 220, Bolman and Deal state that “some organizations use measures of social networking to identify and manage who’s connected to whom.” They go on to say that “ignoring or misreading people’s roles in networks is costly.”
- As a new principal, what are some ways you go about assessing the networks in your building or district? At the same time, how do you discover cultural norms?

Organizational Symbols and Culture - Chapter 12

- Symbolic actions and activities impact an organization's culture for better or worse. Myth, vision, and values imbue an organization with purpose and resolve. Heroes through words and deeds serve as living logos. Rituals and ceremonies offer direction, faith, and hope. When attuned to valued myths, they can fire imagination and deepen faith. They can release creativity, but they can also cement the status quo. Metaphor, humor, and play loosen things up. Stories perpetuate values and keep feats of heroes alive. Symbols can also be negative.

Culture in Action

Chapter 13

- In the field of group endeavor, you will see incredible events in which the group performs far beyond the sum of its individual talents. Example, not command, holds a team together. Stories carry history and values and reinforce group identity. Humor and play reduce tension and encourage creativity. Ritual and ceremony lift spirits and reinforce values. Informal cultural players make contributions disproportionate to their formal role. Team building at its heart is a spiritual undertaking. It is both a search for the spirit within and creation of a community of believers united by shared faith and shared culture. Peak performance emerges as a team discovers its soul.

Organization as Theater

Chapter 14

- Organizations can be viewed as theatrical or as theater. Structures, activities, and events become expressive components of organizational theater. Meetings, evaluations, and collective bargaining all have their scripts that must be followed to maintain organizational norms. Planning is an essential ceremony, which can be like a ritual rain dance that has no effect on the weather that follows. A leader's power is less a matter of action than appearance. Leaders can make a difference by enriching and updating the drama. Leadership is a performing art. If things go wrong, revise the drama and dance to another tune.

Activities

- Who are the heroes in your school/district? What do they do that makes them heroes?
- What do you do to make yourself an everyday hero? What could you do that you are not currently doing? What would you do if you became an administrator in your school?
- Do you have any good hero stories associated with your school's culture.

Integrating Frames for Effective Practice - Chapter 15

- Managers operate largely on the basis of intuition, drawing on firsthand observations, hunches, and judgement derived from experience. When problems are ill defined and options murky, control is an illusion and rationality an afterthought. In a given situation, one cognitive map may be more helpful than others. If the tried-and-true approach shows signs of producing a shortfall, attack it from another frame. Studies show that successful leaders have a bias for action, try a lot and keep what works, take risks and learn from what doesn't work, focus on the organization rather than their reputation, are self-effacing, disciplined, hardworking, and attribute success to their colleagues. Managers usually work with the structural frame while leaders tend to use the symbolic and political frames. Effective principals use multiple frames.

Reframing in Action

Opportunities & Perils - Chapter 16

- Here Bolman and Deal examine a scenario from each of the four basic frames. They give effective and less effective ways to use each frame. The effective leader changes lenses when things don't make sense or aren't working. Reframing offers the promise of powerful new options, but it cannot guarantee that every new strategy will be successful. Each lens has its advantages and shortcomings. For me, this is the best chapter in the book as it demonstrates the four frames in action with multiple outcomes in 13 pages. The next time you have a tense encounter or high-stakes meeting, try novel ways to play your role until reframing becomes instinctive.

Which Frame(s) Do You Use?

An activity

- As a first-year principal, you observed a veteran teacher yesterday and are scheduled to meet with her today for a post observation conference. During the observation you saw several students nod out as the teacher talked for most of the class. Just prior to the conference you are called to deal with a student who is having severe behavior issues. As a result, you are so late for the conference that you ask the teacher to reschedule. She declines and says if you can't get this done in the ten minutes we have I'm going to the union to lodge a grievance that you didn't conduct the post conference within the contract's required time frame. What is your response. Which frames do you use?

Reframing Leadership

Chapter 17

- **Leadership is not tangible.** It exists only in relationships and in the perception of the engaged parties. We expect leaders to produce cooperative effort and to pursue goals that transcend narrow self-interest. Managers do things right. Leaders do the right thing. Managers focus on execution, leaders on purpose. Leadership is a change-oriented process of visioning, networking, and building relationships. Good leadership is also situational. Leaders must communicate a vision effectively, often through the use of symbols. They need to inspire trust and build relationships. Humility is a key quality. Flexibility, self-confidence, decisiveness, understanding followers, and courage also count.

Chapter 17

The Gender Issue

- Bolman and Deal devote five pages to the issue of gender differences. Most of what they offer deals with common stereotypes. Women should be more likely to bring concern for people, nurturance, and willingness to share information, but evidence is equivocal. Men and women are probably more alike than different as leaders. As of 2007, only 15% of superintendents were women. Some believe that a powerful woman is distasteful, unfeminine, and that a strong woman can make both men and women uncomfortable. Expressing anger is positive for men but not women. Women are attracted to intelligent men, but men don't tend to like women who are smarter than them. The challenge for women is to be powerful and feminine at the same time. Personal and family responsibilities are the biggest barrier to career success for women. Women do, however, represent a tremendous talent pool and should have a growing educational edge over male counterparts. (Doug: I think we have reached the tipping point for women in some places. Binghamton, NY has 16 women administrators and only 14 males. Two of the top three are female.) What is the ratio in your district?

Reframing Change in Organizations: Training, Realigning, Negotiating, and Grieving - Chapter 18

- Change agents fail when they rely mostly on reason and structure while neglecting human, political, and symbolic elements. The frames offer a checklist of issues that change agents must recognize and respond to. Initiatives fail when we don't understand our environment well enough to anticipate the consequences of our actions. "He who introduces change makes enemies of all those who derived advantage from the old order and finds but lukewarm defenders (Machiavelli, 1514)." You need to take time to hear people's ideas and concerns and to make sure that all involved have the necessary talent, confidence, and expertise. Your team needs to have the skills, credibility, connections, and authority. (Exhibit 18.2 page 395 is excellent)

Preparing for Change Activity.

- Your vision sees your school's grading system as one that serves to demotivate many students. You plan to put together a team to recommend changes. 1) How long do you give the team to act? 2) Name some of the people by position you want on the team. 3) What are some of the first things you do with your team? 4) What do you do when you find that your proposed plan isn't supported by your report card software? 5) What key events need to happen once the team has consensus? 6) How do you respond to plan detractors? 7) As the plan roles out, what do you look for?

Reframing Ethics and Spirit

Chapter 19

- The authors venture into an area that touches on what may sound like religious beliefs. They see ethics as something that resides in soul, a sense of bedrock character that harbors core beliefs and values. Soul is something that sustains spiritual conviction and ethical behavior. For an organization, soul can also be viewed as a resolute sense of character, a deep confidence about who we are, what we care about, and what we believe in. Scandals usually feature unethical conduct. More emphasis on ethics in professional training is needed. Love is also absent from modern organizations. Love is a willingness to reach out and open one's heart. It make us vulnerable but can serve to mold the soul of the community. Giving power also liberates energy for more productive uses.

Chapter 20/Epilog

- Chapter 20 is an extended summary of a case study involving how a new leader of a school with lots of problems uses the four frames as he tries to dig the organization out of the hole it is in. It is a valuable story.
- In the Epilog, the authors point out that good managers and leaders combine core values with elastic strategies. They get things done without being done in. They know what they stand for and what they want and communicate the vision with clarity and power. They also understand and respond to the vortex of forces that propel organizations in conflicting trajectories. They think creatively about how to make things happen and develop strategies with enough elasticity to respond to the twists and turns on the path to a better future.

Doug's Final Take

- If you haven't done so yet, think about a complex issue or project that you have dealt with in the past that featured people in your organization. Ask yourself how the four frames were involved as you worked towards a solution, resolution, or final product. I think you will find that they all show up to some degree. As you go forward and find yourself trying to manage and lead, be sure to stop and check to see how each of the frames apply to each challenge you face. Always look for the aspects of a situation that remind you of a machine, a family, a jungle, and a theater.