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## Book Review- REFRAMING ORGANIZATIONS: ARTISTRY, CHOICE AND LEADERSHIP.

Jean M. Haar

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# Book Review

Jean Haar

**REFRAMING ORGANIZATIONS: ARTISTRY, CHOICE AND LEADERSHIP.** (Jossey-Bass Business & Management Series), Lee Bolman & Terrence Deal, Paperback: 544 pages, Publisher: Jossey-Bass 4th edition (August, 2008).

## Introduction

Bolman and Deal's 4th edition of *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership* remains a classic, "must have" resource for those involved in organizational leadership. The edition supports the relevance and timeliness of the authors' insightful approach about organizations and leadership. The authors reinforce the usefulness of their four-frame model (structural, human resource, political, symbolic) for refining leadership practices. The four frames serve as a tool to analyze organizational decision-making and to reflect on the effectiveness of processes, procedures, and results. Updated research, examples, and case studies add to those previously drawn from business, education, health care, and the public sector. The information helps leaders more creatively lead complex organizations. As Bolman and Deal note, "We try not to offer solutions but rather to suggest more powerful and provocative ways of thinking about organizations' opportunities and pitfalls" (p. xii).

The authors also emphasize the relevance of incorporating artistry into leadership noting:

Overemphasizing the rational and technical side of organizations often contributes to their decline or demise. . . . Art allows for emotion, subtlety, and ambiguity. An artist reframes the world to give us deeper understanding of what is and what might be. In modern organizations, quality, commitment, and creativity are highly valued but often hard to find. They can be developed and encouraged by leaders and managers who embrace the expressive side of their work (pp. xiii–xiv).

The purpose of the book is to examine the elements and advantages of the four frames in a manner that is important and useful for current and aspiring leaders. The intended outcome is for the reader to understand and practice viewing issues and situations from more than one perspective. The authors contend that people, in general, have a tendency to examine situations or problems from a limited, narrow perspective thus hindering their

## About the Author

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ability to be effective and visionary leaders. Bolman and Deal also emphasize the applicability of the content and concepts to all types of organizations noting that a common ground and shared understanding can strengthen public and private organizations.

The authors have extensive backgrounds in organizational leadership. Lee Bolman holds the Marion Bloch Missouri Chair in Leadership at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. He earned a B.A. in History and a Ph.D. in Organizational Behavior from Yale University. He has written extensively about leadership and organizations. Terrence E. Deal has a Ph.D. in Educational Administration and Sociology from Stanford University. He has written on organizations, leadership, change, culture, symbolism and spirit. He previously taught at Harvard, Stanford, and Vanderbilt. Bolman and Deal met in 1976 when they were assigned to co-teach a course on organization. They have written numerous books and articles together.

## Overview

*Reframing Organizations* is organized into four parts. Part One serves as an introduction to the factors that make organizations complex places. Parts Two—Five unfold the concepts, historical foundations and practices associated with each of the four frames (structural, human resource, political, symbolic). Part Six focuses on improving leadership practices and intellectual development through the refinement of ethics, core values and spiritual development.

Current and aspiring leaders have much to gain from understanding and practicing the four frames. Bolman and Deal provide in-depth development of each frame and demonstrate through content, examples and case studies how “each of the frames has its own image of reality” (p. 15), thus providing the reader an opportunity to learn how to effectively apply all four frames and develop a deeper understanding of organizations. Successful managers “reframe until they understand the situation at hand” (p. 15) heightening their ability to be effective. This expansion of thinking results in the following:

Managers who master the ability to reframe report a liberating sense of choice and power. They are able to develop unique alternatives and novel ideas about their organization needs. They are better attuned to people and events around

them. They are less often startled by the organizational perversity, and they learn to anticipate the turbulent twists and turns of organizational life. (p. 17)

Each of the frames provides its own unique sense of purpose and focus. The Structural Frame attempts to examine the social context of work. Organizations tend to designate specific roles for employees and group them into working units. Coordination and control of these various groups occurs either vertically or laterally. The most effective structure depends on the organization's environment, goals and strategies. Bolman and Deal list six assumptions behind the Structural Frame:

1. Organizations exist to achieve established goals and objectives;
2. Organizations work best when rationality prevails over personal preferences and external pressures;
3. Structures must be designed to fit an organization's circumstances;
4. Organizations increase efficiency and enhance performance through specialization and division of labor;
5. Appropriate forms of coordination and control are essential to ensuring that individuals and units work together in the service of organizational goals; and
6. Problems and performance gaps arise from structural deficiencies and can be remedied through restructuring.

By understanding and respecting the complexity of an organization and the various structural options available, leaders can create structures that work for rather than against both people and the organization.

The Human Resource Frame attempts to view an organization as a large, extended family. From this perspective, an organization is inhabited by individuals—individuals with needs, prejudices, feelings, limitations and skills. The goal of the leader is to mold the organization to meet the needs of its people. The leader seeks to merge the peoples' need to experience satisfaction and meaning in work with the organization's ability to effectively use individuals' knowledge, skills, and abilities.

The Political Frame views the workplace as a jungle. The work environment is viewed as a competitive environment in which different people compete for power and limited resources. The work environment is one of rampant conflict immersed in negotiation, bargaining, compromise and coercion. Bolman and Deal offer five propositions about this frame:

1. Organizations are coalitions of various individuals and interest groups;
2. There are enduring differences among coalition members in values, beliefs, information, interests, and perceptions of reality;
3. Most important decisions involve the allocation of scarce resources and what gets done;
4. Scarce resources and enduring differences give conflict a central role in or-

- ganizational dynamics and typically make power the most important resource; and
- 5. Goals and decisions emerge from bargaining, negotiation, and jockeying for position among different stakeholders.

Based on the political frame, the exercise of power is viewed as a natural part of the work environment and those who know how to garner and use power best are the successors. Effective leaders understand this concept and use it as a vehicle for achieving noble purposes. The level of a leader's political skill can have a direct impact on organizational change and effectiveness.

The Symbolic Frame builds on cultural and social anthropology. It views organizations as carnivals, theaters or tribes. An organization is a unique culture driven by stories, ceremonies, rituals and heroes. This is in contrast to an organization being driven by rules, authority or policies. The organization is analogous to a theater. With this theater, various actors play their respective roles in the drama and the audience forms its own impressions of what is seen on the stage. The Symbolic Frame also views team building differently. It views the development of high-performing teams as a spiritual network enhanced by rituals, ceremonies and myths. A leader's effective use of the symbolic frame is essential during times of crisis and change. By establishing a strong sense of community, effective team performance is maintained even during challenges times (i.e., budget constraints, downsizing, system changes).

## Conclusion

The value of the book for women in leadership is derived from the authors' clear, concise articulation and demonstration of why and how to use the four-frame model to effectively lead organizations. The information is presented in such a manner as to allow the reader to process and practice different perspectives and concepts as needed. The four frames allow a leader to approach situations in new ways and to shift perspective. The use of the multiple frames assists the leader in analyzing problems more broadly and identifying the availability of potential solutions. It encourages the leader to think flexibly about his or her organization and view events from multiple angles. In general, Bolman and Deal urge current and aspiring leaders to view organizational leadership from different viewpoints and realities. The approach allows the individual to establish a stronger repertoire of leadership knowledge and skills for facing challenging situations, problems, and issues—thus providing stronger leadership for complex organizations.