Four Frame Model Analysis

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This evolving world is steadily increasing in its complexity and so leaders and managers must strive to become effective and understanding of the different layers comprising their organization. This includes, but not limited to, understanding their organizations from many perspectives. These perspectives include the use of structures within the organization to enhance the mission and vision of the organization as a whole. The ability to view the organization in a multifaceted approach increases awareness of the culture within the work environment. McGregor (1960) suggests we seek first to understand and then to be understood. To no avail, managers and leaders fail on an organizational level by misunderstanding and misdiagnosing.

Misinterpretation, assumptions, and an erroneous assessment of a problem, leaders make the wrong decision fearful of being labeled political. In our attempt to make sense of issues we often are “clueless” to what may really be happening (Bolman and Deal, 2009). Due to the desire to correct the issue which is occurring within the organization, leaders tend to assess the motivations, values, and attitudes of the employees. The challenge is to appropriately and accurately assess and intervene in organizational issues while reflecting on past occurrences and interventions conducted. The reflection may include a past failed effort in an attempt to rectify an issue and where it went wrong. Managers and leaders should explore the use of reframing, the perspective that organizations can be viewed from more than one angle (Bolman and Deal, 2009). An organization can be complex and so to view it from different perspectives will assist in its success. Acknowledging the complexity of the organization, including structural and power issues and inherent issues, will assist in the goals, needs, and desires in the organization for success. By ignoring the human dynamics, which are in continual interplay with our organizational goals, is basically denouncing the power of relationship. Bolman and Deal (2009) view organizations through four frames: structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. Bolman and Deal (2009) believe that a manager who is able to use multiple frames to solve a conflict within an organization will be effective leaders. The four frame models suggests that if a leader is capable of viewing the organization using different perspectives then the effectiveness of responding to organizational and management conflicts will increase with compassion, creativity, and flexibility. There is no “right” perspective in which to solve challenges which allows managers to utilize a vast range of options.

Four Frame Model Synthesized

Bolman and Deal (2009) have identified four frames, the structural (factories), human resource (families), political (jungle), and symbolic (theatre) in their book *Reframing Organizations*. All four of these frames allow leaders to view organizational challenges from different perspectives. Frame analysis is important because organizations are complex. Bolman and Deal (2009) explain how, “…explosive technological and social changes have produced a world that is far more interconnected, frantic, and complicated” then it once was (Bolman and Deal, 2009, P. 6). A valuable skill of framing and reframing is the ability to view challenges through a multiple lens.

According to Bolman and Deal (2009), “a frame is a mental model – 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 you are up against and ultimately what you can do about it, according to Bolman and Deal (Bolman and Deal, 2008, P. 11). Encompassing frame analysis to ultimately make a decision on overlapping complex issues depends on an artistic point of view of issues in order to understand the core of the problem and take the best action necessary. There are other ways to solve problems in a more traditional way. Bolman and Deal (2008) explain how frame analysis is similar to art, and that, “art is not replacement for engineering, but an enhancement” (Bolman and Deal, 2008, P. 21). The multiple frames assist leasers to sift through the complex issues and find the root of the problem to make the best decision in rectifying the situation.

The structural frame is influenced by Max Weber’s studies on structure within organizations and Fredrick Taylor’s work on “scientific management”, according to Bolman and Deal (Bolman & Deal, 2008, P. 48). Both employee productivity and morale is accounted for formal structure. Bolman and Deal stated that Moeller’s study proved that a school faculty with higher structure had higher morale than a school with a less strict structure, in 1968 (Bolman and Deal, 2008, P. 50). Structure will only be a success if it is the right type of structure being used for the organization. The structure, “…need not be machine like or inflexible,” and it can become a less positive impact if viewed as bureaucratic (Bolman and Deal, 2008, P. 51). When an organization grows, this primarily happens, according to Bolman and Deal (2008) (Bolman and Deal, 2008, P. 62). Furthermore, a company that depends mostly on a structural frame can promote individual interests and gain instead of interests and gain for the company. The not so good side of the structural frame is that it, “risks ignoring everything that falls outside the rational scope of tasks, procedures, policies, and organization charts” (Bolman and Deal, 2008, P. 339). A company can become less resilient and have a negative influence on innovation if it relies heavily on the structural frame. According to Bolman and Deal (2008), a manager becomes a tyrannical or bureaucratic when ineffective and an architect or analyst when effective and depending on a structural frame (Bolman and Deal, 2008, P. 356). In order for leaders and managers to avoid potential negatives, they have to know the positives as well as the negatives within the structural frame.

A company who has used the structural frame and has been successful is United Parcel Service (UPS). UPSs’ employees are more productive due to the structural culture and technology which helps them succeed. Micromanaging and bureaucracy are known by UPS to be its only threat due to the understanding and use of the structural frame. Leaders and managers are able to foresee and prevent issues because of their awareness of the negatives. UPS is able to thrive by using the structural frame because it is not negotiable or flexible (Bolman and Deal, 2008, P. 50).

The next frame is the human resource frame which assumes all employees within an organization ultimately want to be successful and help their organization achieve their goals. Working within this frame allows employees to feel like owner-operators which are important for the organization because it keeps the employees goals adhered with the company’s goals (Bolman and Deal, 2008, P. 128). In the human resource frame, managers and leaders are considered to be servants and catalyst when they are effective, and considered a pushover and weak if ineffective (Bolman and Deal, 2008, P. 356). When managers and leaders disregard the human resource frame at times they tend to cut costs, which compromises safety. Safety goals have to be achieved in order for the human resource frame to be effective. These basic Maslow hierarchy of needs have to be met for the employees to feel secure within the company. A negative impact of the human resource frame is that it often relies on a, “romanticized view of human nature in which everyone hungers for growth and collaboration” (Bolman and Deal, 2008, P. 339). A company that operates using a human resource frame can promote the aspects of power, even though the political frame incorporates it much better, when having committed employees willing to be loyal to the company. An example of a successful human resource framed company is FedEx. “People-Service-Profit”, is how FedEx’s culture is explained.

FedEx website focuses on, “take care of our people; they in turn, will deliver the impeccable service demanded by our customers, who will reward us with the profitability necessary to secure our future” (FedEx Culture). FedEx is considered one of the most admired organizations to work for which is a notable achievement. A business will succeed with a motivated employee and the use of the human resource frame despite taking in account control like the structural frame work does. FedEx has grown believing that employees will do what’s right to help the business grow and do not need to be micromanaged. Keeping an employee satisfied is the basis of the human resource frame when companies are making decisions. This concept will keep the moral of the employees at a high, which will ultimate lead to satisfied customers.

Bolman and Deal explains the political frame by linking it with power and how it influences relationships. The political frame allows a leader to key in on the politics of the company and who has the power to get things done. In order to comprehend the needs and expectations of different parties within a political frame, leaders and managers must make decisions using this frame work. A relationship whose priorities are not at all times compatible is shareholders and management. A shareholder may want the organization to cut the budget in order to improve profitability, while management wants quality improvement. The requirements to manage a company can be demanding for a leader or manager, however, to be successful all demands have to be addressed. Ineffective leaders and managers who operate within a political frame are unsuccessful by acting like a thug, corrupt, or con artist when they are actually advocates and negotiators (Bolman and Deal, 2008, P.356). Collaboration is what a leader should focus on when using the political frame instead of issues and disloyalty (Bolman and Deal, 2008, P. 339). The political and human resource frames are similar because of the emphasis that employees want to do the right thing.

The final frame Bolman and Deal discuss is the symbolic frame, which emphasize on organizations mostly being judged on appearance as well as the outcomes. In order to reinforce the goal, companies stress symbolic culture like rituals, myths, ceremonies, and stories (Bolman and Deal, 2008, P. 254. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) becomes a cultural leader within in the symbolic frame and can be effective and viewed as a poet or prophet. If they are ineffective they will be seen as charlatan and fanatic (Bolman and Deal, 2008, P. 356). Rituals are effective in a symbolic frame is the employees believe the ritual and it is not just gestures mimicked as a tradition. Manipulation is a tactic that is sometimes used; however, in order to not be misinterpreted, a leader must be careful when using the stories and rituals. A manager or leader can be successful and effective if they use multiple frame work to increase the positives and decrease the negatives.

Bolman and Deal explained why using a multiple frame is best by asking one question, “Is the technical quality important”? It’s acceptable to use the structural frame when a technical quality must be met; however, it is necessary to view other resolutions like the human, political, and symbolic frame when making decisions (Bolman and Deal, 2008, P. 318). A leader can make an assumption decision when using one frame, instead of using multiple frames which can have a negative impact on the organization. All frames intertwined with each other so using a multiple lens is imperative to solve issues allowing isolation. While all frames are not always needed to solve an organizational challenge, it will yield better outcomes by knowing how to properly utilize each frame according to the situation.

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