



### Topics

Reframing Leadership **P.1, 2**

Sustaining Higher Education

Leadership **P.2,3,4,5**

### Introduction

The book offers “ a readable, intellectually provocative, and pragmatic approach” (p.xi) to the distinct work and possibilities of higher education leadership. The book builds upon the concepts of the four frames from an earlier book by (Bolman & Deal, 2008), *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice & Leadership*. The book has three parts. Part 1 is about understanding the nature of leadership. Part 2 is about reframing academic challenges based on the four frames ( Bolman & Deal, 2008), and, Part 3 presents the common challenges that academic leaders face and six strategies that can sustain their leadership and foster courage and hope.

### Theoretical Underpinnings

The authors draw from theories in organizational learning ( Arygris and Schon, 1996; Senge 1990), Langer, 1989) academic leadership ( Birnbaum, 1992, and cognition (Gropman 2007 & Deal 1984)

## Reframing Academic Leadership

Leadership in higher education is a social influence process and effectiveness is highly contingent on good relationships and knowledge of the complex context. Some of the factors that drive this complexity in higher education are the interdependent attributes of teaching, research, service to diverse students, and the impacts of globalization. In addition, the culture of higher education is often described as a loosely coupled, open system. This way of organizing creates internal inconsistencies and heterogeneity. It is against this backdrop, that the authors posit two concepts that can help academic leaders gain a deep understanding of the issues and take action. These two concepts are “Sensemaking” and “Reframing”.

Sensemaking is the art of noticing, interpreting and deciding how to respond.

However, if a leader takes action without the deliberate process of reframing, the action is often incomplete and prone to the leader’s biases. Reframing is therefore the process of examining an issue using multiple frames represented by the following metaphors: *Machine, Family, Jungle and Theatre*.

The skills of reframing and sensing can be developed by embracing regular reflection, actively seeking growth opportunities, soliciting developmental feedback and being proactive in anticipating the future by imagining plausible scenarios.

To facilitate reframing, leaders are encouraged enact four different roles in order to gain a multidimensional perspective. These frames include acting as an institutional analyst and architect ( Structural Frame), as a compassionate politician ( Political Frame), as a servant, coach & catalyst ( Family Frame), and as an artist and prophet ( Symbolic Frame).

#### Structural Frame ( machine metaphor):

Effective leaders are akin to analysts and architects. They hold a rational view of organizations and strive to structure work in a way that minimizes barriers and maximizes efficiency and effectiveness. In this frame, rules, roles, policies, and procedures are necessary to support organizational goals. To be effective, leaders have to be adept at leading change using the 3Ps ( Process, Persistence, and Patience).

#### Human Resource Frame (family metaphor).

This frame refers to the relationship between the organizations and their people. To flourish, people need relationships, purpose, and meaning from their work. Leaders can create a nurturing environment by acting as ‘servants, catalysts and coaches’ and by empowering people with the necessary resources to help them succeed.



***"Leadership is about change and change is always disruptive" p 129.***

Sustaining Higher Leadership - Seven developmental areas:

1. Managing Conflict

2. Leading from the middle

3. Leading difficult people

4. Managing your boss

5. Sustaining Health and Vitality

6. Feeding the Soul

Political frame ( Jungle metaphor):

Using this frame, leaders are akin to compassionate politicians who navigate diverse beliefs, values, and worldviews ethically and respectfully. They recognize that their working environment is inherently political. They learn how to map their stakeholder network and how to mediate effectively between the various often competing needs.

Symbolic Frame (Theatre

metaphor): This frame attends to the need for meaning and purpose. In this frame, the leader is akin to a spiritual leader who inspires and energizes people with a compelling vision and leads by example. Leaders in this frame are keenly aware that they are always 'on stage.' They leverage the power of rituals, symbols, and ceremony to reinforce the desired culture and tell compelling narratives that help people bridge the past, present, and future.

***Academic leaders build and shape culture by asking:***

***Who are we?***

***What are here to do?***

***How should we go about doing it?***

**Seven critical areas for leadership development**

**1. Managing Conflict**

Leaders face criticism regularly. To withstand this constant pressure, leaders need to know who they are and stay grounded in that as well as develop a network of relationships that nurture their resiliency.

Since conflict is inevitable in a human system, leaders have to master the skill of regulating the 'emotional temperature' so that conflict does not cool off and create apathy or escalate and cause dysfunction. Effective leaders leverage conflict as a learning opportunity and help the parties involved learn and grow from their differences.

Savvy leaders also learn how to distinguish technical problems from adaptive challenges. Technical problems can be resolved by using a simple problem-solving approach whereas adaptive challenges are messier and take time and patience. To address adaptive challenges, leaders engage their people from different sides of the issue with courage and by regularly stepping aside to see the big picture by reflecting on the following questions:

- What is really going on?
- What is really important?
- Where am I in this?
- Where are others?
- What can be done differently?
- What can we learn from the difficulties being addressed?



## 2. Leading from the Middle

Leaders in higher education serve internal and external stakeholder groups. The needs of these diverse stakeholders are often in conflict.

The external world is often represented by governments and funders, who influence the administrator's agenda by setting expectations and accountabilities which are in some cases not in alignment with the internal priorities.

Other external factors that influence the complexity of administrators include declining budgets, changing technology, competition for students, just to name a few.

Internally, the system dynamics between the administrators and faculty might seem to be at odds with one another. For example, student success is important to leaders and faculty. For majority of the faculty that student success is their top priority, while for administrators their attention is also on the long term strategic issues. A lack of understanding of the direct pressures facing the various roles cause unnecessary misunderstanding.

Academic leaders also have to juggle between the autonomy and collegiality of the academic world and the hierarchy and bureaucracy administrative world.

It can be challenging to balance the competing needs of these two worlds.

### Three critical skills of navigating and leading well from the middle

1. Listen, understand and respect differences by learning how to hold the tension of more than one conflicting perspective and searching for possibilities at the intersections.
2. Look for mutual gains by separating the people from the problem and focus on people's underlying interests or needs and not the positions they have on the issue.
3. Stretch yourself by enacting new behaviors such as choosing to let things go - 'giving work back to the people' supported by coaching and facilitating others.

## 3. Leading difficult people

Six guidelines for handling toxic people:

1. Assess the situation to find out what triggers the toxicity and determine if it is chronic, consistent or situational.
1. Take some time to reflect on how you might be contributing to the problem.
2. Confront the challenge by first reaching out to the individual to assess if they are capable of rational dialogue and if so engage with them.
3. Plan ahead by working through different scenarios and prepare how to self manage when should you feel triggered.
4. Set organizational standards and expectations, communicate them and hold people accountable when there is a breach
5. Access professional support from HR, and professional coaches if necessary
6. Protect the people and culture by severing the employment relationship if these tactics fail.

## Dealing with two classic archetypes of difficult people: bullies and backstabbers

Bullies are arrogant and narcissistic individuals who enjoy using power negatively. To counteract this behaviour, leadership at all levels have act consistently & decisively with bullies in alignment with institutional values.

Backstabbers as the name suggests use passive-aggressive tactics. When leaders hear negative rumours about others, they are wise to stay neutral and open-minded until they have had a chance to validate by getting facts. Backstabbers often back off when they fail to see the results of their tactics.

#### 4. Managing your boss

Savvy academic leaders understand the importance of leading up, *"In a culture where resources are scarce, and relationships are vital for opening doors, the ability to understand, influence and work closely with your boss and other senior players is essential tasks in administrative work."* p. 178

Good partnership with your supervisor is fostered by open communication and mutual respect. Confidence emerges from grounding yourself in who you are and what matters to you, and by developing a relationship of respect and collaboration in spite of the power difference.

Helpful practices:

- Understand your boss's style, preferences and the pressures they face in their position.
- Provide your boss with solutions, not problems, e.g., "Here is what I see, Here is what I have done, and here's what I have learned, and here's my plan. Any advice?"
- Approach your boss prepared with an agenda and focus on big-picture issues.
- Demonstrate mindfulness in how you use your boss's time.
- Keep your boss in the loop about what is going on and by being clear, transparent and ethical in the choices you make.
- Follow through on actions and be accountable.
- Speak the truth when necessary. Excessive deference is not healthy and does not demonstrate courage.

#### 5. Sustaining Health and Vitality

Leadership is personal, and the emotional demands of taking care of people can lead to burnout. To mitigate this, leaders have to create boundaries, practice self-care and learn how to live a balanced life. Creating boundaries involves learning how to differentiate legitimate work concerns from baggage that others thrust on them consciously or unconsciously.

*"Healthy leaders care for self and build vitality in paying attention to: Boundaries, Biology, Balance, Beauty and Bounce," p. 193*

Boundary management is necessary at these critical interfaces:

- Self-other
- Personal- professional
- Self-work
- Leader-follower

Common sense strategies like exercise, sleep, proper nutrition, hydration, etc. are essential for managing the demands of the work. It is alluring to rely on fight-flight responses instead of nurturing healthy practices. Sustained high levels of cortisol elevate the body's susceptibility to sickness and disease.

Balancing energy amongst all life's priorities brings joy, meaning, and fulfillment. Since the needs are unrelenting, academic leaders can respond to the pressure with learning how to relax, by embracing positive emotions and by seeking nurturing spaces to counteract the toxicity and negativity.

*Learning is at the heart of effective leadership, and sometimes what academic administrators must learn is deeply personal: how to strengthen their resilience in the face of failure, how to understand and manage their psychic demands and costs of their work ... p.199*

Leadership requires resilience or the ability to adapt and develop strength in the face of challenge, stress or trauma. Resilience grows with practice, and by recognizing that we have choices in how we interpret and respond to events that happen in our lives. Replenishing ourselves with sleep, humor, not taking life too seriously and other meaningful ways that feed the soul provide respite from the fray of everyday life. Renewing from the inside provides the energy for leaders to meet the physical, emotional and psychic demands of their jobs, sustain health and provide personal and professional fulfillment.



### About the Authors

Lee Bolman has a BA in history and a PhD in organizational behavior from Yale University. He is the current chair of Leadership at the Henry.W. Bloch School of Business, Missouri. He is the author of several books including *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice and Leadership, 2008*. He lectures and consults worldwide with corporations, public agencies, universities and schools.

Joan Gallos is the professor of Leadership at University of Missouri and the Director of the Executive MBA program at the Henry Bloch School of Business and Public Administration. Joan Gallos and Lee Bolman have worked together for more than three decades.

## 6. Feeding the Soul

When leaders are at their best, they demonstrate **focus** (clarity of where they are going) and **passion** (emotional commitment). These feelings fuel **courage** (willingness to take risks to advance the cause), **wisdom** (the ability to engage complexity without getting immobilized), and **integrity** (sense of authenticity and trustworthiness). Strong leadership comes from a leader who has a deep sense of calling and commitment to what they stand for. This capability is nurtured through a life-long developmental journey of “becoming” that starts with the inner self. The following questions lie at the heart of this “Hero’s journey” :

- Identity: Who am I and what are my strengths?
- Values: What do I believe in and what is important to me?
- Contribution: What am I here to do? p. 206

*Secure in what we believe and value, the soul gives us a moral compass p.213*

Cultivating spiritual intelligence disciplines facilitates the ability to lead with soul. These may include: 1) Embracing other ways of knowing such as prayer, meditation, silence, intuition and interconnectedness with nature; 2) Living mindfully and authentically; and, 3) Living generously through appreciating and expressing, love, faith, hope, gratitude, optimism, empathy, compassion and humility. While it might be enticing for leaders to blame external factors, the hope for finding satisfaction depends a lot on a leader's inner core, and hence the importance of nurturing inner growth as much as the technical expertise.

The following quote, in my opinion summarizes the key message from this book:

*The most basic task of leaders is to foster hope. Hope as (Andrew Razeghi, 2008) reminds us is more than wishful thinking. Hope takes courage, strong faith, solid thinking, creativity, willful actions, and persistence in the face of the unknown. The call for more and better leadership is often a plea for those who can help see a path to a better and more hopeful future. Choose hope, advises Razeghi. We agree. Nothing motivates followers – or sustains leaders-like recognition of a brighter world. p. 218*

Critical evaluation:

The book is well written and provides a wholistic approach for developing self as a leader. It offers a multidimensional lens for examining the issues in higher education and a practical how-to guide to support academic and general leadership effectiveness. As a leader in higher education, I resonate with the content of the book and find it a useful resource for my personal development. However, I believe that in higher education collective leadership is more effective than person-centred leadership. Therefore, I would see greater value if these concepts were embraced by leadership teams and/or used to enrich other organizational development strategies such as leadership development programs and as a key resource to support leadership coaching.

Reference:

Bolman, L., & Gallos, Joan V. (2011). *Reframing academic leadership* (1st ed., Jossey-Bass higher and adult education series). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.