Artistry, Choice, & Leadership

REFRAMING ORGANIZATIONS

FIFTH Edition

LEE G. BOLMAN
TERRENCE E. DEAL

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PREFACE

This is the sixth release of a work that began in 1984 as *Modern Approaches to Understanding and Managing Organizations* and became *Reframing Organizations* in 1991. We're grateful to readers around the world who have told us that our books gave them ideas that make a difference—at work and elsewhere in their lives.

It is again time for an update, and we're gratified to be back by popular demand. Like everything else, organizations and their leadership challenges continue to change rapidly, and both scholars and leaders are running hard to keep up. This edition tries to capture the current frontiers of both knowledge and art.

The four-frame model, with its view of organizations as factories, families, jungles, and temples, remains the book's conceptual heart. But we have incorporated new research and revised our case examples extensively to keep up with the latest developments. We have updated a feature we inaugurated in the third edition: "greatest hits in organization studies." These feature pithy summaries of key ideas from the some of the most influential works in the scholarly literature (as indicated by a citation analysis, described in the Appendix at the end of the book). As a counterpoint to the scholarly works, we have also included occasional summaries of recent management bestsellers. Scholarly and professional literature often run on separate tracks, but the two streams together provide a fuller picture than either alone, and we have tried to capture the best of both in our work.

Life in organizations has produced many new examples, and there is new material throughout the book. At the same time, we worked zealously to minimize bloat by tracking down and expunging every redundant sentence, marginal concept, or extraneous example. The result is a volume that's a bit slimmer than its predecessor. We've also tried to keep it fun. Collective life is an endless source of examples as entertaining as they are instructive, and we've sprinkled them throughout the text. We apologize to anyone who finds that an old favorite fell to the cutting-room floor, but we hope readers will find the book an even clearer and more efficient read.

As always, our primary audience is managers and leaders. We have tried to answer the question, What do we know about organizations and leadership that is genuinely relevant and useful to practitioners as well as scholars? We have worked to present a large, complex body of theory, research, and practice as clearly and simply as possible. We tried to avoid watering it down or presenting simplistic views of how to solve managerial problems. Our goal is to offer not solutions but powerful and provocative ways of thinking about opportunities and pitfalls.

We continue to focus on both management *and* leadership. Leading and managing are different, but they're equally important. The difference is nicely summarized in an aphorism from Bennis and Nanus: "Managers do things right. Leaders do the right thing." If an organization is overmanaged but underled, it eventually loses any sense of spirit or purpose. A poorly managed organization with a strong, charismatic leader may soar briefly—only to crash shortly thereafter. Malpractice can be as damaging and unethical for managers and leaders as for physicians. Myopic managers or overzealous leaders usually harm more than just themselves. The challenges of today's organizations require the objective perspective of managers as well as the brilliant flashes of creativity that wise leadership provides. We need more people in managerial roles who can find simplicity and order amid organizational confusion and chaos. We need versatile and flexible leaders who are artists as well as analysts, who can reframe experience to discover new issues and possibilities. We need managers who love their work, their organizations, and the people whose lives they affect. We need leaders and managers who appreciate management as a moral and ethical undertaking. We need leaders who combine hard-headed realism with passionate commitment to larger values and purposes. We hope to encourage and nurture such qualities and possibilities.

As in the past, we have tried to produce a clear and readable synthesis and integration of the field's major theoretical traditions. We concentrate mainly on organization theory's implications for practice. We draw on examples from every sector and around the globe. Historically, organization studies have been divided into several intellectual camps, often isolated from one another. Works that seek to give a comprehensive overview of organization theory and research often drown in social science jargon and abstraction and have little to say to practitioners. We try to find a balance between misleading oversimplification and mind-boggling complexity.

The bulk of work in organization theory has focused on the private *or* public *or* nonprofit sector, but not all three. We think this is a mistake. Managers need to understand similarities and differences among all types of organizations. All three sectors increasingly interpenetrate one another. Public administrators who regulate airlines, nuclear power plants, or pharmaceutical companies face the problem of "indirect management" every day. They struggle to influence the behavior of organizations over which they have very limited authority. Private firms need to manage relationships with multiple levels of government. The situation is even more complicated for managers in multinational companies coping with the subtleties of governments with very different systems and traditions. Around the world, voluntary and nongovernment organizations partner with business and government to address major social and economic challenges. Across sectors and cultures, managers often harbor narrow, stereotypic conceptions of one another that impede effectiveness on all sides. We need common ground and a shared understanding that can help strengthen organizations in every sector. The dialogue between public and private, domestic and multinational organizations has become increasingly important. Because of their generic application, the four frames offer an ecumenical language for the exchange. Our work with a variety of organizations around the world has continually reinforced our confidence that the frames are relevant everywhere. Political and symbolic issues, for example, are universally important, even though the specifics vary greatly from one country or culture to another.

The idea of *reframing* continues to be a central theme. Throughout the book, we show how the same situation can be viewed in at least four ways. In Part Six, we include a series of chapters on reframing critical organizational issues such as leadership, change, and ethics. Two chapters are specifically devoted to reframing real-life situations.

We also continue to emphasize artistry. Overemphasizing the rational and technical side of an organization often contributes to its decline or demise. Our counterbalance emphasizes the importance of art in both management and leadership. Artistry is neither exact nor precise; the artist interprets experience, expressing it in forms that can be felt, understood, and appreciated. Art fosters emotion, subtlety, and ambiguity. An artist represents the world to give us a 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 or managers who embrace the expressive side of their work.

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

The first part of the book, "Making Sense of Organizations," tackles a perplexing question about management: Why is it that smart people so often do dumb things? Chapter One, "The Power of Reframing," explains why: Managers often misread situations. They have not learned how to use multiple lenses to get a better sense of what they're up against and what they might do. Chapter Two, "Simple Ideas, Complex Organizations," uses famous cases (such as 9/11) to show how managers' everyday thinking and theories can lead to catastrophe. We explain basic factors that make organizational life complicated, ambiguous, and unpredictable; discuss common fallacies in managerial thinking; and spell out criteria for more effective approaches to diagnosis and action.

Part Two, "The Structural Frame," explores the key role that social architecture plays in the functioning of organizations. Chapter Three, "Getting Organized," describes basic issues that managers must consider in designing structure to fit an organization's goals, tasks, and context. It demonstrates why organizations—from Amazon to McDonald's to Harvard University—need different structures in order to be effective in their unique environments. Chapter Four, "Structure and Restructuring," explains major structural pathologies and pitfalls. It presents guidelines for aligning structures to situations, along with cases illustrating successful structural change. Chapter Five, "Organizing Groups and Teams," shows that structure is a key to high-performing teams.

Part Three, "The Human Resource Frame," explores the properties of both people and organizations, and what happens when the two intersect. Chapter Six, "People and Organizations," focuses on the relationship between organizations and human nature. It shows how a manager's practices and assumptions about people can lead either to alienation and hostility or to commitment and high motivation. It contrasts two strategies for achieving effectiveness: "lean and mean," or investing in people. Chapter Seven, "Improving Human Resource Management," is an overview of practices that build a more motivated and committed workforce—including participative management, job enrichment, self-managing workgroups, management of diversity, and organization development. Chapter Eight, "Interpersonal and Group Dynamics," presents an example of interpersonal conflict to illustrate how managers can enhance or undermine relationships. It also discusses how group members can increase their effectiveness by attending to group process, including informal norms and roles, interpersonal conflict, leadership, and decision making.

Part Four, "The Political Frame," views organizations as arenas. Individuals and groups compete to achieve their parochial interests in a world of conflicting viewpoints, scarce resources, and struggles for power. Chapter Nine, "Power, Conflict, and Coalition," analyzes the tragic loss of the space shuttles *Columbia* and *Challenger*, illustrating the influence of political dynamics in decision making. It shows how scarcity and diversity lead to conflict, bargaining, and games of power; the chapter also distinguishes constructive and destructive political dynamics. Chapter Ten, "The Manager as Politician," uses leadership examples from an NGO in India and a software development effort at Microsoft to illustrate basic skills of the constructive politician: diagnosing political realities, setting agendas, building networks, negotiating, and making choices that are both effective and ethical. Chapter Eleven, "Organizations as Political Arenas and Political Agents," highlights organizations as both arenas for political contests and political actors influencing broader social, political, and economic trends. Case examples such as Wal-Mart and Ross Johnson explore political dynamics both inside and outside organizations.

Part Five explores the symbolic frame. Chapter Twelve, "Organizational Symbols and Culture," spells out basic symbolic elements in organizations: myths, heroes, metaphors, stories, humor, play, rituals, and ceremonies. It defines organizational culture and shows its central role in shaping performance. The power of symbol and culture is illustrated in cases as diverse as the U.S. Congress, Nordstrom department stores, the Air Force, Zappos, and an odd horse race in Italy. Chapter Thirteen, "Culture in Action," uses the case of a computer development team to show what leaders and group members can do collectively to build a culture that bonds people in pursuit of a shared mission. Initiation rituals, specialized language, group stories, humor and play, and ceremonies all combine to transform diverse individuals into a cohesive team with purpose, spirit, and soul. Chapter Fourteen, "Organization as Theater," draws on dramaturgical and institutional theory to reveal how organizational structures, activities, and events serve as secular dramas, expressing our fears and joys, arousing our emotions, kindling our spirit, and anchoring our sense of meaning. It also shows how organizational structures and processes—such as planning, evaluation, and decision making—are often more important for what they express than for what they accomplish.

Part Six, "Improving Leadership Practice," focuses on the implications of the frames for central issues in managerial practice, including leadership, change, and ethics. Chapter Fifteen, "Integrating Frames for Effective Practice," shows how managers can blend the frames to improve their effectiveness. It looks at organizations as multiple realities and gives guidelines for aligning frames with situations. Chapter Sixteen, "Reframing in Action," presents four scenarios, or scripts, derived from the frames. It applies the scenarios to the harrowing experience of a young manager whose first day in a new job turns out to be far more challenging than she expected. The discussion illustrates how leaders can expand their options and enhance their effectiveness by considering alternative approaches. Chapter Seventeen, "Reframing Leadership," discusses limitations in traditional views of leadership and proposes a more comprehensive view of how leadership works in organizations. It summarizes and critiques current knowledge on the characteristics of leaders, including the relationship of leadership to culture and gender. It shows how frames generate distinctive images of effective leaders as architects, servants, advocates, and prophets.

Chapter Eighteen, "Reframing Change in Organizations," describes four fundamental issues that arise in any change effort: individual needs and skills, structural realignment, political conflict, and existential loss. It uses cases of successful and unsuccessful change to document key strategies, such as training, realigning, creating arenas, and using symbol and ceremony. Chapter Nineteen, "Reframing Ethics and Spirit," discusses four ethical mandates that emerge from the frames: excellence, caring, justice, and faith. It argues that leaders can build more ethical organizations through gifts of authorship, love, power, and significance. Chapter Twenty, "Bringing It All Together," is an integrative treatment of the reframing process. It takes a troubled school administrator through a weekend of reflection on critical difficulties he faces. The chapter shows how reframing can help managers move from feeling confused and stuck to discovering a renewed sense of clarity and confidence. The Epilogue (Chapter Twenty-One) describes strategies and characteristics needed in future leaders. It explains why they will need an artistic combination of conceptual flexibility and commitment to core values. Efforts to prepare future leaders have to focus as much on spiritual as on intellectual development.

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We noted in our first edition, "Book writing often feels like a lonely process, even when an odd couple is doing the writing." This odd couple keeps getting older (both over seventy) and, some would say, even odder and grumpier. Yet the process seems less lonely because of our close friendship and our contact with many other colleagues and friends. The best thing about teaching is that you learn so much from your students. Students at Harvard, Vanderbilt, the University of Missouri–Kansas City, the University of La Verne, and the University of Southern California have given us invaluable criticism, challenge, and support over the years. We're also grateful to the many readers who have responded to our invitation to write and ask questions or share comments. They have helped us write a better book. (The invitation is still open—our contact information is in "The Authors.") We wish we could personally thank all of the leaders and managers who helped us learn in seminars, workshops, and consultations. Their knowledge and wisdom are the foundation and touchstone for our work.

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eye for video material have aided our thinking and teaching immensely. Elena Granell de Aldaz of the Institute for Advanced Study of Management in Caracas collaborated with us on developing a Spanish-language adaptation of *Reframing Organizations* as well as on a more recent project that studied frame orientations among managers in Venezuela. We are proud to consider her a valued colleague and wonderful friend. Captain Gary Deal, USN; Maj. Kevin Reed, USAF; Dr. Peter Minich, a transplant surgeon; and Jan and Ron Haynes of FzioMed all provided valuable case material. Terry Dunn of JE Dunn in Kansas City has been both a friend and an inspiring model of values-based leadership. The late Peter Frost of the University of British Columbia continues to inspire our work. Peter Vaill of the Antioch Graduate School; Kent Peterson, University of Wisconsin at Madison; both Sharon Conley and Patrick Faverty, University of California at Santa Barbara; and Roy Williams are continuing sources of ideas and support. A number of individuals, including many friends and colleagues at the Organizational Behavior Teaching Conference, have given us helpful ideas and suggestions. We apologize for any omissions, but we want to thank Anke Arnaud, Carole K. Barnett, Max Elden, Kent Fairfield, Ellen Harris, Olivier Hermanus, Jim Hodge, Earlene Holland, Scott Johnson, Mark Kriger, Hyoungbae Lee, Larry Levine, Mark Maier, Magid Mazen, Thomas P. Nydegger, Dave O'Connell, Lynda St. Clair, Mabel Tinjacá, Susan Twombly, and Pat Villeneuve. We only wish we had succeeded in implementing all the wonderful ideas we received from these and other colleagues.

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We wrapped up the manuscript in a return visit to the Ritz-Carlton in Phoenix. As always, the staff there made us feel more than welcome and exemplified the Ritz-Carlton tradition of superlative service. Thanks to Grant Dipman, Jean Hengst, Sharon Krull, Joshua Leveque, Rosa Melgoza, Marta Ortiz, Jean Wright, and their colleagues.

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The couples of the Edna Ranch Vintners Guild—the Pecatores, Donners, Hayneses, and Andersons—link efforts with Terry in exploring the ups, downs, and mysteries of the art and science of wine making. Two professional wine makers, Romeo "Meo" Zuech of Piedra Creek Winery and Brett Escalera of Consilience and TresAnelli, offer advice that applies to leadership as well as wine making. Meo reminds us, "Never over-manage your grapes," and Brett prefaces answers to all questions with "It all depends."

We're delighted to be well into the fourth decade of our partnership with Jossey-Bass. We're grateful to the many friends who have helped us over the years, including Bill Henry, Steve Piersanti, Lynn Lychow, Bill Hicks, Debra Hunter, Cedric Crocker, Byron Schneider, and many others. In recent years, Kathe Sweeney has been a wonderful editor and even better friend, and we're delighted to be working with her again. Kathleen Dolan Davies and Alina Poniewaz have done vital and much-appreciated work backstage in helping to get all the pieces together and keep the process moving forward.

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We again dedicate the book to our wives, who have more than earned all the credit and appreciation that we can give them. Joan Gallos, Lee's spouse and closest colleague, combines intellectual challenge and critique with support and love. She has been an active collaborator in developing our ideas, and her teaching manual for previous editions was a frame-breaking model for the genre. Her contributions have become so integrated into our own thinking that we are no longer able to thank her for all the ways that the book has gained from her wisdom and insights.

Sandy Deal's psychological training enables her to approach the field of organizations with a distinctive and illuminating slant. Her successful practice produces examples that have helped us make some even stronger connections to the concepts of clinical psychology. She is one of the most gifted diagnosticians in the field, as well as a delightful partner whose love and support over the long run have made all the difference. She is a rare combination of courage and caring, intimacy and independence, responsibility and playfulness.

To Joan and Sandy, thanks again. As the years accumulate, we love you even more.

May 2013

Lee G. Bolman
Brookline, Massachusetts

Terrence E. Deal
San Luis Obispo, California

PART ONE

Making Sense of Organizations

Sit no longer at your dusty window
I urge you to break the gaze
from your oh so cherished glass

—Gian Torrano Jacobs
Journeys Through the Windows of Perception

chapter

1

Introduction
The Power of Reframing

Steve Jobs had to fail before he could succeed. Fail he did. He was fired from Apple Computer, the company he founded, and spent eleven years "in the wilderness" (Schlender, 2004). During this time of reflection he discovered capacities as a leader—and human being—that set the stage for his triumphant second act at Apple. He failed initially for the same reason that countless managers stumble: he was operating on a limited understanding of leadership and organizations. He was always a brilliant and charismatic product visionary. That enabled him to take Apple from startup to major computer vendor, but didn't equip him to lead Apple to its next phase. Being fired was painful, but Jobs later concluded that it was the best thing that ever happened to him. "It freed me to enter one of the most creative periods of my life. I'm pretty sure none of this would have happened if I hadn't been fired from Apple. It was awful-tasting medicine, but I guess the patient needed it."

During his period of self-reflection, he kept busy. He focused on Pixar, a company he bought for $10 million, and on NeXT, a new computer company that he founded. One succeeded and the other didn't, but he learned from both. Pixar became so successful it made Jobs a billionaire. NeXT never made money, but it developed technology that proved vital when Jobs was recalled from the wilderness to save Apple from a death spiral.

His experiences at NeXT and Pixar provided two vital lessons. One was the importance of aligning an organization with its mission. He understood more clearly that he needed a great company to build great products. Lesson two was about people. Jobs had always understood the importance of talent, but now he had a much better appreciation for the importance of relationships and teamwork.

Jobs's character did not change during his wilderness years. The Steve Jobs who returned to Apple in 1997 was much like the human paradox fired twelve years earlier—demanding and charismatic, charming and infuriating, erratic and focused, opinionated and receptive. The difference was in how he thought, how he interpreted what was going on around him, and how he led. To his long-time gifts as magician and warrior, he had added newfound capacities as organizational architect and team builder. Shortly after his return, he radically simplified Apple's product line, built a loyal and talented leadership team, and turned his old company into a hit-making machine as reliable as Pixar. The iMac, iPod, iPhone, and iPad made Jobs the world's most admired chief executive, and Apple passed Exxon Mobil to become the world's most valuable company. His success in building an organization and a leadership team was validated as Apple's business results continued to impress after his death in October 2011.

Steve Jobs is like many other execs who seem to have it all until they lose it—except that many never get it back. Take the remarkable rise and fall of Rajat Gupta, who immigrated to the United States, graduated from the Harvard Business School, and rose to become head of the global consulting firm McKinsey and Company. After he retired from McKinsey, he joined the boards of prestigious companies like Procter & Gamble and Goldman, Sachs. He was one of America's most respected businessmen—until 2012, when he was convicted of conspiracy and securities fraud for leaking Goldman boardroom secrets to a billionaire hedge fund manager. His former McKinsey associates found it hard to fathom:

"McKinsey's core business principle is to guard the confidential and private information of its clients," said a former McKinsey executive, who spoke on the condition of anonymity. "It is mind-blowing that the guy who ran the firm for so many years could be going to jail for violating that principle" (Lattman and Ahmed, 2012).

Gupta and Jobs were both brilliant men who accomplished extraordinary things. But each descended into a period of cluelessness, becoming so cocooned in his own world view that he couldn't see other options. That's what it means to be clueless. You don't know what's going on, but you think you do, and you don't see better choices. So you do more of what you know, even though it's not working. You hope in vain that if you just try harder, you'll succeed.

Cluelessness is not restricted to business executives—government provides its share of examples. In August 2005, Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans. Levees failed, and much of the city was underwater. Tens of thousands of people, many poor and black, found themselves stranded for days in desperate circumstances. Government agencies bumbled aimlessly, and help was slow to arrive. As Americans watched television footage of the chaos, they were stunned to hear the nation's top disaster official, the secretary of Homeland Security, tell reporters that he "had no reports" of things viewers had seen with their own eyes. It seemed he should have relied on television news rather than his own agency. Americans were even more astounded when, shortly after the secretary's misspeak, President Bush, touring the destruction, descended from Air Force One, slapped the Homeland Security official in charge at the scene on the back, and told him "You're doing a hell of a job, Brownie!" Doesn't anyone get it?

Steve Jobs, Rajat Gupta, and President Bush represent only a few examples of a chronic challenge: how to know whether you're getting the right picture or tuning in to the wrong channel. Managers often fail this test. Cluelessness is a fact of life, even for very smart people. Sometimes the information they need is fuzzy or hard to get. Other times they get bad information from advisors or ignore or misinterpret information they receive. Leaders too often lock themselves into flawed ways of making sense of their circumstances.

In the discussion that follows, we explore the origins and symptoms of cluelessness. We introduce *reframing*—the conceptual core of the book and our basic prescription for sizing things up. Reframing requires an ability to think about situations in more than one way, which lets you develop alternative diagnoses and strategies. We introduce four distinct lenses or frames—structural, human resource, political, and symbolic—each logical and powerful in its own right. Together, they help us decipher the full array of significant clues, capturing a more comprehensive picture of what's going on and what to do.

VIRTUES AND DRAWBACKS OF ORGANIZED ACTIVITY

There was little need for professional managers when individuals mostly managed their own affairs, drawing goods and services from family farms and small local businesses. Since the dawn of the industrial revolution some two hundred years ago, explosive technological and social changes have produced a world that is far more interconnected, frantic, and complicated. Humans struggle to avoid drowning in complexity that continually threatens to pull them in over their heads (Kegan, 1998). Forms of management and organization effective a few years ago are now obsolete. Sérieyx (1993) calls it the organizational big bang: "The information revolution, the globalization of economies, the proliferation of events that undermine all our certainties, the collapse of the grand ideologies, the arrival of the CNN society which transforms us into an immense, planetary village—all these shocks have overturned the rules of the game and suddenly turned yesterday's organizations into antiques" (pp. 14–15).

The proliferation of complex organizations has made most human activities more formalized than they once were. We grow up in families and then start our own. We work for business, government, or non-profits. We learn in schools and universities. We worship in synagogues, churches, and mosques. We play sports in teams, franchises, and leagues. We join clubs and associations. Many of us will grow old and die in hospitals or nursing homes. We build these enterprises because of what they can do for us. They offer goods, entertainment, social services, health care, and almost everything else that we use or consume.

All too often, however, we experience a darker side of these formal enterprises. Organizations can frustrate and exploit people. Too often, products are flawed, families are dysfunctional, students fail to learn, patients get worse, and policies backfire. Work often has so little meaning that jobs offer nothing beyond a paycheck. If we believe mission statements and public pronouncements, every company these days aims to nurture its employees and delight its customers. But many miss the mark. Schools are blamed for social ills, universities are said to close more minds than they open, and government is criticized for corruption, red tape, and rigidity.

The private sector has its own problems. Automakers reluctantly recall faulty cars. Producers of food and pharmaceuticals make people sick with tainted products. Software companies deliver bugs and "vaporware." Industrial accidents dump chemicals, oil, toxic gas, and radioactive materials into the air and water. Too often, corporate greed, incompetence, and insensitivity create havoc for communities and individuals. The bottom line: we seem hard-pressed to manage organizations so that their virtues exceed their vices. The big question: Why?

Management's Track Record

Year after year, the best and brightest managers maneuver or meander their way to the apex of enterprises great and small. Then they do really dumb things. How do bright people turn out so dim? One theory is that they're too smart for their own good. Feinberg and Tarrant (1995) label it the "self-destructive intelligence syndrome." They argue that smart people act stupid because of personality flaws—things like pride, arrogance, and an unconscious desire to fail. It's true that psychological flaws have been apparent in such brilliant, self-destructive individuals as Adolph Hitler, Richard Nixon, and Bill Clinton. But on the whole, intellectually challenged people have as many psychological problems as the best and brightest. The primary source of dimness or cluelessness, as we have labeled it, is not personality or IQ. We're at sea whenever our sense-making efforts fail us. If our image of a situation is wrong, our actions will be wide of the mark as well. But if we don't know we're seeing the wrong picture, we won't understand why we're not getting the results we want. So we insist we're right even when we're off track.

Vaughan (1995), in trying to unravel the causes of the 1986 disaster that destroyed the *Challenger* space shuttle and its crew, underscored how hard it is for people to surrender their entrenched conceptions of reality: "They puzzle over contradictory evidence, but usually succeed in pushing it aside—until they come across a piece of evidence too fascinating to ignore, too clear to misperceive, too painful to deny, which makes vivid still other signals they do not want to see, forcing them to alter and surrender the world-view they have so meticulously constructed" (p. 235). This was the struggle faced by the parents of the Tsarnaev brothers, who were the suspects in the 2013 bombing at the Boston Marathon. Both mother and father resisted the abundant evidence that their sons were guilty, and grasped at implausible alternative stories: their sons had been set up, or the bombing was a hoax that didn't really happen. With one son dead and the other seriously injured, they needed some way to ward off a reality too painful and devastating to accept.

As mentioned earlier, when we don't know what to do, we do more of what we know. We construct our own psychic prisons and then lock ourselves in. This helps explain a number of unsettling reports from the managerial front lines:

- Hogan, Curphy, and Hogan (1994) estimate that the skills of one-half to three-quarters of American managers are inadequate for the demands of their jobs. But most probably don't realize it. Kruger and Dunning (1999) found that the less competent people are, the more they overestimate their performance, partly because they don't know good performance when they see it.

- About half of the high-profile senior executives that companies hire fail within two years, according to a 2006 study (Burns and Kiley, 2007).
- The annual value of corporate mergers has grown more than a hundredfold since 1980, yet one study found that "83 percent of mergers were unsuccessful in producing any business benefit as regards shareholder value" (KPMG, 2000). Mergers typically benefit shareholders of the acquired firm but hurt almost everyone else—customers, employees, and, ironically, the buyers who initiated the deal. Two years after a merger, consumers on average feel that they're paying more and getting less. Despite this dismal record, the vast majority of the managers who engineered mergers insisted they were successful (KPMG, 2000).
- Year after year, management miscues cause once highly successful companies to skid into bankruptcy. Examples in 2012 included Malév, the national airline of Hungary, after fifty-six years in business, and eighty-two-year-old Hostess, unable to stay afloat despite owning iconic American brands like Twinkies and Wonder Bread.

Small wonder that so many organizational veterans nod in assent to Scott Adams's admittedly unscientific "Dilbert principle": "the most ineffective workers are systematically moved to the place where they can do the least damage—management" (1996, p. 14).

Strategies for Improving Organizations: The Track Record

We have certainly made an effort to improve organizations. Legions of managers report to work each day with that hope in mind. Authors and consultants spin out a flood of new answers and promising solutions. Policymakers develop laws and regulations to guide organizations on the right path.

The most universal improvement strategy is upgrading management. Modern mythology promises that organizations will work splendidly if well managed. Managers are supposed to see the big picture and look out for their organization's overall health and productivity. Unfortunately, they have not always been equal to the task, even when armed with computers, information systems, flowcharts, quality programs, and a panoply of the latest tools and techniques. They go forth with this rational arsenal to try to tame our wild and primitive workplaces. Yet in the end, irrational forces too often prevail.

When managers find problems too hard to solve, they hire consultants. The number and variety of advice givers keeps growing. Most have a specialty: strategy, technology, quality, finance, marketing, mergers, human resource management, executive search, outplacement, coaching, organization development, and many more. For every managerial challenge, there is a consultant willing to offer assistance—at a price.

For all their sage advice and remarkable fees, consultants often make little dent in problems plaguing organizations—businesses, public agencies, military services, hospitals, and schools. Sometimes the consultants are more hindrance than help, though they often lament clients' failure to implement their profound insights. McKinsey & Co., "the high priest of high-level consulting" (Byrne, 2002a, p. 66), worked so closely with Enron that its managing partner—the same Rajat Gupta who eventually went to jail himself—sent his chief lawyer to Houston after Enron's collapse to see if his firm might be in legal trouble.[1] The lawyer reported that McKinsey was safe, and a relieved Gupta insisted bravely, "We stand by all the work we did. Beyond that, we can only empathize with the trouble they are going through. It's a sad thing to see" (p. 68).

When managers and consultants fail, government frequently responds with legislation, policies, and regulations. In earlier times, the federal government limited its formal influence to national concerns such as the Homestead Act and the Post Office. Now constituents badger elected officials to "do something" about a variety of ills: pollution, dangerous products, hazardous working conditions, and chaotic schools, to name a few. Governing bodies respond by making "policy." But policymakers often don't understand the problem well enough to get the solution right, and a sizable body of research records a continuing saga of perverse ways in which the implementation process undermines even good solutions (Bardach, 1977; Elmore, 1978; Freudenberg and Gramling, 1994; Peters, 1999; Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973). Policymakers, for example, have been trying for decades to reform U.S. public schools. Billions of taxpayer dollars have been spent. The result? About as successful as America's switch to the metric system. In the 1950s Congress passed legislation mandating adoption of metric standards and measures. More than six decades later, if you know what a hectare is, or can visualize the size of a three-hundred-gram package of crackers, you're ahead of most Americans. Legislators did not factor into their solution what it would take to get their decision implemented.

In short, the difficulties surrounding improvement strategies are well documented. Exemplary intentions produce more costs than benefits. Problems outlast solutions. It is as if tens of thousands of hard-working, highly motivated pioneers keep hacking at a swamp that persistently produces new growth faster than the old can be cleared. To be sure, there are reasons for optimism. Organizations have changed about as much in recent decades as in the preceding century. To survive, they had to. Revolutionary changes in technology, the rise of the global economy, and shortened product life cycles have spawned a flurry of activity to design faster, more flexible organizational forms. New organizational models flourish in companies such as Pret à Manger (the socially conscious U.K. sandwich shops), Google (the global search giant), and Novo-Nordisk (a Danish pharmaceutical company that includes environmental and social metrics in its bottom line). The dispersed collection of enthusiasts and volunteers who provide content for Wikipedia and the far-flung network of software engineers who have developed the Linux operating system provide dramatic examples of possibilities in the digital world. But despite such successes, failures are still too common. The nagging question: How can leaders and managers improve the odds for themselves as well for their organizations?

FRAMING

Goran Carstedt, the talented executive who led the turnaround of Volvo's French division in the 1980s, got to the heart of a challenge managers face every day: "The world simply can't be made sense of, facts can't be organized, unless you have a mental model to begin with. That theory does not have to be the right one, because you can alter it along the way as information comes in. But you can't begin to learn without some concept that gives you expectations or hypotheses" (Hampden-Turner, 1992, p. 167). Such mental models have many labels—maps, mind-sets, schema, paradigms, and cognitive lenses, to name a few.[2] Following the work of Goffman, Dewey, and others, we have chosen the label *frames*. In describing frames, we deliberately mix metaphors, referring to them as windows, maps, tools, lenses, orientations, prisms, and perspectives, because all these images capture part of the idea we want to convey.

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. Frames are vital because organizations don't come with computerized navigation systems to guide you turn-by-turn to your destination. Instead, managers need to develop and carry accurate maps in their heads.

Such maps make it possible to register and assemble key bits of perceptual data into a coherent pattern—a picture of what's happening. When it works fluidly, the process takes the form of "rapid cognition," the process that Gladwell (2005) examines in his best-seller *Blink*. He describes it as a gift that makes it possible to read "deeply into the narrowest slivers of experience. In basketball, the player who can take in and comprehend all that is happening in the moment is said to have 'court sense' " (p. 44).

Dane and Pratt (2007) describe four key characteristics of this intuitive "blink" process:

- It is nonconscious—you can do it without thinking about it and without knowing how you did it.
- It is very fast—the process often occurs almost instantly.
- It is holistic—you see a coherent, meaningful pattern.
- It results in "affective judgments"—thought and feeling work together so you feel confident that you know what is going on and what needs to be done.

The essence of this process is matching situational cues with a well-learned mental framework—a "deeply-held, nonconscious category or pattern" (Dane and Pratt, 2007, p. 37). This is the key skill that Simon and Chase (1973) found in chess masters—they could instantly recognize more than fifty thousand configurations of a chessboard. This ability enables grand masters to play twenty-five lesser opponents simultaneously, beating all of them while spending only seconds on each move.

The same process of rapid cognition is at work in the diagnostic categories physicians rely on to evaluate patients' symptoms. The Hippocratic Oath to "do no harm" requires physicians to be confident that they know what they're up against before prescribing a remedy. Their skilled judgment draws on a repertoire of categories and clues, honed by training and experience. But sometimes they get it wrong. One source of error is anchoring: doctors, like leaders, sometimes lock on to the first answer that seems right, even if a few messy facts don't quite fit. "Your mind plays tricks on you because you see only the landmarks you expect to see and neglect those that should tell you that in fact you're still at sea" (Groopman, 2007, p. 65).

Treating individual patents is hard, but managers have an even tougher challenge because organizations are more complex and the diagnostic categories less well defined. That means that the quality of your judgments depends on the information you have at hand, your mental maps, and how well you have learned to use them. Good maps align with the terrain and provide enough detail to keep you on course. If you're trying to find your way around Beijing, a map of Chicago won't help. In the same way, different circumstances require different approaches.

Even with the right map, getting around will be slow and awkward if you have to stop and study at every intersection. The ultimate goal is fluid expertise, the sort of know-how that lets you think on the fly and navigate organizations as easily as you drive home on a familiar route. You can make decisions quickly and automatically because you know at a glance where you are and what you need to do next.

There is no shortcut to developing this kind of expertise. It takes effort, time, practice, and feedback. Some of the effort has to go into learning frames and the ideas behind them. Equally important is putting the ideas to use. Experience, one often hears, is the best teacher, but that is true only if one learns from it. McCall, Lombardo, and Morrison (1988, p. 122) found that a key quality among successful executives was an "extraordinary tenacity in extracting something worthwhile from their experience and in seeking experiences rich in opportunities for growth."

Frame Breaking

Framing involves matching mental maps to circumstances. *Reframing* requires another skill—the ability to break frames Why do that? A news story from the summer of 2007 illustrates. Imagine yourself among a group of friends enjoying dinner on the patio of a Washington, DC, home. An armed, hooded intruder suddenly appears and points a gun at the head of a fourteen-year-old guest. "Give me your money," he says, "or I'll start shooting." If you're at that table, what do you do? You could faint. You could try a heroic frontal attack. You might try to run. Or you could try to redefine the situation. That's exactly what Cristina "Cha Cha" Rowan did.

"We were just finishing dinner," [she] told the man. "Why don't you have a glass of wine with us?"
The intruder had a sip of their Chateau Malescot St-Exupéry and said, "Damn, that's good wine."
The girl's father . . . told the intruder to take the whole glass, and Rowan offered him the bottle.
The robber, with his hood down, took another sip and a bite of Camembert cheese. He put the gun in his sweatpants . . .