

Academic Leadership Development Series
Leadership Orientation: Bolman and Deal's Four-Frame Model
April 14, 2023

"If you want to bring a fundamental change in people's belief and behavior.. you need to create a community around them, where those new beliefs can be practices and expressed and nurtured."

–[Malcolm Gladwell](#), *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*

Session Goal

The goal of this session is to discuss the application of the four-frame leadership model.

Overview of the Four Frames

A leader should look at and approach organizational issues from four perspectives (Frames). Approaching issues with only one habitual frame of reference is not effective leadership. To maximize leadership effectiveness, one must consider the frames which are:

- Structural
- Human Resource
- Political
- Symbolic

The beauty of this model is that it is dynamic. The idea is to keep your approach to leadership open, not static. Move between frames as situations warrant. Make your own judgement call on the most appropriate behavior in that moment for a given situation. Make sure to ask the right questions and diagnose key issues. And remember, do not fall into the habit of using the same frame for each situation.

Structural: The Structural Frame focuses on the 'how' of change. It is a task-orientated Frame concentrating on strategy, setting quantifiable goals, clearly identifying tasks, responsibilities, and reporting lines, and creating systems and procedures.

Human Resources: The Human Resource Frame places greater weight on people's needs. Another way to view this frame is to consider the importance of addressing needs and providing resources that allow people to flourish in their jobs.

Political: The Political Frame, as the name implies, focuses on the politics inherently associated with interpersonal, group and organizational dynamics. Consideration of this frame is especially important when one addresses the problem of individuals and interest groups, negotiations, conflicting agendas, and resource allocation. Coalition building and conflict resolution are two of the important skills that rely on an appreciation of the political frame.

Symbolic: The Symbolic Frame addresses people's needs for a sense of purpose and meaning in their work. A leader working in the symbolic frame will actively work to get people excited and committed to working toward a goal. While there are many skills associated with effectively employing the symbolic frame, two important skills are using stories, and communicating a vision in ways that give people hope and focus.

Questions to ponder

- If confusion around priorities and responsibilities is the main issue, which frames will probably be best to employ?
- If the greatest problem is a lack of motivation and commitment, which frames would you employ to address this issue?
- If there is uncertainty and anxiety around future direction and resource allocation, which frames should be considered when addressing these concerns?

Online resource:

Leadership Orientation Instrument and the four frames:

<https://newsite.leebolman.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Leadership-Orientations-2012.pdf>