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Review of Reframing Academic Leadership

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Reframing Academic Leadership
Lee G. Bolman and Joan V. Gallos

Reviewed by Rishi Sriram, Baylor University

If what Birnbaum (1988) says about the differences between colleges and businesses is true, then college administrators need more than a business book to teach them about organizational culture and leadership in higher education. For almost two decades, Bolman and Deal’s (2008) theories—or frames—have influenced higher education governance and the curriculum of graduate preparation programs in higher education and student affairs. Now, Bolman and Gallos provide a book that applies the frames specifically in the context of higher education administration. The married couple, who both serve as professors of leadership at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, aim to offer “a readable, intellectually provocative, and pragmatic approach” (p. xi) to the distinct work and possibilities of higher education leadership.

Bolman and Gallos divide Reframing Academic Leadership into three parts. In part 1, “Leadership Epistemology: When You Understand, You Know What to Do,” they make the case for thinking and learning as the heart of effective leadership. Chapter 1 uses the real-life example of former Harvard president Lawrence Summers to illustrate the need to reframe—to shift perspective in order to see the same situation in multiple ways. Chapter 2 presents the concept of sensemaking and conveys the importance of shaping meaning-making in higher education leadership. In chapter 3, Bolman and Gallos focus on the issue of learning from experiences in order to better understand one’s strengths, weaknesses, and overall tendencies.

Part 2, “Reframing Academic Challenges,” presents the four frames of Bolman and Deal (2008) in the context of the four biggest concerns endemic to higher education administration. Rather than emphasizing the frames themselves, however, Bolman and Gallos focus on the roles that leaders must play when using the frames. Chapter 4 uses the structural frame to discuss the leader as analyst and architect. Chapter 5 emphasizes the political frame while describing the leader as compassionate politician. Chapter 6 uses the human resource frame to present the leader as servant, catalyst, and coach. Chapter 7 discusses the leader as prophet and artist on the basis of the symbolic frame.

Part 3, “Sustaining Higher Education Leaders: Courage and Hope,” addresses the personal and sometimes difficult relationship between higher education administrators and their work. The first four of these six chapters focus on common college leadership challenges. Chapter 8 provides advice on how to manage conflict, chapter 9 tackles the issue of leading from the middle, chapter 10 presents strategies for leading difficult people, and chapter 11 focuses on managing your boss and leading up. The final two chapters of the book emphasize the importance of resiliency in higher education leadership. Chapter 12 provides insight on sustaining health and vitality in stressful roles, while chapter 13 encourages the reader to continually view higher education leadership as a calling and developmental journey.

In Reframing Academic Leadership, Bolman and Gallos provide a meaningful and beneficial text for those in higher education leadership. While building upon the foundation of Bolman and Deal (2008), the authors present a better tie-in to the process of sensemaking and how leaders can specifically utilize the four frames to improve sensemaking processes. Moreover, Bolman and Gallos offer vivid examples that directly pertain to higher education administration. Most of these examples come from their own experience.
in college leadership. However, some examples are real case studies, such as Lawrence Summers from Harvard and Michael Crow from Arizona State University. The chapters are well-written, accessible, and relevant to issues that college leaders face daily. Chapters often begin with an illustration, present the content, and then connect the content back to the illustration. Lists and outlines are regularly used to clearly convey the primary points of a chapter. Bolman and Gallos also draw from other well-respected authors in leadership, such as Heifetz (1994; 2002). The pages spent on the spiritual aspects of leadership are needed and appreciated, and they draw much from Palmer’s (2000) work in this area. The pragmatic approach is helpful and orients the text toward immediate application in practice.

However, in their attempt to make this book a distinct contribution from Bolman and Deal (2008), Bolman and Gallos leave out too much of what Bolman and Deal offer. Perhaps surprisingly, there is not enough information on the four frames themselves and how they can be utilized in multiple ways to achieve organizational change and success. The altered language that de-emphasizes references to the frames and focuses instead on leadership roles can sometimes make necessary connections too vague or implicit. Therefore, Bolman and Gallos offer a good companion to Bolman and Deal’s (2008) work that focuses on the nuances of a higher education context, but their offering is not a suitable replacement altogether to Bolman and Deal. And although Bolman and Gallos make mention of student affairs administration specifically in the book, the vast majority of it, as the title implies, is focused on academic leadership.

Overall, Bolman and Gallos successfully accomplish their goals of offering something that is readable, intellectually stimulating, and helpful. Higher education leaders will find themselves often relating to the numerous examples and cases presented in the text, and they will come away with wisdom pertaining to college governance that goes beyond self-help tips and common sense.

REFERENCES


Contested Issues in Student Affairs: Diverse Perspectives and Respectful Dialogue

Peter M. Magolda and Marcia B. Baxter Magolda (Editors)
Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2011, 498 pages, $34.95 (softcover)

Reviewed by Jan Arminio, Shippensburg University

This edited book presents perspectives on 24 contested issues that are defined as “contemporary, critical, and contentious questions” (p. xv). The editors posed 24 questions, and each is addressed in a chapter that consists of two essays. One essayist addressed the question and then a second essayist responded to the first. More specifically, the first essayist framed the contested issue by defining terms and providing a historical context, while making perspectives explicit. The second essayist responded to the first by noting agreement, disagreement, and additions. The 24 contentious issues are organized within four broad topics. There are 4 chapters in the section on philosophical foundations of student affairs work in higher education, 7 chapters in challenges to promoting learning