

## **CHAPTER 16. REFRAMING IN ACTION: OPPORTUNITIES AND PERILS**

### **CHAPTER 16 OVERVIEW**

#### ***Chapter 16 Summary*** \_\_\_\_\_

In Chapter 16, the authors explore how managers can use the frames to create alternative scenarios—sets of principles and assumptions that guide their responses to a management challenge. All of us have learned how to play different roles in different circumstances. We can draw on that skill to avoid the self-entrapment of assuming that there is only one way to respond to a given situation. Scenario building is an essential skill for reframing and a straightforward way to expand options, influence outcomes, and enhance leadership capacities. The Cindy Marshall case illustrates the scenario-building process. Marshall arrives in her first day in a new job and is stunned by the dismissive welcome she gets from her predecessor. The chapter shows that each frame offers Marshall different options and that any frame could be used well or badly in the situation.

#### ***Chapter 16 Major Case Example*** \_\_\_\_\_

- Cindy Marshall

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHING CHAPTER 16**

Chapter 16 emphasizes the power of reframing and the skills needed to develop frame-specific scenarios. Instructors can use this chapter to focus on understanding the scenario-building process with the Cindy Marshall case or the RFK High School case in Chapter 20.

#### ***Chapter 16: A Focus on Scenario Building*** \_\_\_\_\_

Chapter 15 focused on using the four frames to understand a complex organizational world. Chapter 16 emphasizes action strategies suggested by each frame and how to shape a desirable outcome by choosing the right approach. It also teaches that individuals can enhance their flexibility and versatility by creating scripts or scenarios for themselves. Role playing gives students a chance to see the frames in action and to test their own skills in building scenarios.

Copyright © 2003 by Joan V. Gallos and Jossey-Bass/A Wiley Company, 989 Market St., San Francisco, CA 94103

All rights reserved. No parts of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

## Chapter 16: Cindy Marshall Role Play

The Cindy Marshall case is one place to start. A student exercise based on this case is presented in Exercise 16.1. You may worry that the chapter provides so much detail that students will merely copy the examples from the chapter in their role play. This rarely happens, partly because the examples in the book are too short—students run out of material before they run out of time and must then fall back on their own resources.

Students will struggle to project their understanding (and misunderstanding) of the frames into their role plays. Exploring their interpretations and comparing them to the scenarios in the chapter offer opportunities for debates about the content of the frames, individual interpretive processes, and the ways that interpersonal styles interact with intellectual grasp of each perspective.

The activity produces learning on multiple levels. Students are likely to see that:

1. Frames are not just abstract ideas but have implications for action.
2. Bill Howard becomes a different person—in terms of his behavior—in each role play.
3. Each frame describes an important truth, yet each is incomplete (students' initial reading of the case often overlooks critical issues).
4. Reframing expands options and implies clear choices.
5. How one executes a solution is as important as the assumptions behind it. (Groups, for example, are sometimes shocked at how their chosen role player interprets their strategy; the discrepancy between intention and outcomes is clearly illustrated in this activity.)
6. Though people typically have frame preferences, they can still choose to take different roles in any situation.
7. The frames offer a simple guide for at least four possible courses of action.
8. Creating alternative scenarios requires practice and risk taking but is a useful way to expand one's repertoire of managerial skills.

## Chapter 16: RFK High School Role Play

Since the frame scenarios provided in the chapter are “generic,” they can be applied to almost any challenging managerial case. One alternative is the RFK High School case, which appears at the beginning of Chapter 20. This case differs from Cindy Marshall in several respects: no scenarios are provided in the book, it occurs in a school rather than a corporate setting, and the protagonist has more time to plan how to approach the situation. There are a number of options for working with this case.

- Substitute the RFK High case for Cindy Marshall and build a role play around the meeting that David King has said he will have with Chauncey Carver, using the design suggested in Exercise 16.1 for Cindy Marshall. Students can be given the following instructions: Choose one person to role-play David King. As the case states, King has promised Betsy Dula that he will talk to Chauncey Carver about

Copyright © 2003 by Joan V. Gallos and Jossey-Bass/A Wiley Company, 989 Market St., San Francisco, CA 94103

All rights reserved. No parts of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Carver's threat to Dula in the last faculty meeting. You will role-play that Monday meeting.

- Instead, have students role play the RFK High case using the more detailed structural (A), human resource (B), political (C), and symbolic (D) David King role descriptions provided in Part 4 of this instructor's guide ("Detailed Role Descriptions for RFK High School").
- Instructors who have already run the more complete role-playing activity with Cindy Marshall might want to use scenario building for the RFK High case as a student written assignment or take-home exam.

## STUDENT EXERCISES FOR CHAPTER 16

### EXERCISE 16.1

---

#### **Focus:** Scenario Building

In this exercise, students role play the Cindy Marshall case from Chapter 15. If necessary, the activity can be run over multiple class periods. One possibility is to do preparation and set-up of the role players in one class, the structural and human resource role plays in the second, and political and symbolic in a third. In such cases, you will want to give students brief written assignments or study questions at the end of each class so that they record their reactions and observations from each frame. Where the schedule permits, you might want to arrange a longer class period so that all four role plays can be done at one time.

*Group number and composition:* In setting up the activity, you will want four or more groups—at least one for each frame. Groups should be of manageable size, so that students can work easily on the assignment and not get bogged down in group dynamics. (For large classes, see Note 1 at the end of the exercise.)

Group composition should respond to instructional goals. If you want to emphasize distinctions between the frames, you may want to form groups by frame preference, comfort, and/or skill—students who have the best shot at producing the highest-quality role play. If you want to focus on skill development, random assignment to the groups offers opportunities for people to test their knowledge and abilities. Alternatively, groups can be formed on frame weakness or discomfort, to encourage students to experiment with new behaviors.

*Cindy Marshall role:* Once teams are formed, ask each team to choose one member to portray Cindy Marshall. Then the team should formulate a strategy for the meeting and

Copyright © 2003 by Joan V. Gallos and Jossey-Bass/A Wiley Company, 989 Market St., San Francisco, CA 94103

All rights reserved. No parts of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

get the role player prepared. (What should she say? What outcomes does she want? What should she focus on? How should she respond to anticipated reactions from Howard?).

*Bill Howard role:* As instructor, you will need to decide who will play Bill Howard. You can assume the role yourself or can assign a group the task of choosing and preparing a realistic and consistent Howard. There are trade-offs involved. On the one hand, the instructor as Howard may assure drama consistent with character. On the other hand, students may see differences in Howard's response across perspectives as reflecting some form of instructor manipulation (for example, choosing to be easier or tougher on certain groups and/or frames). Students tend to be less suspicious when other students play Howard, but this poses a risk that the role will be poorly played. In any case, there are advantages to having the same person play Howard in each role play. A more consistent Howard makes it easier to see the impact of differences in Cindy Marshall's approach. If a student plays Howard, a team should meet to help him or her prepare. Instruct the team members that Howard should be Howard-like (consistent with the Bill Howard they see in the case) but not so rigid that any Cindy Marshall faces an impossible mission. Howard should respond as the team members think he might, given how Cindy approaches him.

*Activity structure:* The activity might be designed as follows:

- Groups choose and prepare their role players: 30–45 minutes
- Brief introduction to the structural frame: 5 minutes
- Structural role play and processing: 30–45 minutes
- Brief introduction to the human resource frame: 5 minutes
- Human resource role play and processing: 30–45 minutes
- Brief introduction to the political frame: 5 minutes
- Political role play and processing: 30–45 minutes
- Brief introduction to the symbolic: frame 5 minutes
- General discussion, summary, and conclusion 30 minutes

Groups generally need about half an hour to prepare their role plays, sometimes longer. You will need at least a half hour to run and process each frame's role play. As suggested above, you may also want to provide a brief introduction to or summary of each frame before the role play to set the context and take another opportunity to review each frame. Tell the class that you expect the role plays to run five to ten minutes each and that you will look for a logical stopping point. A good time to stop is when either party falls out of role or if Cindy seems stuck or is becoming repetitive. Use the remaining time set aside for debriefing.

Useful questions for processing the role plays include the following:

1. What was Cindy Marshall's approach here? What worked? Why? What didn't? Why?
2. How did it fit with the frame scenario?

Copyright © 2003 by Joan V. Gallos and Jossey-Bass/A Wiley Company, 989 Market St., San Francisco, CA 94103

All rights reserved. No parts of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of this approach? (Recording strengths and weaknesses on the board creates a record that can be compared once you have done all four frames.)

Debrief each role play before moving on to the next. The same sequence and questions can be followed for each frame. This activity is usually worth the time it takes. Students find it a powerful, integrative experience.

**Notes:**

*1. For larger classes:* In large classes with more than one group per frame, instructors can ask for a group to volunteer to role-play and subsequently call on other groups prepared in the same frame to discuss how the role play compares with their approach. If other groups describe intriguing variations, or confidently assert they had a better approach, the instructor may want to put them “on stage” briefly. If a group’s role-player is struggling, the instructor may choose to stop the action, discuss what’s happening, and then let the same Cindy Marshall try again (often a student will do better after getting feedback and time to reflect) or bring up a new Cindy Marshall and pick up the meeting where it was interrupted.

*2. Alternative structure:* This activity can also be designed as a “leadership challenge” (as discussed in the teaching notes for Chapter 8; see Exercise 8.5). In that case, each of four student teams would prepare role-players for both the Marshall and Howard roles, and each Marshall would meet a Howard prepared by another group.