

# PART 1. AN INTRODUCTION TO REFRAMING ORGANIZATIONS

*Reframing Organizations* is more than a standard organizational behavior (OB) text. Understanding its unique nature and contributions, as well as its underlying philosophy and values, clarifies its possibilities in the classroom.

## OVERALL PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

*Reframing Organizations* is written for present and future leaders and managers—those who envision themselves actively engaged in the struggles to tame and befriend the too-often unruly organizational beast. The authors' primary purpose in writing the book was to sort through organization theory and research: to bring readers understanding that is genuinely important and useful to practitioners, as well as simple ways of using this information on a day-to-day basis. By examining what is known about structure, human resources, politics, and symbols, the authors offer easy access to and a quick handle on central organizational concerns culled from a hundred years' worth of theory and research.

The book, however, is not a standard, chapter-by-chapter march through a traditional list of topics. Rather, it is intended as a readable and usable synthesis and integration of present understandings about organizations. *Reframing Organizations* is unique in its attempt both to name the isolated traditions and major theoretical perspectives—structural, human resource, political, and symbolic—that characterize organization and management thinking and to propose direct links across these distinct traditions for good professional practice. In that sense, the authors provide a comprehensive framework for understanding organizational theory and behavior, as well as a good historical overview of the field.

The authors' second purpose in writing the book is to show how reframing and a four-frame approach to organizations, management, and good leadership work. The authors present many real-life cases and organizational examples from the four different perspectives. They ground their central assertions for more practically minded readers; they demonstrate the power and usefulness of reframing and the skills essential for applying multiple perspectives to the same organizational event. Four questions—What is going on structurally? What is going on from a human resource perspective? What is going on politically? What is going on symbolically?—echo throughout the book, challenging readers to cultivate good

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diagnostic habits and develop an appreciation for comprehensive views of organizational happenings.

## PHILOSOPHY BEHIND THE BOOK

The title of the book—*Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice and Leadership*—reflects important beliefs and values that underpin it.

*Reframing*—looking at events from different viewpoints in order to avoid individual biases and psychic blindness—emphasizes the importance of patience, clarity, and flexibility in the face of organizational complexity. The reframing process suggests taking time to find out what is “really” going on and then using that information to inform action. Looking at events through structural, human resource, political, and symbolic lenses lessens the likelihood of oversimplifying problems. In the face of organizational confusion, panic, or desperation, it is easy to drown in the puzzles and pressures. The authors believe that the reframing process increases the probability of seeing and solving “real” problems, while encouraging people to expand the scope and flexibility of their own thinking. Reframing invites ongoing individual and organizational learning.

Reframing also expands *choice* by developing options. Too often people feel trapped because they conclude that there is only one way to solve a problem or only one thing that they can do. John Dewey defined *freedom* as the power to choose among known alternatives. Reframing with structural, human resource, political, and symbolic lenses frees managers by offering four different ways to approach diagnosis and problem definition, with corresponding implications for leadership and effective action. People have found this systematic way of generating options and expanding choices empowering. *Reframing Organizations* is based on the belief that this kind of empowerment is critical for individual and organizational success.

Embedded in a multi-perspective emphasis is acknowledgment of individual and cultural differences and a way to explore and bridge such diversity. The authors’ research has shown that managers and students often have strong predispositions or preferences for only one or two perspectives. In laying out the central dimensions and underlying assumptions of each frame, the authors provide portraits of how typical structural, human resource, political, and symbolic thinkers see their world. What does each focus on? Ignore? “Naturally” see as critical? What might each consider insignificant? Inaccurate?

The four frames even provide clues to the kind of “language” each speaks—does she, for example, speak in terms of goals, purposes, and interfaces with the environment, while his language is peppered with concerns for needs, feelings, and individual potential? Determining one’s own frame and comparing it with someone else’s provide a way of better understanding and communicating about individual

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and cultural differences. Reframing helps in dealing with age-old communications problems that plague organizations, and offers a useful strategy for managing the increasing diversity in today's global organizations.

The book is also based on three central beliefs about *leadership*:

1. That good leaders are made, not born—anyone can fine-tune his or her leadership skills, abilities, timing, and style.
2. That organizations desperately need good leadership.
3. That leadership is not dependent on organizational position or hierarchy.

Developing sophistication in four-frame diagnosis, using the frames to generate options for effective action, and developing facility in talking about that process means that anyone, no matter what his or her position, can provide effective leadership. Organizations need clarity. They crave people who can provide clear, not simplistic, ways of responding. The authors believe that the structural, human resource, political, and symbolic frames help leaders define their roles more clearly. The four frames offer equal opportunity for exerting leadership to organizational leaders, managers, and willing participants.

Finally, the emphasis on *artistry* rests on belief in the importance of using skills and imagination to create possibilities for beauty and enjoyment in organizational life. Too often, good management and leadership are defined in static and overly rational terms, and organizations are portrayed as unavoidably mechanistic and impersonal. People can too easily feel burdened and constrained by the tasks that face them and overwhelmed by the seriousness of their mission. The authors believe, however, that good leadership is dynamic, enjoyable, and ultimately spiritual. Organizations offer wonderful opportunities for people to find art, poetry, delight, and values that allow them to move large systems with grace and dignity. The authors try to capture the inimitable spirit of good leadership in their examples and cases. They provide clues for how to infuse management and organizations with enjoyment, passion, and purpose.

## **THE POWER OF THE BOOK IN THE CLASSROOM: A RATIONALE FOR ITS USE**

*Reframing Organizations* lays out a clear four-frame approach to organizations and leadership. The power of this approach is its combination of simplicity and sophistication. By remembering four terms—*structure*, *human resources*, *politics*, and *symbols*—students have a point of entry to a world of organizational thinking and an anchor for their actions.

More specifically, students are offered:

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1. A way of categorizing and recalling organizational theory.
2. A means for critically assessing the comprehensiveness of organizational research, consultation, advice, and popular “how-to” books.
3. A useful and usable template for organizational diagnosis and action.
4. A schema and language for joint problem solving.
5. An aid to managing organizational diversity and improving communications.
6. A guide for good management and leadership.
7. A way to cope with the complexity and ambiguity that surround life in organizations.

It is a testimony to their power that the ideas stick: students at many institutions, when asked to recall what was most useful and memorable from their studies, named the four frames. Many also report feeling enriched in mind, spirit, and purpose. (In Chapter 1, the authors cite a study by Dunford and Palmer that found a distinct positive impact of the frames on MBA students.)

Diverse student audiences have responded enthusiastically to earlier editions of *Reframing Organizations*. Students regularly say the book was a valuable introduction to organizational theory and behavior. Most also say that, in contrast to many other texts, it was enjoyable and highly readable. They especially value the examples and cases that bring concepts to life. Experienced managers relished opportunities to compare their own situations with others and to test the reality of the authors’ assertions. Younger students enjoyed a window into the “real” world. All appreciated the many applications of the frames in different organizational and cultural settings.

The third edition builds on the success of the first and second. It updates concepts, research, and cases to respond to key turn-of-the-century issues and challenges.

Because of the content and style of *Reframing Organizations*, it can be used in multiple ways. Many instructors use it as the main text and conceptual centerpiece in courses on organizations, management, or leadership. It can be used as an introduction to and overview of the field or as a concluding, integrative work in courses relying on other texts. It can serve as a building block for instructors who are dissatisfied with the limited and/or more traditional focus of many organizations texts and who, therefore, combine readings, cases, and activities to construct more personally distinctive courses. *Reframing Organizations* can be used to convey essential understandings about organizations and to assist students in developing more complex reasoning skills—to teach an integrative approach to both theory and practice.

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## FEATURES THAT DISTINGUISH *REFRAMING ORGANIZATIONS* FROM OTHER BOOKS ABOUT ORGANIZATIONS

*Reframing Organizations* is different from standard OB texts in its developmental focus, goals, and style. Some of these differences have been implied in the discussion above. It might be useful to emphasize the differences here.

The developmental focus of the four-frame approach makes *Reframing Organizations* most distinctive. The book attempts to teach a way of thinking about the organizational world and managing its complexity. When we begin to talk about framing experience, changing the ways in which people make sense out of their world, and helping people to understand and cope with increasing complexity, we do more than teach about organizations and management theory. We address basic developmental issues. In that sense, *Reframing Organizations* is as much a book to encourage developmental growth as it is a book to teach about managing and leading. Many OB instructors define their roles in developmental terms: they see themselves not simply as conveyors of facts but as guides to deeper and more comprehensive thinking. *Reframing Organizations* is perfect for this purpose. It facilitates working on developmental agendas in the classroom while exploring the day-to-day realities of modern organizations.

Another distinctive feature of *Reframing Organizations* is the authors' consistent emphasis on both management and leadership. Many OB texts march through a standard set of topics, leaving students to sort through theories and research to make them useful for practice. The authors of *Reframing Organizations* emphasize professional practice: seven chapters focus on improving leadership and management. *Reframing Organizations* is accessible, and, like any good theory, elegant yet parsimonious.

The authors, however, also want a book that provides easy access to the organizational literature for students as well as professionals who recognize the value of a deeper understanding of organizational theory. For this audience, the four frames provide a manageable and straightforward handle on the growing body of organization theory (OT). The four frames become a sorting mechanism for simplifying a broad and complex body of research and theory.

At the same time, *Reframing Organizations* offers a more comprehensive view of the organizations literature than many traditional OT texts. While *Reframing Organizations* includes the traditional OT emphasis on structural and bureaucratic views of organizations, it also extends organization theory into political and symbolic domains and provides a direct link between the traditional macro areas of OT and the micro areas of OB. In that sense, *Reframing Organizations* offers a workable way of integrating organizational theory and organizational behavior into one manageable course.

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*Reframing Organizations* is divided into six parts. Part 1 examines the generic role of theory and the power of reframing in making sense of organizations. It sets the context for examining four perspectives on organizations and leadership. Part 2 develops the ideas and concepts central to the structural frame. Part 3 explores human resource issues. Part 4 lays out the political perspective, and Part 5 focuses on symbolic concerns. Part 6 is devoted to improving leadership and managerial practice.

The choice of topics, organization of the material, and overall style of the book are also unique. Many OB texts begin with a discussion of perception, attitudes, and motivation and lead students through a series of independent chapters examining standard topics. Instead, *Reframing Organizations* groups ideas by frame; introduces basic concepts, along with key contributions and contributors; and points readers to additional sources and references.

Ideas that cut across different frames are explored in various parts of the book to provide more realistic and comprehensive understanding of organizational phenomena. For example, the concept of “needs” means something different from a human resource and a political perspective. The idea is, therefore, explored in the context of *both* frames. In the same way, goals look very different from a structural perspective than from a symbolic point of view and need to be viewed in those two distinct ways. Standard texts often bypass such critical distinctions and comparisons, leaving students confused by seeming inconsistencies or wrongly concluding that the meaning of organizational dynamics and events is more widely shared and agreed upon than it actually is.

Finally, *Reframing Organizations* is unique in its relevance for diverse audiences. It has been successfully used in schools of business, education, government, medicine, nursing, law, divinity, and public health; with undergraduates, graduate students, postdoctoral students, and students in professional schools; with new managers and seasoned executives in industries of various kinds and sizes, in the public and private sectors, in the United States and abroad. Many organizational texts are written for business students and assume that these students need exposure only to examples from the private sector. *Reframing Organizations* is built on a belief that management students in any sector learn more and understand more deeply through studying organizations in a variety of contexts. But the relevance of *Reframing Organizations* for a wide audience rests mostly on the power of the four-frame approach in diverse settings. The authors refuse to offer simple solutions or definitive answers to organizational problems and managerial dilemmas that are culturally based or time bound. Instead, they propose a new way of thinking about organizations and responding to age-old managerial problems and leadership challenges.

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## PART 2. TEACHING WITH REFRAMING ORGANIZATIONS

What happens when you use *Reframing Organizations* in the classroom? What should you do? What should you avoid? What kinds of student responses can you anticipate? What interesting options are available for teaching each chapter? What maximizes the chances for a successful experience for you and your students?

The next three parts of the instructor's guide answer those questions and more. They offer the nuts and bolts of using *Reframing Organizations*. This section provides an overview of central teaching issues and suggests caveats for instructors in courses using *Reframing Organizations*. Part 3 contains chapter-by-chapter notes and discussions, complete with suggestions for how to teach each chapter and augment the central ideas. Part 4 provides sample course syllabi and guidelines for personal case papers and other support materials.

### CENTRAL TEACHING ISSUES

There are excellent reasons for optimism: instructors around the world have had great success with courses built around *Reframing Organizations*. Most students respond very positively to the book and its key ideas. They describe the book as clear, understandable, helpful, and fun to read. Research on reframing courses (cited in Chapter 1 of the text) has consistently found that students rate the ideas highly—they find the framework easy to remember and useful in practice. Another reason for optimism is that there are many pedagogical routes to success—more than one is likely to fit your own style, skills, and preferences. At the same time, reframing raises its own particular set of challenges and choice points, and you will want to be prepared for them.

Courses based on the art and science of reframing teach more than the content of organizational theory and research. They teach a process for learning about the world and mastering new ways of making sense out of present and past experience. They encourage flexibility, self-reflection, and an acceptance of personal causality. They demand skills in relative thinking, a tolerance for ambiguity, and an appreciation of the social construction of reality—developmentally sophisticated capacities.

As students work to meet the intellectual and developmental demands of reframing courses, they face a number of challenges. They are asked to explore their beliefs about organizations and about themselves, rethink their past experiences and relationships with significant others, and question their abilities to navigate the world successfully. For these reasons, reframing courses can be extremely powerful and productive. For some students, they can also be stressful. Instructors will want to be aware of the unique challenges and potential stresses that students

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face in reframing courses and provide structures and support to assist students in learning and development. What should instructors anticipate? What can they do?

## **DEVELOPMENTAL IMPLICATIONS OF REFRAMING COURSES**

Reframing courses provide opportunities for developmental growth. Students learn to develop more complex ways of reasoning and managing ambiguity and choice. Exploring the implications of individual development reminds instructors of what might be happening for their students and points to prescriptions for creating an appropriate classroom learning environment.

### ***Different Students Start from Different Developmental Places*** \_\_\_\_\_

Developmental issues play themselves out in every classroom. Students can view the role of the teacher, the topic, and class processes and structures in very different ways depending on their developmental stages and competencies. Those same generic issues also affect reframing courses. (Instructors new to developmental thinking and its applications to the classroom may want to read other works that explore these issues in more detail, such as those suggested in Note 1 at the end of this part of the instructor's guide.)

However, there are also specific developmental issues that are particularly applicable in reframing courses. Instructors need to remember that reframing challenges students' capacity to bring multiple perspectives to the same event. Students who bring such capabilities to a course will zoom through the material and activities, appreciative of the opportunity to find a new and exciting ways to do what they already know how to do. Other students will find the course more challenging and confusing. They will wonder how one event can be four things at once. They will look for the "one right answer" and want to know which frame is "really" correct? They may feel betrayed when they finally master one frame only to be asked to consider another. They may be baffled by the overlap among the frames. They may feel manipulated by requests for "frame flipping," wondering if it is some kind of academic game or test. They may look at students who seem to know what reframing and "frame flipping" mean and feel embarrassed at their own bewilderment. They may know that they are lost but be unable to understand or talk about why. They may translate developmentally based confusion into attacks on the teacher, the subject matter, the frames, the readings, or any combination of the above.

Sometimes instructors simply push harder in the face of student anger and confusion, assuming that complaints reflect laziness or lack of motivation. Remember that students may work very hard and want very much to learn yet be developmentally hindered from understanding and working at the instructor's

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intended level. Failing to recognize this can lead to growing student rebellion or deep feelings of failure.

It is equally tempting to write off confused or complaining students as people for whom the course and its challenges are inappropriate. Actually, the course may be even more important for them than for students who easily handle the material: the confused students are being pushed to explore issues that are at the boundaries of their present developmental capabilities—exactly the educational challenge that they need.

Instructors in reframing courses must therefore set realistic goals for individual students and accept that people are starting from very different places. Since age is a weak predictor of developmental stage, assumptions about students' developmental capabilities should not be based simply on age or experience. Instructors will want to think of ways to assess student developmental capacities and readiness—using developmentally based sentence completions, for example, as part of a course activity. (Examples of developmental sentence completions and other suggestions can be found in the Gallos article on developmental diversity cited in Note 1.)

Instructors will need to offer different slants on the same ideas so that students at all development levels can benefit. (The teaching notes in Part 3 of this instructor's guide provide multiple suggestions for working with the central ideas in each chapter.) They will need to develop skills in diverse teaching methods in order to work with students along the developmental spectrum. Instructors will also want to check in with students often to see what they are understanding and taking in from their readings, discussions, and course activities. One simple way to do this is to ask students after each class to hand in anonymous 3-by-5 cards with their reactions, questions, concerns, or suggestions. The cards provide efficient feedback about what is most prominent in students' minds. (Instructors can complete the feedback loop by reporting back at the beginning of each class on what they gleaned from the cards.)

If they find that they have overestimated student skills and competencies, instructors may need to shift gears midcourse by recasting course ideas and content so that students can understand them. They will need to reward students for taking steps that are signs of real individual progress and not restrict praise to those whose developmental sophistication made the course relatively easy.

## ***Developmental Growth Takes Time*** \_\_\_\_\_

Instructors need patience. Personal development does not happen overnight. Students who enter a course expecting the “one right answer” from the instructor will not blossom quickly into reframing experts. They can, however, make steady progress in that direction with support, encouragement, and appropriate challenges.

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Developmental growth has ups and downs—clear swings forward to new understanding followed by regression to old ways. Expect and accept this. Help students understand what is happening and why. Provide a context for student experiences. Offer language to name their experiences and label frustrations. Provide multiple opportunities for students to discuss reactions and responses.

It is also important for instructors to remember that development is nonlinear. Students will grasp some frames more quickly than others, love some and hate others. Undergraduates often find the human resource frame easiest, struggle with the structural, find the political cynical and hard to swallow, and are completely confused by the symbolic frame's ambiguity. Executive audiences, on the other hand, are often hungry for political insights and delighted to acknowledge the power of symbolic perspectives. Cultural differences also interact with developmental capacities. In Asian and Middle Eastern cultures, for example, the symbolic frame is more easily understood, even among young audiences.

Students will also experience gaps between understanding the content and knowing what to do with it. There is a large gap between diagnosis and action, between wanting to reframe events and actually being able to do it. Instructors need to recognize that this can be mutually frustrating. Students may feel that they are devoting large amounts of time to course readings, activities, and projects without being able to integrate their learning or get an easy handle on how to reframe. Again, instructors will want to find ways to reward people for progress and effort. They may need to pay extra attention to student frustration when setting up role plays or asking students to explore personal case papers. Students need to see these activities as opportunities for learning rather than as further opportunities to feel confused or inadequate.

### ***Developmental Growth Can Be Stressful*** \_\_\_\_\_

Reframing encourages development. Developmental growth can be stressful. When students develop facility in using the four frames as a new way to make more sense of their world, they naturally turn to old situations that are still unresolved and ponder how the frames might have helped. (Instructors who use personal case papers in their courses, in fact, are explicitly asking all students to do this.) These reflections are often eye opening, but they can be intense, especially for undergraduates and others who have not often been required in other academic courses to explore their inner and outer worlds so explicitly. The experience may open old wounds or leave students feeling guilty or angry about ways in which they contributed to a past failure. Students often reassess their conclusions about the motives of significant others and even renegotiate their relationships with parents, peers, or authority figures.

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Developmental growth can thus lead to tension and conflict with friends or family as students begin to see things differently and to experiment with new ideas or behaviors. Significant others may be threatened by the experiments. Research tells us that even those who say they want the student to learn may not welcome significant change. Students themselves can feel distant and alienated from significant others who no longer see the world as they do. Instructors will want to be aware of these possible stress points and, again, help provide a context for students in which to understand and explore their experiences. Student groups that meet regularly over the term can provide a comfortable place to raise questions, air reactions, and share learning.

Student groups can be set up and structured in many ways. They can meet in class, out of class, or both. They can have assigned tasks, such as class presentations, group papers, or case analyses. They can become “frame groups”—groups assigned one of the four frames and asked to serve as “frame experts” throughout the term (reading beyond the text to enrich understandings of central ideas and assumptions, bringing the frame’s perspective into all class discussions, and so on). As in Larry Michaelsen’s team learning model (discussed in more detail later in this guide), they can be the vehicle for students to take exams and quizzes. Teams can be learning groups that meet regularly to process new insights or reactions to class activities and exercises. They can also be loosely structured study groups that are encouraged to meet and discuss readings, cases, and films in anticipation of class discussions.

There is no one best way for groups to function. Their structure and composition depend on the instructor’s purposes and goals for the course. There are, however, three critical needs:

1. The groups must be an integral part of the course.
2. Instructors must provide assistance in developing groups into cohesive teams.
3. The groups must meet regularly.

In addition to providing social support and a safe sounding board, research has shown that regular student discussion groups help students better understand readings and course materials—an additional aid in reframing courses, where instructors often cover a large amount of organizational theory in a short class time. In large courses with teaching assistants (TAs), instructors will want to familiarize the TAs with the stresses and pressures that students may feel. Experience suggests that students will often choose to explore their confusions and complaints with TAs rather than with the main course instructor.

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## ***Development Often Results from Conflict***

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Developmental growth springs from recognition that one's past models no longer meet present needs. Such recognition ushers in a period of transition from one cohesive way of making sense of the world to another. This transition brings disequilibrium and conflict. Articulating conflict and confusion helps to speed reintegration of one's worldview. Instructors in reframing courses therefore need to be comfortable with conflict, capable of providing opportunities for students to explore it, and willing to create productive arenas for expressing it. They can encourage students to wrestle with internal conflicts and inconsistencies through activities such as:

1. Personal case papers, in which students use the four frames to analyze a challenging situation that they have faced.
2. Short reflection papers, in which students examine a powerful learning experience, key insight, critical question, or important concern.
3. Developmental exams, where students complete a short exam themselves and then meet to redo the same exam in small groups.

Instructors will also want to address the issue of conflict in response to course requirements or activities. They will want to warn students at the beginning of the term, for example, that conflict is basic to learning—that the course is not for those who seek simple answers or an environment free of controversy or challenge. They will want to periodically reflect on the course and its structures and readings, listening for useful course feedback as well as clues to student developmental struggles. They will want to encourage a critical reading of the text and open exploration of the authors' suggestions and assumptions. Instructors will need to welcome and embrace conflict as a sign of long-term student growth as opposed to a short-term annoyance or diversion from “real” learning.

## ***Developmental Stages Have Blinders***

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Instructors must also remember that developmental stages are hierarchical. Higher stages incorporate the skills and developmental capabilities of lower stages: those in lower stages are unable to comprehend higher-level concepts or understandings beyond their own developmental perspectives. This is important, because it means that students with newly budding developmental capabilities cannot fully anticipate the reality of all that instructors tell them about the course, course goals, and course experiences. A month or two into the term, some students will become surprised or frustrated by course requirements and demands that no longer match their initial expectations. Instructors who believe that they have offered ample

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information about what to expect can feel shocked or angry, wondering, “If this bothered you, why didn’t you say so a month ago?”

Developmental limits cast new meaning on instructors’ beliefs about informed choice. Until they experience it directly, students may not really understand what they have signed up for, no matter how clearly the instructor outlines expectations. Instructors need to recognize this and continuously provide a context for students to understand what they are being asked to do, what is happening in the course, and why. Providing information once at the beginning of the term or the start of a major teaching unit may not be enough. Recognizing the developmental basis for student comments such as “If I had known what the course was really going to be like, I wouldn’t have taken it” can also allow instructors to avoid defensive responses and to inquire into the meaning of the problem or disappointment that students are expressing.

## STUDENT RESPONSES TO REFRAMING COURSES

Exploring the developmental implications of reframing courses can leave instructors wondering whether all this is just too complex for their students. The answer is no if instructors (1) have a clear picture of what may happen for students as they learn to reframe and (2) can provide support and structures that encourage students to develop more complex reasoning skills while they learn about leadership and organizations. Overall, students of all ages and with varying organizational experiences have responded positively to reframing courses. What do students say about reframing courses? What are their experiences generally like?

Students like the four frames as a vehicle for studying organizations. They appreciate the simplicity of learning four words that can serve as a starting point for exploring any situation. They become excited when they recognize that all four frames are applicable in situations inside *and* outside the workplace. They are proud at the end of the course of how much they have learned about organizations. They are pleased that four words—*structure*, *people*, *politics*, and *symbols*—give them easy access to a vast amount of organizational knowledge and theory without overwhelming them. They are surprised that people using different frames see and experience the same event so differently.

Students who have studied the four frames describe themselves as having a manageable handle on organizational theory, a new confidence in themselves, a simple language for talking about organizational issues, and at least four different approaches to any situation. Students find this empowering. Instructors should not be surprised to get letters like the following: “After our last class, a group of students met. We talked excitedly—like true disciples of the frames—about how rich with ideas and insights this course was for each of us. . . . The four frames as

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perspectives on organizational behavior are fascinating tools for understanding. When I applied the frames to my own organizational history, a clear 20-year pattern of conflict emerged into clear focus. I can't think of a course I've taken or a philosophy I've studied that, when applied to life-use, made me feel so enriched in mind and spirit—and empowered.”

What other responses are common? What do students find difficult? What seems easy or straightforward? What are the surprises? Many students are initially confused by four different views about organizations. They have been accustomed to courses that stressed the “right” answer. Some approach the study of organizations skeptically, believing that it is little more than common sense. The notion that there are different traditions and contradictory beliefs that affect how people think about organizations—and that even common sense can flow from different worldviews or organizational frames—can be temporarily disconcerting. Instructors need to acknowledge potential student confusion and encourage people to dig into the content of each perspective. The more deeply students understand each individual frame, the better able they are to integrate the perspectives and to expand their appreciation of the frames’ relevance to diverse situations.

In order to use the four frames well, students need solid knowledge of each as well as easy access to that knowledge. Instructors can use a set of key words as shorthand for each frame’s central concerns, assumptions, and processes, offering access to these bodies of knowledge much as the frames offer entry into organizational theory and research. (Table 2.1 lists key words for each frame.) Instructors should use any opportunity to review key words and firmly connect them with the frame. They can, for example, list them on the board before discussion of a particular frame. They can use them to structure initial conversations about the frame and its content and in summaries and frame reviews. They can put them in study questions for student assignments and case preparation. They can use them as diagnostic lenses for in-class case discussions and for consideration of personal cases, current events, newspaper clippings, movies, and so on. Remembering the central issues in each frame helps people feel comfortable and confident in applying the ideas to other personal and organizational situations. Applying the ideas to diverse situations enables people to review the frame. The two goals feed each other well.

**Table 2.1. Key Words for the Four Frames**

<b>Frame</b>	<b>Keywords</b>
Structural frame	Goals, task, technology, rationality, environment, rules, roles, linkages, differentiation, integration
Human resources frame	Needs, skills, feelings, motivation, satisfaction, norms, interpersonal interactions, fit (between

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	person and organization)
Political frame	Power, conflict, coalitions, scarcity, enduring differences, politics, bargaining, negotiation
Symbolic frame	Symbols, meaning, belief, faith, culture, ceremonies, rituals, myths, stories, play

Students respond positively to the key-word approach for learning about the four frames. A group of managers in a recent course, in fact, had key words for the four frames attractively printed on large desk blotters, which they playfully distributed to everyone in the final session. They were energized by the idea of a simple way to keep these ideas “right in front of their eyes” as they attended to the day-to-day pressures of their work. Younger students find the key-word approach eye opening as well—it offers them a model for how to acquire and structure useful knowledge.

Undergraduates often try to master the frames by memorizing every theory and author and idea and then feel overwhelmed by the amount of information that they need to remember. Instructors can use the study of the frames as a vehicle for offering students a more productive way of approaching reading assignments: read for ideas and understanding, not memorization. Think and talk back as you read. Create a basic framework or a central question and then read to increase understanding of that.

In their discussions of the frames, instructors will want to explore the ways in which different theories and ideas enrich a central set of frame understandings. Through use of key words for each frame, for example, they can help students sort ideas into a few basic categories and arrange a wealth of information in an easily remembered format. By thinking about compartmentalizing their learning and providing themselves with a way to tap into a larger reservoir of information about organizations, students can learn something important about how to read and study.

Once students have spent time isolating and exploring individual frames, they can have difficulty integrating the four frames and moving on to reframing and frame flipping. Some can get “hooked” on one frame as *the* way to see the world and resist letting go of their newly discovered “right” answer. This is a perfect opportunity for instructors to work on the issue of frame preferences and to offer students time to develop or reassess personal learning goals in order to expand their comfort and facility with each perspective. (The teaching notes for Chapter 1 suggest frame-related instruments for exploring frame preferences.)

Students can also become too concerned about overlap between frames, wanting tidy, nonoverlapping boundaries: “Expanding employee participation with a multiple-level task force is a human resource issue. How can it be a structural issue

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as well?” or “A sign of a leader’s power is a political frame issue, but isn’t it a symbolic frame concern too?” They may need encouragement to become less rigid in defining frame boundaries, less concerned about the “correctness” of the parameters of each frame, and more willing to play with different applications of the central issues and assumptions that each frame suggests. Instructors need to acknowledge that overlap between the frames can be confusing, assure people that the matter will become clearer over time, and then move on. Instructors can help students to eventually sort out frame-overlap confusion for themselves by working with the central ideas of frame in different contexts, assignments, cases, and activities; taking a second cut at frame content in the later text chapters on leadership, change, and ethics; reviewing and integrating the perspectives through activities such as the Cindy Marshall case in Chapter 16 and the RFK High School case in Chapter 20; and encouraging people to apply the frames to their own life and work experiences through, for example, personal case papers.

Finally, instructors should realize that the content of each frame can raise certain emotions and trigger predictable student reactions in the classroom. For example, work with the political frame may lead to testing of the instructor’s power or attempts to renegotiate course requirements or expectations. The structural frame can raise questions about class rules, roles, exams, and standards. The symbolic perspective gets students talking about values and culture in the large class or in their small groups. Students may not even be aware that they are acting out frame-related dynamics in the class or in their assignments. Instructors who anticipate and are prepared for these kinds of frame-related dynamics can use them as opportunities for powerful frame discussions and learning.

## **CREATING A PRODUCTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

The discussions above contain multiple suggestions for creating a productive learning environment in reframing courses: understand the pressures and tensions implicit in developmental growth, create arenas for conflict, establish study groups as sounding boards and sources of support for student learning, train teaching assistants, approach topics in multiple ways, drill the content of the individual frames, and so on. Additional issues that instructors will want to consider when working with *Reframing Organizations* include attendance, use of personal case papers, and anticipation of tension points in the course.

### **Attendance and Participation Incentives**

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To work well with the frames, students need to understand them, see their applicability in diverse situations, be able to flip quickly from frame to frame, and develop the skills and capabilities to use all of the frames in their own

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organizational lives. This takes hard work and consistent effort. In the same way that it is impossible to learn to play tennis by only reading a book about the sport, it is hard to become a skilled reframer by sitting back, casually reading the text, and hoping that all this will come.

Students need to immerse themselves in the material: they need to practice using the frames, personalize the information to their own organizational experiences, and work with the ideas in multiple ways. They need regular opportunities to discuss and grapple with the subtle features of each perspective. They need to work closely with others who can challenge their developmental limits and encourage them to see their world in new and different ways. Students need to practice their reframing skills repeatedly until all this becomes second nature. They need the guidance of their instructor-coach, feedback from others, and encouragement from understanding supporters in this learning process. Class attendance and participation in reframing courses are therefore critical. Instructors will need to think of incentives for encouraging both.

Clearly, one incentive is an engaging class, filled with activities in which students can experience the frames in different ways and realize that class attendance and involvement are expanding their knowledge. In addition, instructors will want to discuss the importance of attendance and active involvement in class activities for skill building. With graduate audiences, this may be sufficient. In undergraduate courses, where students may not yet have strong abilities to manage competing claims on their time and energies, instructors may need to create attendance requirements with clear penalties for violations. In all classes, instructors may want to increase the quality of student involvement by making class participation a reasonable percentage of the final course grade.

In executive education, instructors will want to review with participants the importance of regular practice in acquiring reframing skills. They can suggest strategies such as informal frame groups where people meet regularly and discuss personal cases or seek frame guidance about situations that they find challenging. Instructors can also design their training efforts to include follow-up sessions and opportunities for people to meet regularly to check their understanding, practice reframing in a supportive context, and receive the coaching critical to fine-tune reframing competence.

### ***Personalizing Learning: Using Student Case Papers*** \_\_\_\_\_

The frames have the most power and meaning for students who discover the usefulness of frames in their own lives and their own work in organizations. One way for students to make that discovery is through the writing and analysis of personal cases. In preparing personal cases, students write three-to-five-page

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descriptions of situations in which they were central participants. A situation on which a case is based should have the following characteristics:

1. The student found the situation challenging.
2. The student thinks he or she can learn something about himself or herself and about organizations from the situation.
3. The student is motivated by and interested in the situation enough to explore it throughout the term.

Instructors will want to remind students to think broadly when choosing a case situation. It need not be limited to a work setting—a great relief to students with limited employment experience. Many powerful personal cases have examined sports teams, family dynamics, relationships with roommates or spouses, church groups, and so on.

These conditions are important to emphasize. Students may initially frame this as an opportunity to show their strengths to the instructor and fellow students. They may therefore choose a shining example of their best work, which leaves little room or motivation for exploring what they might have done differently—the paper becomes “just another assignment,” as opposed to an opportunity for deep learning. Alternatively, students may want to write a case about someone else. Although they may find this intellectually challenging, they need to realize that doing so removes the opportunity to dig into their own preferences, choices, and strategies. Often, the best personal cases are based on personal or professional failures. Instructors may want to encourage that when describing the assignment. (Guidelines for personal case papers are provided in Part 4 of the instructor’s guide.)

Once personal cases have been written, they can be used in various ways. They can become the basis for a final course paper in which students integrate what they have learned about the four frames, analyze their case situations, and suggest what they might have done differently. Instructors can ask for written analyses of the personal case but divide the assignment—asking, for example, that students turn in analyses of their case situation one frame at a time. Instructors can also use the personal case for two take-home exams, with an exploration of the case using the structural and human resource frames in the first paper and the political and symbolic frames in the second. In addition, students can work with personal cases in class activities throughout the course. (The teaching notes for many chapters in Part 3 provide other suggestions for using personal case papers.)

Instructors should remember that students may become highly invested in their personal cases. If personal case papers are used in a reframing course, instructors need to devote ample time for students to work with their cases, design class structures for facilitating new insights about them, and provide individual feedback on each case. The latter means a substantial time commitment from instructors

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and/or trained TAs to provide both initial feedback on the content of personal cases and additional comments on student case analyses.

### ***Anticipating Tension Points***

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There is always high energy in reframing courses—much is happening on multiple levels for everyone. The more smoothly the course runs in a mechanical sense—requirements are clear, structures are in place—the easier it is for instructors and students to focus on learning about organizations and leadership rather than dealing with distractions and unmet needs. Instructors will want to anticipate potential stress points in the course and build in ways to address them in their class designs.

Choosing and writing a personal case, for example, are difficult for most students. They worry about choosing the right case. Students with limited work experience are sure that they have nothing important to examine; those with years of experience feel overwhelmed by the choice of one significant event. Many wrestle with the desire to learn and the need to look competent. Others are unsure about the how and why of exploring personal experiences in a class assignment. Still others fret about how to write a good case. In anticipation of these tensions, instructors may want to devote a class to a case-writing workshop. Here, students can work on understanding the content of a good case; explore the difference between description and analysis (the personal case asks for description, the final paper seeks analysis); talk with the instructor about the assignment; and meet in small groups to discuss the personal cases that they anticipate writing.

Instructors will want to think about the particular needs of their student audience, identify other potential tension points, and design strategies for shortcutting the stress. Is the institutional culture, for example, one in which there is high anxiety about assignments and grades? If so, then clear, detailed written guidelines for all assignments and requirements can help. Is the case method new to students? If so, instructors will want to devote class time to teaching students how to prepare a case, exploring what leads to good case discussion, and examining the value of learning from cases. Is writing apt to be a major problem for students? If so, build instruction in basic writing and analysis into the course. Simple work on distinguishing between description and analysis can be eye opening for many. Secure outside writing assistance for students. Can instructors in writing courses serve as auxiliary resources? Is there an on-campus writing or study center that could work with students on your course assignments? Can a talented TA hold mini-writing workshops? Would feedback to early paper drafts help? Can students form writing support groups? Sometimes even asking students to consider the resources and support that they have available—for example, family or friends to provide feedback on drafts—can help to allay writing fears.

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## **Putting the Course into Perspective**

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A final reminder to instructors is that, at times, it may be important to stand back and put the course into perspective. Instructors can become highly invested in reframing courses. The ideas are compelling; class energy is high; student progress is so rewarding to see. This investment can make it hard to listen to student criticisms or live through those inevitable moments when things go awry.

Students too can be easily caught up in reframing courses. The learning is powerful and engaging. The highs can be exhilarating. The lows can lead to long lines outside the instructor's office and intense complaints. Activities that work beautifully with one audience can bomb with another, and highly invested students can be the first to question why any instructor in his or her right mind would have suggested such a "ridiculous activity." A single classroom event can serve as an unintended arena for conflict, triggering an avalanche of unanticipated emotions and student complaints that "surely this was all planned" and a clear sign of instructor insensitivity and manipulation.

Instructors need to remember that with highs come inevitable lows and that tension and conflict are part of developmental growth. All this means, quite simply, is that there are times when instructors cannot take things that happen in a reframing course personally. At tense times, they need to avoid being drawn into student-instructor battles by defending the course, the book, an assignment, themselves, or any particular set of ideas. Instead, they need to reflect back the intensity of the emotions and work with students to understand what they mean. They need to focus on more than short-term comfort—they need to keep their eyes on long-term learning.

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### **Note for Part 2**

1. As mentioned, instructors new to developmental thinking and its applications to the classroom may want to read other works in which I have explored these issues in more detail:

- J. V. Gallos, "Developmental Diversity and the OB Classroom: Implications for Teaching and Learning," *Organizational Behavior Teaching Review*, XIII:4, 1988–89.
- J. V. Gallos, "Understanding the Organizational Behavior Classroom: An Application of Developmental Theory," *Journal of Management Education*, XVII:4, November 1993.

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A focus on gender and development can be found in:

- J. V. Gallos, “Exploring Women’s Development: Implications for Career Theory, Practice, and Research,” in M. Arthur, D. Hall, and B. Lawrence (eds.), *Handbook of Career Theory: Perspectives and Prospects for Understanding and Managing Work Experiences* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
- J. V. Gallos, “Women’s Experiences and Ways of Knowing: Implications for Teaching and Learning in the Organizational Behavior Classroom,” *Journal of Management Education*, XVII:1, February 1993.

## **PART 3. CHAPTER-BY-CHAPTER NOTES AND TEACHING SUGGESTIONS**

This section of the manual provides teaching notes for each chapter in *Reframing Organizations*, third edition. The notes include:

- An overview summarizing each chapter’s central ideas.
- Key terms and definitions.
- A list of the major case examples used in the chapter.
- Alternative ways to think about teaching the material.
- Suggested cases, films and videos, activities, and exercises.

Cases and training films are identified with names or acronyms such as Hartwick and HBS, which refer to sources listed in Appendix A. Some sources for films and videos can be found in Appendix B.

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