

2023

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Recommended Citation

Hussein, Abdelnasser. (2023). Reframing and the Power of Resistance: A Case of Self-Reflection. *i.e.: inquiry in education: Vol. 15: Iss. 1, Article 7*.

Retrieved from: <https://digitalcommons.nl.edu/ie/vol15/iss1/7>

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i.e.: inquiry in education is published by the Center for Inquiry in Education, National-Louis University, Chicago, IL.

Reframing and the Power of Resistance: A Case of Self-Reflection

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Abstract

This article is a reflection on my personal experience as a practitioner in the field of educational leadership when resistance resulted from restructuring the dismissal procedure in my school. This reflection is primarily drawing upon the four-frame approach of Bolman and Deal (2017) in their book, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*. The article explores the full description of the case, an analysis focused on me and my understanding of the case, and a reframing process based on the premise Bolman and Deal offer in their book. Throughout my self-reflection on this case, I develop options that add choice to the framework, which can be applied when reframing is required for a similar educational organization. When examining the prevailing resistance toward restructuring the dismissal plan, my focus falls primarily on three frames that I consider in this article. First, there is the structural frame, which includes a sharp vision and significance of goals, roles, formal relationships, and rationality. Second, there is the symbolic frame, which often conveys the symbols, rituals, and ceremonies that create meaning and belief. Third, the political frame discusses power, conflict, networks, and building coalitions. The analysis reveals there is no one answer to a specific problem. Accordingly, the article urges organizational leaders to apply a comprehensive perspective as a key strategy to avoid failure when responding to a single problem.

Case Description

The Board of Education (BOE) of Enlightened, a pre-kindergarten–eighth grade private faith-based school, hired me as the head of the school. Seeking accreditation by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), I started drafting a three-year school improvement plan (SIP), which included seven standards with two or three objectives under each standard. Safety was a major standard of the SIP due to the hostile notion against the denomination of Enlightened and its population, and the requirements of the accreditation process. For example, parents felt that the current prejudice and rhetoric against their religion would cause someone to attack their children at school. Additionally, the foundation of the fifth standard of accreditation emphasized the proactive culture of health and safety. Accordingly, one of the main objectives

was to develop a plan to ensure students' safety inside and outside the school premises. To achieve such an objective, two key strategies were in place under the safety standard: first, relocating grades two and three classrooms to be on the first floor instead of being on the second floor, and second, restructuring the dismissal procedure to be more organized and safer. Although the first strategy was urgent, it was postponed to the end of the year due to the school's limited budget. The second strategy was doable and more affordable since it was a matter of reorganization. The Enlightened SIP was developed by a leadership team of seven people, including four teachers, the school accountant, the school secretary, and me. The SIP was approved by the BOE who invited parents to attend a presentation of the SIP by the head of the school. Some parents reviewed the SIP and gave their signature of approval.

The Old Structure at a Glance

Due to the disorganized way of dismissing students and limited parking lot space, Enlightened dismissal was chaotic to the extent of becoming a safety threat. During dismissal, grades one–eight would form a line upstairs in the hallway, waiting to hear their names announced over a megaphone. Once a student heard his/her name, he/she came downstairs carrying a heavy backpack. Pre-kindergarten (pre-K) and kindergartener (K) students would line up downstairs with their teachers in front of the school's main door waiting for their parents. Teachers had a megaphone to call the students when a parent was parking or appearing in front of the school.

The parking lot shared with the adjacent church was not big enough. Parents who would arrive early had to park in the parking lot, while parents who came later blocked the cars parked earlier. The early-arrived parents would complain because they had already picked up their children, but they could not leave the parking lot because of a lengthy line of cars blocking their way. At the same time, other parents who were still at the end of the line may have picked up their children, but they usually became stuck at the end of the line. In conclusion, any observer could have easily noticed a big mess and chaos in the parking lot when picking students up.

The Logic of the Old Way of Dismissal

Endeavoring to understand the logic of this way of dismissal, I reached out to some veteran teachers who said, "This is the way the administration decided to handle dismissal since the establishment of Enlightened." The BOE did not have a clear justification either. It turned out that Enlightened followed this way of dismissal since the first day of operation. Back then, the student body consisted of no more than forty students. One-third of that number consisted of the employee's children. Fifteen families decided to bring their children to this place to start a faith-based school for their community. Most of these families had strong ties as friends and relatives. They even would come carrying cups of coffee to share with the teachers while picking up their children. The school population expanded to reach 160 from all over the state. However, the school

administration did not rethink the dismissal procedure or pay attention to the difference between dismissing 40 and dismissing 160 children.

Structure Flaws and the Need for Restructuring

One key problem was centered around the risk that the first and second graders could have experienced when walking downstairs at the end of the school day. These young children were usually excited about leaving school. Stepping twenty-two stairs down while carrying heavy backpacks indicated a potential risk for students to be easily injured. This process was also time-consuming to bring these children safely to their parents in front of the school. Another challenge emerged because of the packed parking lot and disorganized way of dismissal. Parents who would arrive early for dismissal complained about not being able to leave quickly because they usually got trapped in the parking lot by other parents arriving late for dismissal. The third challenge was about the danger of a pre-K child potentially being picked up by someone other than his or her parent or guardian. Such incidents happened occasionally because some families would pick up children other than their children. Frequently, some families would call the school to permit other families to pick up their children.

The New Structure at a Glance

The new dismissal plan assigned both pre-K and K students to remain seated inside their classrooms with their teachers. Their parents were directed to park their cars and walk into classrooms to pick up the children. Simultaneously, grades one–eight would move to the gym located behind the school building. Parents were guided to drive behind the school on a one-way route to pick up the children from the gym. Children whose parents arrived behind the school were instructed to leave the gym and enter their cars upon hearing their names. Parents did not leave their cars, and teachers observed the students entering their cars. Children who took the bus were dismissed from the side door of the school. The buses were assigned to park in front of the side door of the school. This location was assigned for buses to keep them away from the cars lining up behind the school and those parked in front of the school.

The new plan for dismissal went well for the first semester without complaints, except for two parents who rejected the new way of dismissal, claiming there was a delay when picking up their children while waiting in a lengthy line of cars. I had one-on-one conversations with them. After that, they showed a great deal of satisfaction and acceptance after hearing the safety goals and efficiency of the strategy. I could prove that time was not an issue of complaint after asking them to observe dismissal with me and calculate for themselves the exact time of dismissal. They then affirmed the new strategy was proven to be much faster, safer, and easier.

Restructuring: Goals, Rules, and Roles

The new dismissal plan developed new roles for the teachers and staff. For example, the head of the school was the general supervisor during dismissal time. The secretary and the accountant were assigned to receive parents or guardians at the front office. They also answered the parents' phone calls during dismissal. It was common for some parents to pick up their children instead of sending them by bus. Other parents required their children to be picked up by another family. Two teachers were responsible for the students who took the bus. These students lined up inside the school and were led by the teachers to enter the buses waiting for them in front of the side door. Two other teachers were assigned to stay outside to organize the traffic and call the students whose parents had appeared in the line. The rest of the teachers were allocated to supervise the children in the gym to make sure every student was safe and not leaving the gym before hearing their names announced. The plan was effective; we had no complaints from parents, except the two mentioned above. However, it seemed that some parents kept silent waiting for a chance to attack the new dismissal plan.

Resistance Rises to the Surface

After a month of the second semester, Enlightened was vandalized. Some parents found vandalism a valid reason to attack the new dismissal plan. They claimed that students who walk from the school to the gym are easily exposed to terrorist threats. On a weekend day, a person came in full disguise and vandalized the school. After a long week of working hard to clean the slurs off the school walls and doors, I invited the parents to a face-to-face meeting to discuss the crisis plan and the school's readiness for the students' return after a vacation. I also invited state officials, such as law enforcement and directors of the U.S. Department of Justice to the meeting to answer parents' questions related to the role of the state in protecting school children. The meeting went well until one parent brought up the school's procedure for dismissal as life-threatening to the students. Although I was acting as the moderator of the meeting, I found myself in confrontation with two parents whose spouses had discussed their concerns with me at the beginning of the school year. The earlier discussions with the spouses resulted in mitigating their fears and gaining a sense of satisfaction about the safety of the children during dismissal.

A Structural Analysis

In this section, my analysis is primarily based on my role as a structural leader to shape the school. I reflect on the structural core concepts that were implemented to meet the safety needs in the school. Considering the structural frame, this analysis attempts to explore my success as a structural leader, to find a plausible solution to the problem of the potential risks while dismissing children, and to investigate to what extent stakeholders accepted this solution.

Goals, Rules, Roles, and Rationale

First, the restructuring process of dismissal is considered a structural-oriented change based on goals and objectives. The main goal of this new way of dismissal was to confirm the safety of every child. Thus, the new dismissal was based on a clear goal: safety. “Organizations exist to achieve established goals and objectives and devise strategies to reach those goals” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 48). This is the first assumption of the six structural assumptions proposed by Bolman and Deal (2017), which is related to achieving goals. Next, the new procedure emphasized top-down coordination by allocating the head of the school to the top of the structural hierarchy under the BOE. As the head of the school, I had formal authority to control, set rules and policies, and monitor the performance to make sure goals and objectives were achieved efficiently. Bolman and Deal (2017) state the fourth structural assumption as follows: “Organizations work best when rationality prevails over personal agendas and extraneous pressure” (p. 48). Observing the dismissal process inside and outside the school was the first step toward a successful restructuring process. Based on such an observation, the safety goal was highly emphasized to avoid the defects of the current dismissal process. I identified potential dangers, such as the probability of young children being hurt while rushing down the stairs for dismissal. So, one rationale for restructuring was to avoid potential risks while dismissing students. In this case, I studied the status of safety inside the school and decided to put new standards for safety as a major requirement for the school setting. These dangers were clearly explained to the BOE and the teachers. One of the first things that effective school leaders do when beginning the change process in an organization is to help employees identify the reason for the change (Gardner, 2006). According to Bolman and Deal (2017), restructuring is a challenging process that organizations may be forced to go through in response to a major problem. Thus, the new structure of dismissal came as a response to a major problem, the students’ safety, rather than any personal or hidden agenda.

I think one of the reasons behind the resistance to restructuring the dismissal was that some parents were used to the old way of dismissal, and, consequently, they may have preferred not to have any kind of confusion. They may have refused to experience uncertainty about the efficiency of the new structure. However, those parents could not realize that their pursuit for stability resulted in misalignment with the dynamic change of the school environment, such as the growth of the student body, staff, and teachers that tripled within the last ten years. According to Miller and Friesen (1984), when organizations attest little structural change over extended periods, a major restructuring is usually expected. Miller and Friesen (1984) explain that a troubled organization can fall into a configuration called the stagnant bureaucracy. In such a stagnant status, the environment is calm, and the leadership is committed to old ways. That status of tranquility of the Enlightened environment led the previous administrations to ignore that the number of students was increasing and failed to realize such growth required a structural change to provide maximum safety to the students during the school day and dismissal.

A Symbolic Analysis

This conflict happened at a remarkable period when a wave of alarming hatred, racism, and divisiveness was spreading nationwide in a country where the campaign of a presidential candidate smeared immigrants, in general, and Mexican immigrants, in particular, describing them publicly as rapists, liars, and criminals (Lee, 2015). The worst of this situation is that Donald Trump, the then-president of the United States, promoted hatred against Muslims and immigrants. In a clear attack on American values, Donald Trump started his presidency with the executive order referred to as the Muslim ban that was issued under the cover of a counter-terrorism measure. The executive law prevented Muslims from seven countries (Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen) to enter the United States. In Trump's four years of presidency, the media consistently reported hate crimes and increasing violence against two major minorities in the United States: Jews and Muslims. Synagogues, Mosques, Hindu temples, and Islamic and Jewish private schools became easy targets of vandalism.

Meanings versus Actions

Enlightened was vandalized with racial and religious slurs and graffiti against its community population and faith. As a result, dramatic concerns about the students' safety arose. From a symbolic perspective, the meanings and beliefs that occur in the wake of action are much more important than the action itself. "What is most important is not what happens but what it means" (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 241). After the vandalism, parents did not physically appear in front of the school to read the slurs that were written or examine the damage caused by the vandal. Their information was initially taken from what the media transmitted to the public. This reflected how parents were not interested in what happened, and how the threat to their children's lives dominated their thoughts. Parents began contacting one another, discussing their concerns, and asking about the school's precautionary measures to keep children safe. Vandalism was seen by parents as a symbol of threat to children who studied at Enlightened, while community members of the same faith saw vandalism as no more than slurs and phrases of hatred, which they condemned with no further actions. Vandalism was a symbol of fear that conveyed two different messages in terms of tension and concern to diverse groups of people in the same community. In one of the core suppositions of the symbolic frame, Bolman and Deal (2017) state, "events and processes are often more important for what is expressed than for what is produced" (p. 242).

Planning as a Symbol

After the vandalism, I contacted some parents who expressed hesitance to send their children back to Enlightened because of their worries about their children's lives. Realizing that parents' major concern was the uncertainty about the school's ability to secure the place and protect their children from potential harm that may reoccur in the future, I called for a general body meeting. I developed

a comprehensive school crisis plan that identified clear safety measures and suggested implementing specific strategies immediately, regardless of the cost. As mentioned earlier about Enlightened's limited budget for such a large project, I communicated with the Enlightened community, seeking their financial support for the school's safety project to replace the school gates and doors. Vandalism added a profound sense of urgency to that project, and we raised more than \$40,000 to replace the vulnerable gates and doors. Installing gates and replacing the school doors were a priority followed by intensive training for the staff and teachers on active shooters, intruders, and lockdown practices. This plan was a symbol to indicate that the school administration understood and shared the same concerns of parents regarding children's safety and would do its best to make the school a safe place for their children. Bolman and Deal (2017) emphasize the role of planning in conveying such symbolic messages, "Planning is a signal that all is well, or improvement is just around" (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 288).

Giving the Example of Myself

I decided to send a clear message to school parents and the community that I share their fears and concerns about children's safety as a parent rather than the head of the school. So, I mentioned that I had two children studying at Enlightened to demonstrate how my concerns as a parent interrelate with the parents' concerns. I said, "I want you to know that I am not only the head of the school, but I am also a parent." This example was an implicit symbol, but it was highly needed to provoke a spirit of courage to resist our fears. In times of uncertainty and stress, it is important to instigate a spirit of confidence and trust in the school leadership. By giving this example, I intended to highlight my love and commitment to protecting every student in the school as equally as my children. "Subtle and implicit signals rather than concrete and explicit guidelines or decisions held the group together and directed it toward a common goal" (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 270). I admitted there was a risk that the community had to take, but they should never give up. The community needs to continue providing children with the type of education that they have been always dreaming of and continue transferring their culture to the new generation.

A Political Analysis

Enlightened, like some other private schools, suffered from scarcity of resources, power relations, and divergent interests that represented the major elements of politics. "It is naive and romantic to hope organizational politics can be eliminated, regardless of individual players" (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 183). This analytical section is an exercise to understand and manage the political dynamics by reflecting on my power as experienced in response to a specific conflict at the school.

Power

The conflict that happened with a few parents, who were against the new procedure of dismissal, inspired me to reassess the sources of power that other stakeholders and I had, my awareness of such sources of power, and my success in dealing with the existing groups of power in the school community. In this situation, my authority initially stemmed from my position as the head of the school. Given this power, I created an agenda of several changes, which implied a sign of effective leadership according to Bolman and Deal (2017). They consider the change agenda the first key skill of four skills that a manager should exercise. This agenda should function to outline “a goal and a schedule of activities” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 204). The goal outlined in my agenda was students’ safety, and the new procedure of dismissal was the exact activity to achieve the goal. Granted the position of power, I had full responsibility, commitment, and power to take the necessary steps to provide maximum safety for the students.

Looking back at the situation, I realize I was aware of two existing sources of power of two stakeholders: the position power of the BOE to whom I report plus the information and expertise power of the teachers. Acknowledging these two poles of power, I discussed and submitted the draft of the SIP to the BOE. To empower the new agenda of change, I sought the approval of the superior power that the BOE represented. Not only did the BOE approve the agenda of changes, but they also valued it. As a newcomer to the school and its community, it was important to realize and benefit from the existing teachers who have gained information and expertise power through their long years of working at Enlightened and being members of the school community. In addition, it was imperative to share the changes, including the new dismissal procedure, with the teachers since they were the key players who would implement every change planned to take place in the school. The teachers’ power of information and expertise could help me solve some problems that emerged when implementing the changes.

Fear as a Primary Source of Power

Now, I can easily notice that the two parents came to the meeting equipped with a powerful idea that revolved around their fear about their children’s lives. After the vandalism, they could market fear as the main motive to attack the plan that had been in place for the entire semester and that was convincing initially. This situation was embarrassing to me and surprising at the same time. Fear, which I could not deny, became the dominant feeling after the vandalism. I was embarrassed by how the two parents repeated their objection with new justification, exploiting vandalism to refute the new dismissal plan. At the beginning of the change phase, they rejected the dismissal plan because they claimed it took more time than before. When I met their spouses and explained the new dismissal plan, its merits, and its urgency, they praised my interest in the students’ safety and admitted their ignorance of the goal of the new way of dismissal. Moreover, it was surprising because I did not think that vandalism could have been manipulated to revoke the dismissal procedure that had been going on for a whole semester without defects.

Limited Networks

Shortly after my arrival as head of the school, I managed to create a limited network with the school founders, cofounders, and community supporters. Such a network helped me understand much about the school's history and effectively assisted me in preparation for the accreditation process. The limited network with few key figures from the community contributed to building a good impression of the new head of the school among the school community. But the question remained: Can these formal limited networks function as a powerful coalition to support the agenda of change in times of conflict and resistance? I reflect on this next in the reframing section.

Reframing

Bolman and Deal (2017) define reframing as “looking at the same situation from multiple lenses or points of view” (p. 23). The authors proposed four frames: structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. The structural frame is concerned with the organizational architecture of the focus on goals, rules, roles, and rational decisions. From a structural perspective, the organization is presented metaphorically as a factory or a machine. The human resource lens focuses on people's psychological needs, skills, and relationships. Thus, the family is the metaphor for such an organization, and leadership is empowering. The political frame sees organizations as a jungle where resources are scarce, different interests provoke conflict, and people fight for power and advantage. The symbolic frame focuses on meanings, beauty, and faith where concepts such as culture, metaphor, ritual, ceremony, stories, and heroes prevail. From a symbolic lens, the leader is presented as an inspirational person. Reflecting on this case, I found out that resistance emerged as a major challenge after the change process. This resistance made me rethink my views regarding such a case and try to apply multiple lenses for a deeper understanding of the situation considering reframing. So, I now explore what I could have done differently based on the three frames: structural, political, and symbolic. The following pages focus on what could be done if I were to face a similar situation considering the new lenses introduced in *Reframing Organizations* by Bolman and Deal (2017).

Coordinating Roles and Rationale

The new dismissal structure brought up clear roles in which everyone had a specific task to perform with a fair load. However, I should have paid more attention to the role of coordination to achieve more well-coordinated roles and relationships. From the perspective of Bolman and Deal (2017), “Coordinating roles or groups use persuasion and negotiation to help others dovetail the efforts of the different units” (p. 59). If I were to start the process again, then I would present the roles of every location and ask teachers to pick what suits their abilities and interests instead of imposing these roles on them. Coordinating these more democratically could reduce the tension of staff and teachers when some parents expressed their dislike of a new structure of dismissal. Reflecting on

these roles from a structural perspective, I would coordinate the roles of each person with a clear rationale and full explanation of the task that is needed from everyone assigned to his/her role. Teachers would be given the choice to pick the place they prefer to serve in and express the rationale for their choice. It is better to play the role of the facilitator who endorses his followers' choices. Bolman and Deal (2017) highlight the role of the designated boss with formal authority to coordinate the efforts of individuals and divisions as a widespread practice in organizations.

Informal Meetings

From a structural lens, meetings are highly emphasized as a tool of lateral coordination. However, for future restructuring, I would pay more attention to informal meetings with parents and community members. A significant instrument for building bridges with the community is being a friend or community member rather than the head of the school. Attending social activities could be my gateway to informal meetings, such as coffee with the head of the school and community dinners. Meetings in community centers, cafés, and potluck dinners could provide a more natural context to communicate with parents and other stakeholders. Stringer (2008) emphasizes the importance of meeting on the parents' turf to create a more comfortable environment for discussion and understanding. There is no doubt that formal meetings are crucial as lateral coordination, but informal meetings are "vital to take up slack and help glue things together" (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 58). From a structural point of view, informal meetings are encouraged among managers and coworkers. The BOE, principal, teachers, staff, and parents should be in touch with one another consistently. Schlender (2004) proposes this informal exchange as the cornerstone of the success of Pixar, the animation studio, through providing a constant stream of talk among the groups of managers, artists, and engineers. I could target informal gatherings throughout the community to achieve progressive communication channels.

Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) as a Task Force

According to Bolman and Deal (2017), task forces are devices that can facilitate face-to-face coordination. It is much better to establish a PTO that consists of the principal, teachers' representatives, parents' representatives, and community members who work together to identify needs for change and ways of restructuring that guarantee minimum resistance or conflict. In firms, the task forces are devices for orchestrating "the development of new products and services" (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 58). Similarly, a PTO can be the coordination team that presents restructuring to Enlightened parents as an organizational need more than a leadership decision. As the population of the school changes, enrollment grows, and the boundaries of the community expand, it is mandated to create organizations such as a PTO that can facilitate more effective communication with parents in the school community.

Building Coalitions

First, from a moral perspective, I must admit that I hate to view schools as places of political conflict. However, this case is proof of the existence of politics in schools. In *Reframing Organizations*, Bolman and Deal (2017) present the political arena to the leaders who may dream of placing their organization in a better position when different interests collide. The first proposition of the political lens by Bolman and Deal (2017) admits that “organizations are coalitions of different individuals and interest groups” (p. 184). Building a coalition among parents could support and advocate the change agenda. If I were to face this situation again, then I would follow specific steps to build a supportive coalition. First, I would create general linkages and informal relations with community members side by side with a formal relationship with individuals and community organizations, like the BOE, leaders of interfaith, and PTO. Second, I would identify the internal and external key players who maintain sources of power in the school’s community, especially parents. This group of influential key figures in the community would form a coalition to back up the change agenda. Bolman and Deal (2017) warn leaders they may fail if they depend solely on reasons to accomplish goals without paying attention to relationships. After that, it would be useful to seek to understand the interests of every group of power and assess which group or individual may resist the change, why, and to what extent (Kotter, 1985). Kotter’s strategy aims to communicate and develop a good relationship with the opponents before they think of building a coalition to act against leaders or the change agenda. It happened that the two opposing parents were trying to build a coalition of some teachers to lead a confrontation against me to revoke the new dismissal plan. In conclusion, leaders who seek organizational change should build coalitions to develop a power base to dent the resistance of the opponent groups of power.

Bargaining and Negotiation

Bolman and Deal (2017) propose bargaining and negotiation as a central element of decision-making that political leaders should implement to avoid conflict when applying their change agenda. Lax and Sebenius (1986), as cited by Bolman and Deal (2017), identify the most critical part of negotiations as “choosing between creating values or claiming values” (p. 210). I find the model of Fisher et al. (2011) more reasonable for school leaders who act like politicians in passing their change agenda while securing a good sense of morality that fits the purpose of highly respected educational institutions such as schools. Fisher et al. (2011) present their principled bargaining model based on four principles: 1) separating people from the problem; 2) focusing on interests, not positions; 3) inventing options for mutual gain; and 4) insisting on objective criteria. Negotiators, according to the model of Fisher et al. (2011), can be classified as value creators who cooperate to get a win-win solution. That may help get projects done if one does not build a good coalition to support their agenda. I am in favor of this model because it pays much attention to objective criteria that bring an agreement to the criteria from the beginning and secures a level of fairness among the gains of every party.

Reflecting on what happened in the general body meeting when the two parents brought up the conflict to the public, I think a one-to-one approach would be much more successful when negotiating with opponents. This approach was particularly useful when I contacted the two opposing parents earlier and convinced them of the new dismissal plan. Bolman and Deal (2017) describe political leaders as people who “recognize the value of personal contact and face-to-face conversations” (p. 352). In one-on-one meetings, as Kanter (1983) explained, leaders act “as if each person were the most important one for the project’s success” (p. 223).

A Shared Vision

From the perspective of symbolic leadership, vandalism could be utilized effectively to communicate the school’s vision and articulate its mission to the stakeholders. The focus should be on the safety standard while applying some compelling changes considering the new situation of fear and confusion. In response to the vandalism, the vision is expected to promote a safer environment assuring school continuation while enhancing safety precautions, getting the police involved, and building bridges, especially with those who may disagree with such a vision. According to Bolman and Deal (2017), “Vision is particularly needed in times of crisis and uncertainty” (p. 355). Besides, a shared vision would bring collective responsibility among the parents instead of placing the burden solely on the administration’s shoulders. Promoting a shared vision might, in turn, point out shared interests that might provide a common background to pave the way for a symbol of unity among stakeholders in times of conflict. “Without a sustained process for building a shared vision, there is no way for a school to articulate its sense of purpose” (Senge, 2012, p. 72). Such an experience should urge educational leaders to review and share Enlightened core values, such as integrity, patriotism, respect, compassion, accountability, and teamwork. As a symbolic leader, I appraise virtues expressed in the school’s values. Revisiting and articulating such values during times of affliction could significantly raise the spirit of challenge and persistence among parents, students, and teachers. Moreover, values and beliefs have a direct impact on bringing harmony to all efforts needed to face difficulties. Bolman and Deal (2017) emphasize the role of shared values, beliefs, and cultural ways to facilitate agreement and harmony among stakeholders.

Reinterpreting the Situation

The symbolic frame suggests the concept of reframing experiences as an extremely useful practice that I would apply if I were in an analogous situation in the future. “Symbolic leaders interpret experience so as to impart meaning and purpose through phrases of beauty and passion” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 353). If I were to face the same situation, then I would reinterpret vandalism much more optimistically. I would explain the situation from an incredibly positive and promising point of view. I would have an opening speech to convey a message that should ease worries and remove fear. I would address the school community saying,

We are not afraid, but they are. We are strong, but our enemies are the weakest. We are brave, but the vandal is a coward. We come to school in the mornings, afternoons, and evenings, but the vandal comes when we are not present, on a Sunday morning. He was fully disguised, which means that he was in horror of being seen or discovered. In fact, this situation shows how strong we truly are. He committed this crime before dawn because he could not face us. I am quite sure that if he knew that one of us was in the school, he would not dare do it. This experience should make us stronger and have full confidence in ourselves as a strong community. Enlightened students, parents, and teachers are making history in our community by encouraging enrollment at Enlightened more than before. We are here today to celebrate the success achieved over the last week to get the school ready on the first day after vacation. We are here to move forward and not to hold back.

Creating a Slogan

A slogan such as “Hate will never win” would be inspiring to parents, students, and staff. The vandal wrote on the school’s front door, “Now this is a hate crime.” What he wrote inspired me to encounter such a hateful sentence with a strong slogan if the same situation is repeated. Such a slogan is intended to bring unity, solidarity, and hope to have a bright future free of hatred and discrimination based on religion, race, ethnicity, or color. I, personally, like slogans because they are short but can convey strong messages that can be remembered for a prolonged period. Interfaith leaders throughout the state could help spread such a slogan and articulate the meaning of resistance to such waves of hatred affecting groups of different ethnicities, religions, and color all over the country.

Evaluation as a Ritual

The symbolic frame offers evaluation as a signal of a well-managed organization that plans, performs accordingly, and considers recommendations (Bolman & Deal, 2017). In a situation such as vandalism, I could develop a crisis plan and submit it for parents’ evaluation. Parents’ involvement in evaluating the crisis plan would increase the interaction between the school and parents, which may reflect positively on parents’ trust in the school administration. Parents would gain confidence in the school’s safety and strong faith in the school’s performance. “Evaluation plays a decisive role in helping organizations foster faith, belief, and confidence among constituents” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 290). So, this evaluation process would be a ritual that Enlightened would follow occasionally. The evaluation ritual should include parents in the decision-making and evaluation processes. Inviting parents to evaluate the school’s plans occasionally may remove resistance to new plans and priorities. Discussing a plan that has been already implemented is important to highlight what should be done differently for future reference.

Past Stories

Though Enlightened has a history of only fifteen years since its establishment, the school survived a natural disaster that hit more than five years ago. It is one of the best stories of success in the history of Enlightened and worth bringing up. It would be impressive to remind parents of that natural disaster, highlighting community solidarity and collective efforts to renew and reopen the school after many people thought there was no way to attain education in such a place anymore. It would also be motivating to name the people and organizations who played vital roles in restoring the school. There was a church that offered its building to be used as classrooms, which enabled students to graduate in the same year. This story is a sign that may refute the impression of some parents who think that its faith-based community is targeted and rejected in the state or the country. This story could inspire a spirit of challenge and persistence by recalling how the community became stronger and in better shape after a previous time of calamity. This history should also bring some heroes and heroines who may be influential to raise a collective sense of confidence and hope for success during times of hardship. Such historical stories “grant comfort, reassurance, direction, and hope to people of all ages” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 247). Stories could convey the message that the community is legendary in welcoming and protecting children of different faiths. As cited by Bolman and Deal (2017), Berry Lopez reminds us, “the stories people tell have a way of taking care of them. . . . Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive” (p. 247).

Beliefs and Culture

Enlightened is a spiritual, cultural organization more than an academic institution. Though the school is committed to the national educational standards, it is a faith-based organization. From a symbolic lens, it is highly recommended to promote a sense of faith and culture that relates everything that may occur in this life to the will of God. It is a fundamental belief of its culture to believe that God decrees only good for people. In addition, no harm may happen to someone without the fair compensation of God. Faith teaches its followers that circumstances that seem bad may turn out to be good, and vice versa. Faith motivates its followers to seek protection from God first. Religious leaders of the same faith could be invited to give spiritual speeches to the parents to remind them of the true meaning of relying on God. They could also lead prayers asking God for protection and tranquility. These religious symbols would ease anxiety and fear in times of horror and despair. I believe that fear breeds hatred. Hence, virtues such as tolerance, forgiveness, and mercy, which are well articulated in the holy book, can be brought up to alleviate any desire for revenge. The school’s mission articulates its culture and emphasizes the importance of bringing up Enlightened children in complete harmony with society, religion, and culture.

Conclusion

Bolman and Deal (2017) emphasize that thinking about situations from different perspectives is a skill that requires reframing to create new strategies. From the perspective of Bolman and Deal (2017), leaders who depend on one correct answer of their own when processing change often generate resistance. They urge leaders not to respond to a specific problem in a single way, claiming they did all that could have been done while repeating the famous saying, “Failure was unavoidable.” Bolman and Deal’s (2017) premise suggests that managerial failure is the result of limited ideas in which leaders trap themselves, thinking such ideas are the only solution for a specific problem. I believe that restructuring dismissal, in this case, was mandated and a vital strategy for providing the maximum level of safety for the students. However, the change could have avoided resistance if I had effectively applied the political and symbolic lenses in parallel with the structural perspective. Gardner (2006) considers challenging resistance as the first step to changing minds. Finally, leaders should rely on the comprehensive concept of reframing as one of the best tools to bring harmony between the sincere intentions behind change and the correct implementation of actions to avoid resistance as much as possible. “Many improvement efforts fail not because the managers’ intentions are incorrect or insincere but because they are unable to handle the social challenges of change” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 166).

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