An Introduction to the Competing Values Framework

Traditional models have divided the increasingly popular domain of leadership into contrasting, either/or categories. The vast majority of examples from the leadership literature create dichotomies of leadership (e.g., Theory X vs. Theory Y; task vs. socioemotional; participative vs. autocratic; transactional vs. transformational). There has been little effort to combine the existing dichotomies into a larger synthesis or examine the extent to which multiple forms of leader behavior are required (Hart & Quinn, 1993). Using any one of these dichotomous models exclusively can lead to either/or thinking, which is a limited and ineffective way of conceptualizing leadership (Bensimon, Neumann, & Birnbaum, 1989).

Robert Quinn is among those authors that have recently begun to argue that effective leadership requires a balancing and simultaneous mastery of seemingly contradictory or paradoxical capabilities -- decisiveness and reflectiveness, broad vision and attention to detail, bold moves and incremental adjustment, and a performance as well as people orientation (Hart & Quinn, 1993).

Quinn's model of leadership is based on the Competing Values Framework for organizational analysis. The Competing Values Framework (CVF) was developed initially from research conducted on the major indicators of effective organizations. Based on statistical analyses of a comprehensive list of effectiveness indicators, Quinn and Rohrbaugh (1983) discovered two major dimensions underlying conceptions of effectiveness. The first dimension is related to organizational focus, from an internal emphasis on the well-being and development of people in the organization to an external focus on the well-being and development of the organization itself. The second dimension differentiates organizational preference for structure and represents the contrast between stability and control and flexibility and change.

When these value dimensions are juxtaposed, a spatial model emerges (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983). Together the two dimensions form four quadrants,
each representing a distinct set of organizational effectiveness indicators (Figure 1). Each quadrant of the framework represents one of four major models of organization and management theory (Quinn, 1988). The human relations model places a great deal on emphasis on flexibility and internal focus, and stresses cohesion, morale, and human resources development as criteria for effectiveness. The open systems model emphasizes flexibility and external focus, and stresses readiness, growth, resource acquisition and external support. The rational goal model emphasizes control and an external focus, and views planning, goal setting, productivity and efficiency as effective. The internal process model emphasizes control and an internal focus, and stresses the role of information management, communication, stability and control.

Figure 1. Competing Values Framework: Organizational Effectiveness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Human relations model</th>
<th>Open system model</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Means</strong>: cohesion, morale</td>
<td><strong>Means</strong>: flexibility, readiness</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ends</strong>: human resource development</td>
<td><strong>Ends</strong>: growth, resource acquisition</td>
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<th>Internal process model</th>
<th>Rational goal model</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Means</strong>: information management, communication</td>
<td><strong>Means</strong>: planning, goal setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ends</strong>: Stability, control</td>
<td><strong>Ends</strong>: productivity, efficiency</td>
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This scheme is called the competing values framework because the criteria seem to initially carry a conflicting message (Quinn, 1988). Indeed, it displays the paradox that exists inherently in notions of effectiveness in organizations as organizations pursue competing, or paradoxical, criteria simultaneously (Quinn, Faerman, Thompson, & McGrath, 1996). We want our organizations to be adaptable and flexible, but we also want them to be stable and controlled. We want an emphasis on the value of human resources, but we also want an emphasis on planning and goal setting.
Citing the absence of an explicit theoretical foundation for the "seemingly endless array of unconnected empirical investigations" (p. 10) in the field of leadership, Quinn (1984) used his competing values framework of organizational effectiveness to organize the literature on leadership. Eight categories of leader behavior, or roles, emerged from his review of the literature. Figure 2 plots these eight roles onto the existing framework. The resulting model of leadership was derived theoretically and represents "a hypothetical rather than an empirical statement about the perceptual understructure of leadership" (Quinn, 1984, pp. 18-19).

Figure 2. Competing Values Framework: Leadership Roles

The competing values framework of leadership effectiveness is built, therefore, around the two major value dimensions (internal-external, flexibility-control) used in the framework of organizational effectiveness. Each quadrant reflects a set of core management skills. Within each quadrant, two roles exhibit the characteristics associated with each of the four major models of organization and management theory:

- The upper-left quadrant, representing the human relations model, defines two leadership roles: The facilitator encourages teamwork and cohesiveness, and manages interpersonal conflict. The mentor
is helpful and approachable, and engages in the development of people through a caring, empathetic orientation.

- The open systems model, in the upper-right quadrant of the competing values framework, specifies two additional leadership roles. The innovator is creative and facilitates adaptation and change. The broker is politically astute, persuasive, influential, and powerful, and is particularly concerned with maintaining the organization's external legitimacy and obtaining external resources.

- The lower-right quadrant, containing the rational goal model, also presents two leadership roles. The producer is task-oriented and work-focused, and motivates members to increase production and to accomplish stated goals. The director engages in planning and goal setting, sets objectives and establishes clear expectations.

- Finally, the internal process model in the lower-left model contains an additional two leadership roles. The coordinator maintains structure, schedules, organizes, and coordinates staff efforts, and attends to logistical and housekeeping issues. The monitor checks on performance and handles paper work (Quinn, 1988).

Quinn argues that more effective managers have the ability to play multiple, even competing leadership roles. Managers are expected to play all of these roles and to simultaneously consider and balance the competing demands that are represented by each set of expectations (Quinn, 1988). Effective managers demonstrate ‘behavioral complexity’ — the ability to both conceive and perform multiple and contradictory roles (Denison et al., 1995).

Several recent studies in the organizational literature have uncovered evidence of the importance of ‘behavioral complexity’ to effective leadership. In their study of 176 public utilities executives, Denison and his colleagues (1995) found that more effective executives exhibit a greater variety of leadership roles than their less effective counterparts. Hart and Quinn (1993), in their study of 916 top managers, tested the relationship between leadership roles and organizational performance. They found that the highest levels of performance
were achieved by CEOs with high levels of behavioral complexity -- those who were able to play, at a high level, all primary leadership roles. Similarly, in his study of 282 middle managers from a large Fortune 50 manufacturing company and 252 managers from the public utility industry, Hooijberg (1996) found that managers who were perceived to perform the leadership functions frequently were seen as more effective by their subordinates, peers, and supervisors than managers who were not perceived to perform the leadership functions frequently.

In their study of the validity of the CVF, Denison and his colleagues (1995) found strong support for the quadrant structure of the framework, but not necessarily for the individual leadership roles within the quadrants. This and other research (Hart and Quinn, 1993; Hooijberg, 1996) suggests that the eight leadership roles might be combined to reflect four primary or essential leadership roles, with each role corresponding to a quadrant in the CVF. Within the context of the human relations quadrant, leaders perform the People leadership function, combining the responsibilities associated with the Facilitator and Mentor roles described above. Within the context of the open system quadrant, leaders undertake the Adaptive leadership function, combining the responsibilities associated with the Innovator and Broker roles. In the context of the rational goal quadrant, leaders undertake the Task leadership role, performing the Producer and Director roles. In the context of the internal process quadrant, leaders perform the Stability leadership functions, and perform responsibilities of Coordinator and Mentor roles described above.

References


