

Module Two Narrative Paper: Organizational Frames and Challenges

There are five organizational frames identified in *Heraclitean Fire* – rational, human, systems, political and cultural. (Carey, 1999, p. 41) These frames are segmented, each with their own unique concerns, priorities and perspectives that impact the way a leader lodged in a frame will lead and interact with others. The following story will examine each individual frame, highlighting some of the strengths and limitations of each, ending with an examination of how the leaders embedded in each frame can choose to grow and transform from their own frame into more dynamic and inclusive leaders.

The Rational Frame

The phone rang, for the second time in the middle of the night. I was in a hurry, trying to pack a bag for the unexpected trip, but I answered it without looking at the caller ID. “Good Morning,”

On the other end, Fred Taylor began speaking without preamble. “I know you got the call to head out. Looks like we will be working together on the real deal now.” I hummed a response while looking for matching socks, and Fred continued without noticing. “Disasters are always bad, and this storm looks like it is going to be the storm of a generation. We need to get in, get control, and get our forces assigned. We need decisive action, now”

Fred was one of the members of the Worldwide Disaster Response Team I was recently appointed to lead. Representing the armed forces, he had the ability to laser focus on achieving objectives, and often pushed for formal rank structures and hierarchy. “Fred,” I said, placing a handful of mismatched socks into my bag, “The team is meeting in California in just a few hours. I know you’re used to operating on your own, but we need to have the team operate together.”

I could hear him roll his eyes, “I know you weren’t there for the last field exercise we did as a team, so you didn’t see how the tabletop fell apart. The organization we have right now isn’t working,

and we need to reorganize and restructure! I've already notified several battalions to prepare to deploy to assist in evacuation, and..."

I interrupted his planning, "Fred. Read the latest situation update. There were some issues with the local government getting chartered flights, so looks like we're moving away from evacuation as the focus and towards preparation and..."

Fred cursed. "I didn't get a notification...I'll have to scrap the entire plan, and..."

"Fred," I said firmly, "Make sure you get packed. I will see you in California in," I checked my watch, "less than 8 hours. We don't formally take over command for another 12 hours after that. Get your notes together, and I'll see you at the table." Fred hung up, doubtlessly rearranging his mental chessboard of battalions.

A manager embedded in the rational frame sees their organization as a tool or method to achieve a specific set of goals. (Carey, 1999, p. 50) There is a set structure, a hierarchy of organization that focuses on training and developing people to fill specific roles, and if there are challenges and problems, they can be solved by re-organization or re-assignment of roles and people. (Carey, 1999, p. 52). In the story, Fred Taylor represents the rational frame. He mentally defined goals and achievements and built a structure around those goals. Upon being told those goals have changed, his structure fell apart because the counterpoint to the organizational structure is inflexibility when adapting to change. (Carey, 1999, p. 52) Fred also shows a desire to control situations. While this can be a useful trait of a strong leader, it can lead to rigidity, and ultimately to viewing people not as individuals, but as tools or pieces on a chessboard. "It could not be otherwise. If the humanization of the oppressed signifies subversion, so also does their freedom; hence the necessity for constant control. And the more the oppressors control the oppressed the more they change them into apparently inanimate "things"."

(Freire, 2014, p. 59) The danger of control is that the more you control, the more you will want to control. With more focus on control, people become alienated and may fail to perform, leading a manager to assert more controlling measures, creating a negative feedback loop. (Carey, 1999, p. 92)

The Human Frame

I was putting my bags into the trunk of the uber when my phone rang again, and I answered, yawning. "Oh, it's so early!" Abby McGregor said. "Are you packed? Did you get enough sleep? I hope you aren't driving yourself to the airport, it's the middle of the night and I am sure you are still just waking up." I smiled, assuring Abby I was okay, and that I had gotten an uber. "Wonderful," she continued. "Now, about this mission... I know you haven't been in the position long as chairperson, but I think it is critically – critically - important that we talk about how you plan to take care of all the people you will be needing. I can start calling hotels and getting food contracts, but I am going to need authorization to sign some contracts and that must – must - come from you. After all, people can't be expected to work if they don't have a bed and a good meal! Now, I have already talked to Fred, and he was just impossible- impossible. Can you believe he thinks he gets to tell me what to do? And that he scoffed at my suggestion we lease out an entire hotel block for the responders. He said they would just bring tents – tents – and that..."

"Abby, Abby," I broke into the stream of conscious. "Take a breath. We aren't at the stage of entering any contracts yet. We haven't officially taken command yet, so we have no way to enter contracts. Let's not rush to decisions. If you rent out all the local hotels for responders, for example, then what will happen after the storm when people are looking for shelter when their homes are damaged? I know you have a lot of experience in logistics, but let's keep in mind, this environment may have different needs than what you are used to."

“I’ve been working in logistical management for response in my region for years,” Abby said frostily. “I think I know what people would need in a disaster response.”

“And that is why you are perfect for this position, Abby. You bring a wealth of experience and knowledge. We are meeting in about 7 hours for the initial briefing. I don’t want you to feel like your pre-planning is wasted if the situation isn’t what you expected. Come prepared, but this will be a joint brainstorm session to ensure we can meet the needs of responders and local populations.”

Abby accepted my caution, and she continued her monologue for a bit before saying her goodbyes. “Make sure you stop and get something to eat – you know airplane food is terrible, and the airport is just overpriced. I’ll make sure to bring the coffee!” I ended the call, closing my eyes in the back of the uber to catch a short nap on the way to the airport.

The human frame is built around the concept that for organizations to achieve goals, they need people who are fully integrated and functional. People can only truly be committed to achieving those goals once their own needs – physical, safety, mental, relationship, etc. – are met. (Carey, 1999, p. 59) If people’s basic needs are met, they will naturally be ready for, and even seek, additional responsibility or tasking, needing only empowerment and general direction from leadership. However, leading exclusively from the human frame can introduce issues with authority should someone question priorities, and a lack of accountability among followers. (Carey, 1999, p. 60) There is also a tendency to see oneself as knowing what is best for everyone, as Abby demonstrated in our story. “One of the basic elements of the relationship between oppressor and oppressed is prescription. Every prescription represents the imposition of one individual’s choice upon another.” (Freire, 2014, pp. 46-47) While acknowledging the humanity of individuals and their specific needs that must be met, there must also be clear accountability, and a rejection of a “one size fits all” needs assessment.

Systems Frame

Gathering my bags from the TSA checkpoint and attempting to get my shoes back on the right feet, I felt my pocket vibrate. Buzz buzz. I checked my phone and saw I had several text messages from Morgan Bolt, another member of the response team.

Morgan: "I have our statistical analysis ready, and I am creating an online database to begin immediately reporting damages, deaths and missing persons. I am working on a mobile app now for responders to directly input photos and data from the field "

I typed back, walking through the airport. "That's great, Morgan. Is that from the contingency plan? I don't remember anything like that being pre-approved."

Morgan: "Based on feedback from prior exercises and best work practices, both critical communication speed and open source reporting are traditionally areas of improvement. We can avoid the issues if we implement this immediately. It's in beta but I think it will work."

I thought this through carefully. Morgan was an accomplished programmer but didn't always consider the affects her directions may have on team members. I could already see one huge pitfall. "The database sounds great, but live information feeds available to the public is going to cause more sensationalism than problems it will solve. Can you work on a way to keep this in-network only? We need to be sensitive to the needs of the people we are there to help." I typed.

Several minutes passed, and I bought an overpriced sandwich from a bleary-eyed clerk. My phone buzzed again. "I can adapt the program based on response feedback in real time. It will help create reports and tracking information. I've also programed it to prioritize responder signal and electronic traffic over all other, so comms won't be delayed if there is infrastructure damage."

I juggled my sandwich and suitcase handle to type back. "I think it sounds like a valuable project to discuss. However, let's not start by solving problems that may not be problems yet. We will get the initial briefing, and make sure we are conscious of the needs and concerns of the locals we are going to support. Our needs might be met with priority controls, but we need to consider the impact that would have locally." I was at the gate for the plane when Morgan typed back a one letter response. "K".

The systems frame manager believes in the adaptability of systems and values the ability of a system or program to continually adjust with feedback from outside sources. (Carey, 1999, p. 66) Processes are implemented to achieve goals, feedback is received, adjustments made to the process, and the feedback loop continues. This logical approach provides constant feedback and values flexibility, but the constant focus on problem avoidance can obscure or completely neglect original goals. (Carey, 1999, p. 68) Building a habit of operating on "if-then" statements rather than on true dialogue and evolution, the systems frame focuses on reflective, reactive action, not conscious choice. This is similar to the "banking" model of education, where information is provided, stored, and repeated at a later time. "The banking concept of education, which serves the interest of oppression, is also necrophiliac. Based on a mechanistic, static, naturalistic, spatialized view of consciousness, it transforms students into receiving objects. It attempts to control thinking and action, leads men and women to adjust to the world, and inhibits their creative power." (Freire, 2014, p. 58) This frame can cause a manager to overlook the fact that humans are conscious and morale beings, and that pursuit of perfect achievement needs to be balanced against those values. (Carey, 1999, p. 94) In the story, Morgan addressed a problem (slow communication) from previous exercises by prioritizing communication traffic for the team, but did not consider the morale or political implications of 'others' coming into an area and prioritizing themselves above local emergency responders and citizens.

The Political Frame

The flight was delayed, and I was reflecting on the various conversations I had already had that morning, when I familiar voice caught my attention. At the airline desk, Nicole Maki stood, appearing to engage the airline representative in an entertaining and private story. I watched as they both laughed, and several minutes later, I waved to Nicole as she began to wheel her bags out of the gate area. “You’re not on the flight with me anymore?” I asked.

Nicole laughed, “Oh no. I never wait for delayed flights. Its all about talking to the right people and getting what you want. Never be afraid to ask for what you want! I’m hopping on another flight, and will be there an hour earlier than originally scheduled with this one.” She paused, “Do you want me to...”

I shook my head. “No thanks, the delay isn’t very long, and I don’t want to worry about my luggage. Are you ready for the meeting?”

Nicole’s eyes brightened. “Oh yes! I’ve already started making phone calls, and I’ve got some major political players from the nearby areas committed to providing us everything we could possibly need, and then some! I’ve already got my team scrambling to set up a major interview as well – we’ll be the first ones on the ground to help, and that’s what will be all over the news. All we have to do is make sure that we mention a few sponsor names, easy day. I even got a few extra benefits added in! I also got an offer of help from one of the local disaster response teams, no string attached, but I haven’t figured out their angle yet. I don’t know what they want, but I will”

I raised my eyebrows. “Nicole...we don’t have sponsors.”

Nicole laughed. “Well, if we want to get first picks of all of the response gear, we do now! Well, I have to run, flight to catch and all!” and she wheeled her carryon behind her as she rushed to her next gate.

Nicole Maki represents the political frame in the story. She understands that organizations must rely on the allocation of resources, some of which may be scarce. She also understands the value of bargaining and negotiation to get what she wants. (Freire, 2014, p. 73-76) Throughout an organization, there are different individuals, teams, and interest groups, all with different motivations and values. The manager entrenched in the political frame not only recognizes that, but uses these relationships and cultures to achieve goals, with the understanding that bargaining and negotiation is a normal part of any environment. However, as Nicole demonstrated, this can lead to looking for political agendas and motivations when there are none, and a loss of an ethical compass. (Carey, 1999, p. 76) The success of a negotiation starts to take priority over what is best for the common good, which in turn dehumanizes those negotiating. (Carey, 2014, p. 94) This political domination is a type of control and oppression. "The dominators try to present themselves as saviors of the women and men they dehumanize and divide. This messianism, however, cannot conceal their true intention; to save themselves." (Freire, 2014, p. 145) Saving themselves by placing their needs first, or preserving their own priorities as most important, is an oppression of others. The idea of 'winning' takes over the idea of team success.

The Cultural Frame

I settled into my seat, ready for the flight. The delay ended up being shorter than anticipated, and the flight would be taking off soon. I looked across the aisle when someone called my name. "Dolf? Is that you?" I asked, smiling. Dolf Moore and I worked in the same main office, and he was assistant to my new position as chairperson for the response team. "Dolf! I had wondered why I hadn't heard from you yet." Dolf smiled back, although a little uneasily. I haven't been in the position of chairperson very long, only since the previous chairperson resigned in frustration. Dolf, though, had stayed. "What's going on, Dolf?" I asked, genuinely curious.

Dolf sighed. "I am just concerned. This is the first real world response, and the exercises have not gone well at all. Fred is such a linear thinker; he just can't adapt. I'm not sure Morgan even understands that this will involve real people, Abby is a storm on her own and just has the wildest priorities, and Nicole...well, any means to justify the ends. This is not what I envisioned when I signed up for this team."

I nodded, thoughtfully. "Tell me, Dolf, what did you envision?"

Dolf thought the question over. Finally, he said, "You know, I thought that we would come together as a group and have common ground. We do all have the same goals, but I am not sure everyone is aware of that. Everyone is operating by their own personal rulebooks, even after all this time working together. It feels fragmented, and I can't predict what the team will prioritize." Dolf shrugged. "I mean, you went to the one meeting, but I don't think you really saw how everyone interacts. In my former jobs, I knew what to expect with the people I worked with because we were one team and shared the same values. Here...I don't know. It's always a battle between different managers. The last chairperson tried to force everyone into cooperating, and was convinced that we just needed to bond and find a way to connect with our inner selves," Dolf paused, smiling, "You should have seen Fred at the meditation retreat. Anyhow, none of it worked. I don't even know if this joint response team is viable if we can't come together even at an exercise."

As Dolf said, I hadn't been in the position very long. However, based on the conversations I had this morning, he wasn't far off the mark. I had some very capable, but very embedded, managers to try and bring together and lead. But something Dolf said struck me.

"Dolf," I said, "Do you feel rested enough to work on a little project with me before the meeting?" I could see he was intrigued. "I may have some ideas..."

Organizations and workplaces have their own cultures, norms and beliefs that are shared by members of that group. (Carey, p. 82) These norms and beliefs are what define the cultural frame. This creates a sense of owning and belonging within an organization and provides people with a cultural map of expectations and philosophies to follow. These basic assumptions help to build the ways in which the group operates and survives, and eventually are taken for granted as reliable and expected ways for problems to be solved. (Carey, p.83) Workplace cultures, and those who lead from the cultural frame, can reflect an organizations values and standards, but can also manipulate and negatively influence people by normalizing oppressive behaviors. Less powerful members of an organization may follow guidance or instruction that is not to their benefit, for example, because it is expected, normal or because they are trying to achieve the greater good. Sometimes, this is a manipulation for the greater good. A fire fighter volunteering for an unpaid shift because there are too few paid members to safely respond to a fire is an example of a cultural norm of 'service before self' that helps achieve the goals of the organization (community safety) at to the detriment of the individual (no overtime for additional hours). Manipulation can also be negative, or only seem to serve the greater good when in fact it only serves the oppressor. "By means of manipulation, the dominant elites try to conform the masses to their objectives. And the greater the political immaturity of these people (rural or urban) the more easily the latter can be manipulated by those who do not wish to lose their power." (Freire, 2014, p. 147) In the story, Dolf is at a loss because his natural leadership inclination is to manage from the cultural frame. He likes having a cultural norm to fall back on the manage and direct behavior, and finds that with a cohesive culture missing, his own leadership skills are shaken. He can identify what is not there but has not been able to replace it.

Solution

Everyone was seated at the large table. We had just received the situational report and would be formally assuming control of the response in a few hours. The response would be significantly larger than the initial briefing suggested, shaking everyone's foundations and assumptions coming into the meeting. Dolf and I had spent our flight brainstorming strategies, and now it was time to bring the team together so we could operate as one unit towards our goals. I took a deep breath. "Thank you all for coming on such short notice. This room is filled with people selected specifically for your skill, experience and ability, and working together we will find a way to save lives." I turned to Fred first. "Fred, we need an organizational structure. I suggest dividing our areas of focus into operational, planning, logistical and financial. You can lead operational planning, and I suggest you have a current operations lead and future operations lead under you to maximize flexibility. You'll work closely with other members of the team to build this out." Next, I turned to Morgan. "Morgan, you're going to lead planning, technology and management. Fred is going to need your help to ensure his operations are achievable but flexible to the changing environment. I'll need you to manage the incoming information and be prepared to implement different actions and suggestions simultaneously. Being flexible is critical."

Next was Abby. "Abby, Fred and Morgan are going to rely on you to ensure that resources and people are cared for and managed. Come up with an efficient way to get people checked in and taken care of so we can get them working on operational goals as soon as possible. Your challenge will be working within a variety of different local areas with different needs, this won't be a one size fits all response, and needs will constantly evolve." Nicole was next. "Nicole, you will be engaging with everyone here. There are going to be problems sourcing resources, people, everything. We need to keep in mind that we are just a small part of this response, and our actions affect others, so ensure we are balancing our needs with the local needs. See how we can share resources – we want to keep the overall greater

good as our priority. I need you to take the lead on connecting each of our teams with the local and political contacts that can help, find out what they need.”

“Dolf is going to help facilitate this operational team building session. He knows what my values and expectations are. If we fail to support one another, we fail to accomplish our goals, and the ones who are most impacted by this will be the ones we are here to help.” I looked at each person directly. “I’m going to develop some specific objectives with leaders of the countries we will be supporting, but you can start now on what we talked about, so we are ready to come up with tactics after.” I stood up to leave. I looked back at the group. Already, people were talking in small groups and pulling out posters to brainstorm on. It was a start, and better than our first meeting where there was no interaction at all. My phone rang, and I left to answer it.

In the story, the narrator had to decide how to lead five very different managers, each embedded into a specific frame, to find a way to successfully work together to achieve the goals of the team. By finding the strengths of each manager based on their frame and emphasizing not only the weak points but the counter point manager to help balance those points, the narrators’ intention is to bring the team closer to a balanced *logos*. (Carey, 1999) Ultimately, the intention is to move the members of the team away from their fractured embeddedness in the individual frames, towards a more balanced center where they can engage in relationships for mutual benefit and learning. By identifying the way each member of the team thinks about management and the organization, facilitating the relationships to create community among the members of the team will lead to the growth and development of each manager individually. (Carey, 1999, p. 98) Each member of the team is already empowered due to their experience and selection for the team, so the narrator is focusing on leading the team to collaboration, and using the common ground between each members personal view to build a community that can grow. (Carey, 1999, p. 103) With the sense of community in place,

eventually this can grow into dialogue. According to Carey (1999), "Dialogue is not possible unless people first have experienced collaboration; collaboration is impossible if individuals have not had a previous experience of empowerment." (p. 103) The process takes time but is important in the ultimate achievement of *logos*.

In order to assist in the growth of the team, the narrator will need to help each member identify their barriers and move past them. For the rational frame in the story, represented by Fred, there is a desire to rely on facts, logic, reason, and to maintain a perspective of objectivism. (Palmer, 2017, p. 99) Fred will have to identify what prevents him from creating relationships and what objectifying people and problems is giving him control over in order to move through fear, and grow towards *logos*. (Palmer, 2017, p. 107)

Morgan represents the systems frame in the story. Morgan demonstrates a desire to analyze and solve problems based on feedback received from previous events, without stopping to consider the impacts of her actions on other areas of influence. She sees the world as a series of *if-then* statements. Palmer (2017) describes this as "thinking the world apart". (p. 116) In order to overcome this tendency to see things as either-or, Morgan will have to practice paradoxical thinking and find a way to balance when opposite things are both true. In the story, Morgan solves the problem of communication by prioritizing the team's comms above all others, but while this solves a problem it also creates a problem. Morgan will need to look beyond the immediate needs of the team and creatively blend solutions that benefit both the immediate team and the location they are tasked to assist.

The human frame is represented by Abby in the story, and Abby shows an immediate commitment to ensuring the basic needs of people are met. However, Abby also has trouble acknowledging that, despite her experience, there are no pristine objects of knowledge and no ultimate

“one way” to do things. (Palmer, 2017, p. 170) In order to grow beyond her frame, Abby will need to be open to empathy and the knowledge of others. “When we deny or disparage the knower’s inner life...we have no capacity to intuit, let alone inhabit, the inwardness of the known.” (Palmer, 2017, p. 175) Being open to transcendence and collaborating with others in a community will help her recognizing when she is forcing her own will and opinions on others, and allow her to engage openly to discover needs and desire.

The political frame was represented by Nicole. She wanted to ‘win’ at all costs, even to the point of being suspicious of offers of assistance from those she could not immediately identify a motivation, and therefore a win/lose scenario. Nicole will need to embrace a losing to win mindset, keeping in mind the greater good over personal achievement. Rather than a competition, Nicole will need to negotiate and bargain from a view point where “...winning means emerging from the encounter with a larger sense of self...” (Palmer, 2017, p. 81) not with a bigger piece of the pie.

The final frame represented in the story is the cultural frame, represented by Dolf. He is struggling because he relies heavily on an organizational structure to guide his actions and objectives and wants that organizational structure to define roles and expectations. He is so paralyzed by not having the same sense of community and culture he previously had, he cannot make connections or help to lead a team that doesn’t fit his frame, thus leaving him vulnerable. He has disconnected from the team to protect himself, forgetting that, as Palmer describes, “distance makes life more dangerous still by isolating the self.” (Palmer, 2017, p. 50) Finding himself disconnected, Dolf will need to look inside himself, and find the inspiration to connect with others. He may find a mentor in the narrator to help him adjust and reconnect, and he may need to listen closely to his own “leader within” to understand what he has lost touch with. Once he reclaims his own identify and self-hood, he will be more confident

in leading from within himself rather than relying on cultural standards to guide his actions. (Palmer, 2017, pp. 73-74)

Each of the five frames identified in *Heraclitean Fire* – rationalism, human, systems, political and cultural – has different strengths and limitations. It is only once a leader can move beyond the confines of their own frame and can recognize the value of perspectives and strengths of the other frameworks that they can grow as leaders. This growth is known as *logos*. Carey (1999) defines *Logos* as “how the diversity of the created universe can be seen to be unified” (p. 39). The value of moving towards *logos* is in the diversity of the different frames, and the different, but equally valuable, perspectives each brings. Understanding each frame, and the unique value it carries while also being aware of the potentially dysfunctional aspects it carries, helps to create balanced leadership and a better understanding of self and others.

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