



# **Administrative Leadership in the Social Services**

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## ***The Next Challenge***

Yeheskel Hasenfeld  
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# **Administrative Leadership in the Social Services: The Next Challenge**

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# **Administrative Leadership in the Social Services: The Next Challenge**

Yeheskel Hasenfeld  
Guest Editor

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# The Challenge to Administrative Leadership in the Social Services: A Prefatory Essay

Yeheskel Hasenfeld, PhD

The idea for this collection germinated while David Bargal, Hillel Schmid, and I were conducting research on executives of community service organizations in Israel. We were especially impressed by a somewhat unexpected finding that administrative leadership was a critical variable in the ability of these organizations to adapt to a rapidly changing environment. As we have thought about the implications of our findings to the social service sector as a whole, we have come to recognize that in the face of the turbulence experienced by the social services in the 1980s administrative leadership will loom as an important factor in their future survival and adaptation.

The 1980s have brought about major transformations in the organization and management of social services both public and private. It has been an era of challenges including threats to the legitimacy of social welfare, fiscal retrenchments, changing social needs, and emergence of alternatives to traditional social services (Hasenfeld, 1985, Bawden & Palmer, 1984). Facing a rapidly changing environment, social services are forced to shed old and often dysfunctional organizational and administrative patterns, and to adopt new organizational forms to ensure their survival and effectiveness. To do so will require visionary and "transformational" leadership.

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**THE LEGITIMACY CHALLENGE**

Social services, especially public, have always experienced precarious legitimacy, being subject to attacks from the Left for failing to fulfill their social obligations and from the Right for being ineffective and fostering dependency. Nonetheless, the ascendancy of an anti-welfare state ideology in the 1980s has tipped the political scale to the extent that undermines the institutional legitimacy of many social services (Stoesz, 1981). Social services for the poor, in particular, have come under special attack. Indeed, according to Gilder (1981), Murray (1984), and Mead (1986), social welfare for the poor is actually the villain. It is responsible for many of the current social ills, including family disintegration, poor school performance, persistent unemployment, crime and delinquency, and drug addiction. Furthermore, social service agencies, especially public, are said to be excessively bureaucratic, wasteful, and resistant to innovation and change, and to corrupt the intent of social welfare policies.

Thus, social services in general, and public in particular, are challenged more than ever to demonstrate their effectiveness and efficiency. No longer can they protect their legitimacy by a shield of professionalism or appeals to institutionalized symbols. With the decline in fiscal resources, social services can no longer count on a steady flow of resources without strict accountability and demonstrated effectiveness. For example, many public schools are now rated on the performance of their students and hospitals on their morbidity rates. Agencies have to produce considerably more data about their services to justify themselves. These trends do not imply that effectiveness and efficiency have become the norm. Rather, they indicate that social service agencies are forced to employ far more complex and sophisticated political strategies—including measures of effectiveness and efficiency—to justify their existence. It is in this context that one can understand the appeal by Patti (1987) to reorient social welfare administration toward managing for service effectiveness as a way to regain legitimacy.

Finally, with the rise of consumerism, professional authority is no longer sufficient to justify existing modes of service delivery.

The expansion of social services to the middle classes also brought in its wake a more knowledgeable and assertive clientele. Even in the medical profession, the authority of physicians is being questioned. As Haug and Lavin (1983) point out, "consumerism in medicine is a reality in the United States. For many, the physician's authority is not to be taken for granted" (p. 181).

### ***THE FISCAL CHALLENGE***

Profound changes have occurred in the availability and allocation of fiscal resources to the social services. In the U.S., since FY 1982, federal outlays to a broad range of social services have declined significantly, ranging from a cut of 14% in AFDC, 28% in child nutrition to 23% in social services block grants and 37% in community service block grants (Bawden & Palmer, 1984). The impact on the voluntary social services sector was equally profound. Salamon (1984) estimates that from 1980 to 1984, these agencies experienced a reduction of 35% in revenues from the federal government. Only a small portion of the reduction was compensated by increases in charitable donations. The prospects for a significant improvement in the availability of public funds are slim. As forecasted by Sawhill (1988):

Budget deficits have all but ruled out new spending initiatives or tax subsidies to accomplish various public purposes. Indeed, at least part of the next decade will have to be spent getting the nation's fiscal house in order, leading to a search for existing commitments that can be curtailed or new sources of revenues. (p. 14)

The reduction and curtailment in federal funding has shifted some of the fiscal burden to state and local governments and private charity. There is no evidence that these sources have made up the reductions in federal funding, but their contributions have become a larger component of the revenues of social service agencies. These sources of funding, however, are much more sensitive and vulnerable to short-term economic ups and downs. Therefore, they have

introduced greater uncertainty and unpredictability in the fiscal management of social service agencies.

Coupled with the reduction in public funds for many social services, there have been important changes in how such funds are allocated. First, contracting for social services has become a predominant form by which government attempts to meet many of its social welfare obligations. As noted by Kramer and Grossman (1987), this has resulted in profound changes in the management of social services, especially since short-term underfunding is now a common occurrence. According to Kramer and Grossman, agencies are forced to undertake various fiscal strategies including political advocacy, search for new resources, interagency collaboration, service delivery modification, entrepreneurial management and saving on staff.

Second, there has been a trend to privatize and commercialize social services through tax benefits, vouchers and purchase-of-service contracts (Abramovitz, 1986). As Stoesz points out in this issue, there has been a dramatic rise in profit-making social services. Indeed, the conventional distinctions between the public, voluntary and private for-profit agencies has become quite blurred. It is quite common for a public agency, such as child protective services, to contract services from a private for-profit agency, such as residential care, to its clients. Moreover, many voluntary agencies are developing services which are specifically designed to compete with those offered by the for-profits, as in the case of employee assistance programs.

One of the consequences of these developments is the reinforcement of a two-tier social services system, one catering to the middle and upper classes and one serving low income and poor people. This is fueled by a powerful economic logic. When the clients can pay, directly or indirectly, there is an incentive by the agency to expand the quantity and improve the quality of its services. When the clients cannot pay and the agency is reimbursed on a fixed and pre-determined rate, there is an incentive to cut costs as much as possible. Thus the two class system is in danger of becoming increasingly more bifurcated in terms of quality of services.

## **THE SOCIAL NEEDS CHALLENGE**

As the social environment changes, so do its social welfare needs. A number of social indicators point to the persistence of certain needs and the rise of new ones to which social services need to respond. The 1980s have witnessed the spread of the AIDS epidemic and its unparalleled demand on medical and social services. In the 1980s, we have become sensitized to the problem of the homeless. It is estimated that 735,000 persons are homeless on any given day and that 1.3 million to 2 million people will be homeless for one night or more sometime in a year (National Academy of Science, 1988). Sosin et al. (1988), in their study of homeless in Chicago, found that while the homeless use general social services many indicated being "short changed" by the service systems. This implies needed changes in the ways services are being provided. Associated with homelessness is the care for the chronically mentally ill who are estimated to include over 1.5 million persons. The deinstitutionalization movement has put considerable pressure on social services agencies to provide shelter and care. There is much research to demonstrate that this population needs a comprehensive and integrated system of care (Bachrach, 1986) but, with few exceptions, the social services have yet to develop such a system. Finally, the aging of the population continues to pose a major challenge to social services, particularly in the development of services for the chronically ill and the fragile elderly. But, relative to other vulnerable populations, they obtain greater social protection.

Yet, two interrelated trends are likely to dominate the challenge for social services. First and foremost is the continued increase in female headed households. From 1970 to 1980 there was an increase of 56% in female headed families. From 1980 to 1987 the rate of increase was 20% (Bureau of the Census, 1988). As indicated by Garfinkel and McLanahn (1986), mother-only families experience major social needs: approximately half of these families are poor, their children are educationally disadvantaged, and they face greater social and psychological stresses. The ability of the mothers to escape poverty is limited, not only as a result of an unworkable child support system, but also due to difficulties in en-

tering the labor market, including lack of child care and inability to earn a living wage. Coupled with this trend is the fact that over 20% of all children under the age of six live in poverty. Thirty-four percent of these children do not have health insurance, yet they are more likely to experience serious health problems. Many will also suffer from malnutrition and will drop out of school (Children's Defense Fund, 1987). These problems are far more severe for non-white children. The impact of these facts on the social service needs of these children is staggering.

Closely related is the persistence of what has been termed an "underclass" in the inner cities which is mostly non-white. Ellwood (1988) estimates that the underclass or ghetto poor represent 10% of all the poor, but surely the social costs of such poverty far exceed its size. As noted by Wilson (1987), the social dislocation in the inner city is characterized by a tangle of social pathologies ranging from crime to family dissolution. Much of it can be attributed to demographic changes—migration and the declining median age—and economic changes—the relocation of manufacturing industries out of the central cities, the shift to service industries, and the polarization of the labor market into low-wage and high-wage sectors. Will and can social service agencies respond to this challenge?

### ***THE ORGANIZATIONAL CHALLENGE***

New organizational forms for delivering social services have emerged to present alternatives to currently dominant patterns. We have already alluded to the transformation of social service agencies from a strictly public or voluntary status to a structured conglomerate in which several operationally autonomous units provide services to a distinct segment of the market, while headquarters has tight control over the allocation of resources (Hasenfeld, 1986). The market is often segmented according to the status of the clients (e.g., self-paying or privately insured clients, clients on public assistance, and "charity cases"). Moreover, contracting out has introduced in many social services a new level of competitiveness which necessitates a market-oriented strategy.

Yet, beyond these developments we are witnessing challenges to the "traditional" organizational structure of social services. Foremost among them is the tremendous expansion of self-help associations. Katz (1981) estimated that by the mid-1970s there were already over half of a million separate self-help groups in North America. The number has surely gone up considerably since then. The relationship between these groups and bureaucratic and professional service providers has been a source of considerable debate. While much of the literature advocates a collaborative relationship, research by Yoak and Chesler (1985) has shown that conflict can occur. Indeed, self-help associations have often been used to challenge professional dominance and to provide clients with an alternative to the monopoly held by social service agencies. It seems that the most viable form of relationship is through coalition in which the autonomy of both types of organizations is preserved.

Coupled with self-help associations, there has been a growth of collectivist organizations providing social services such as free health clinics, runaway shelters, safe houses for battered women, and food cooperatives. The collectivist organization has unique structural attributes including collective authority, minimal rules, no hierarchy of positions, normative and solidarity rather than material rewards, and minimal division of labor (Rothschild & Whitt, 1986). In such organizations, both staff and clients are much more likely to be empowered.

Finally, even in hierarchically structured social service agencies there have been various experiments in alternative structural arrangements which emphasize greater workers' participation and team work. Indeed, one of the ways to cope with resource constraints has been to reduce the number of managerial positions, include managers in work teams, give the work teams greater autonomy in deciding how to provide the services, and reduce levels of specializations (Martin, 1983).

Faced with these and other challenges, there has been a resurgence of interest, both professional and academic, in the role of leadership as a key variable to effective transformation and adaptation of social service agencies. In part, this trend emulates a similar development in the business sector. There, too, leadership has been



re-discovered and the field of management has been flooded with books on leadership with such titles as *In Search of Excellence* by Peters and Waterman, *The Change Masters* by Kanter, *The Leadership Factor* by Kotter, and *The Leadership Challenge* by Kouzes and Posner, to name a few. There is considerable danger in adopting a simplistic notion that leadership alone can transform organizations in general and social services, in particular, to become more responsive and effective. There is a temptation to see in leadership alone the "quick fix" to organizational ills. As the essays in this volume point out, leadership is a complex phenomenon that is intricately tied to organizational structure and processes as well as to the environment of the organization. Unless the relationships between leadership and other organizational variables are identified and specified, we are not likely to advance social work administration. The papers presented here examine some of these relationships as well as new developments and directions in administrative leadership in the social services.

The first three papers present a theoretical orientation to the field. David M. Austin provides a conceptual framework for understanding the role of the executive in the human services. Using a "competing value" model he elaborates on the numerous, and often conflicting, roles that executives must perform. He suggests an interactive style of leadership as an effective model in handling these roles. David Bargal and Hillel Schmid present a timely review of the theory and research on leadership, pointing both to the theoretical and methodological limitations of many of these studies. They identify four dominant leadership themes and several managerial tasks and indicate how they combine in the human services. Finally, Michael J. Austin addresses the social-psychological processes that affect the performance of a new executive. He articulates several principles that can help these executives overcome their liability of newness.

The next two papers provide some exciting empirical findings on the relationship between leadership, service effectiveness and the organizational commitment of staff. Mark Ezell, David Menefee, and Rino J. Patti present findings to indicate that certain managerial activities influence the structure and the status and influence of the department which, in turn, affect the scope and efficiency of the

department's services. Charles Glisson presents findings to indicate that three leadership attributes—maturity, power, and intelligence—affect the organizational commitment of the staff.

The next two papers present a feminist perspective on social welfare administration. Patricia Yancey Martin and Roslyn H. Chernesky examine the position of women in social work administration. They point out that despite the overwhelming presence of women as workers in the social services, they have remained disadvantaged in advancement to administrative positions. Using a political economy perspective, they analyze the reasons and present strategies that can bring about change. Cheryl Hyde presents a feminist model for macro-practice which is based on five principles: the centrality of women's values, lives, and relationships; consciousness raising, linking the personal with the political; the reconceptualization of power; democratizing processes; and emphasis on fundamental cultural and structural change. Based on field interviews with fifty feminist practitioners, she assesses the validity of the feminist model and articulates some of the dilemmas it poses.

The next three papers point to new directions in social work administration. David Stoesz documents the rise of for-profit human services and the niche they are occupying in the provision of services. These organizations present both opportunities and challenges to social work administrators. Howard Jacob Karger assesses the role of social work unions in the management of social services. He argues that the stereotypic adverse relationship between unions and managements is inaccurate and inappropriate, and he suggests ways in which both groups can work together to improve the quality of social services. John E. Tropman, noting the challenges and opportunities facing social services, proposes that entrepreneurship should be considered as a vital aspect of social work administration. He presents a model of entrepreneurship that is closely articulated with key organizational dimensions.

Finally, Yeheskel Hasenfeld and Hillel Schmid present a life cycle model of human service organizations and its implications for administrative strategies. Integrating several of the themes presented in this volume, they show that human service organizations undergo processes of growth and decline, and that one of the key functions of the executive is to undertake several strategies, ranging

from leadership to client empowerment, to achieve organizational renewal.

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# The Human Service Executive

David M. Austin, PhD

Little systematic attention is given to the role of the executive in human service organizations in contemporary social work literature. When it does deal with the executive, the literature reflects a number of traditional attitudes. One is the suspicion held by practitioners in human service professions towards administrators in general as the source of fiscal constraints and intrusive rules and regulations. Another is the suspicion that social movement activists hold towards persons in positions of public authority, the "bosses," holding them personally accountable for the continued existence of social problems. Still another perspective regards with great suspicion the continued male domination of executive positions in service organizations largely staffed by women (Kravetz & Austin, 1984).

Current textbooks in social work administration focus on "management" as a generic process, or on "entry level" or "mid-management" positions. This analysis, however, deals specifically with the position of senior administrator, or chief executive officer, in human service organizations.

There are two highly visible and distinctive models of the organizational executive in the society-at-large. The most widely recognized model is that of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the for-profit corporate firm. The corporate executive role combines policymaking—as a member of the corporation board of directors—and implementation—as the senior administrator. Conceptually, this is the simplest version of the chief executive officer role. There

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is ultimately a single yardstick to measure the effectiveness of executive performance—financial returns to the shareholders.

The second widely recognized executive model is that of the generalist public administrator, the federal department executive, the state agency administrator, the city manager (Gortner, Mahler & Nicholson, 1987). According to long-established principles of public administration (Wilson, 1887) the public administrator is responsible for policy implementation but is not a policymaker—elected legislative bodies make policy. This is, in fact, a more complex version of the CEO role. There are several different yardsticks to measure the effectiveness of public administrator performance: consistency of implementation with legislative intent; continuity of the governmental organization; and break-even financial management, that is, operating within the limits of available financial resources. In the instance of both the corporate CEO and the public administrator, however, the quality of the products actually produced by the organization, while important, is not the most critical yardstick for judging executive performance.

Analyses of the CEO role in voluntary nonprofit and governmental human service organizations often attempt to fit the characteristics of that position into one of these two widely recognized models. However, the role of the executive in human service organizations is, in many ways, a distinctive, and even more complicated, role (Austin, 1983). The characteristics of the position of human service executive are shaped not only by the organizational characteristics which voluntary nonprofit and governmental human service organizations share with other types of formal organizations, but also by the distinctive characteristics of human service organizations (Austin, 1988).

Similar to corporate executives, human service executives, particularly those who are also experienced professional specialists, are usually active participants in policy formation, as well as in implementation, even if the executive position is formally defined as not being a policymaking position. In fact, most policy issues come to the policy board as a recommendation of the executive. Similar to the public administrator, the human service executive is concerned with the congruence of implementation to policy, with organizational continuity, and with “break-even” financial perfor-

mance. And, similar to the public administrator, the human service executive has no direct personal economic stake in the financial performance of the organization. Specifically, the executive salary does not increase in proportion to the size of the organizational budget.

But the role of human service executive is also distinctly different from either the corporate executive or the public administrator. One of the critical differences is that the most important yardstick for judging executive performance in a human service organization is the quality of the services actually produced by the organization (Patti, 1987). In turn, one of the important and distinctive characteristics of the position of human service executive is that it involves dealing with the interface between two distinctive social structures—the service production organization and the organized human service profession.

### ***THE EXECUTIVE POSITION***

The characteristics of the executive position have been analyzed in a variety of ways. The approach used in this analysis is based on the concept that the executive position, and the preferred style of executive performance, involves an interactive, adaptive “contingency” process between an individual and a structural context. That process is shaped, in turn, both by the operational characteristics of a particular organization, and the situation of that organization in its environment.

The same organization may require different executive performance styles at different stages in the development of the organization. Human service organizations producing similar products, but in different environments, may require a different mix of elements in the executive position. Different individuals may shape the specific elements in the executive position in different ways. Moreover, effective executive performance may require that a particular individual uses different executive styles at different times during an executive career. There is no single universal definition of the characteristics of the executive role, or of the “best” style of executive performance. The following discussion examines an inclusive model which may be useful, however, in analyzing the mix of ele-



ments in the executive position in a given organization at a particular time.

### ***The “Competing Values” Model of Executive Functions***

One inclusive framework for the analysis of the functions of service production organizations is the competing values approach presented by Robert E. Quinn in *Beyond Rational Management: Mastering the Paradoxes and Competing Demands of High Performance* (1988). (See Figure 1.) This analytic framework is built around two dimensions, representing competing orientations, or “values” in the organizational context—centralization-decentralization and internal-external.

The combination of these two dimensions distinguishes four sectors of organizational activity with very different and often antagonistic functional requirements: (1) human resources mobilization and motivation; (2) organization and control of production processes; (3) resource acquisition and adaptation to the task environment; and (4) goal-oriented strategic management. This competing-values analysis of organizational functions has been applied by Edwards, Faerman and McGrath (1985) to the assessment of performance effectiveness of human service organizations.

However, this analytic framework can also be used for examining the component elements of the executive position in human service organizations on the premise that the chief executive officer is ultimately responsible for all aspects of organizational performance. In combination these four sectors deal with the two major criteria for assessing organizational outcomes—quality of services produced and continuity of the organization.

No single executive position involves equal emphasis on all four of these sectors. In any given organization the senior administrator may be primarily involved in some sectors while other persons who are part of the executive component may carry major responsibilities for activities in other sectors. Yet, the chief executive officer is ultimately responsible for the effectiveness of organizational performance in all four sectors. The following material summarizes some

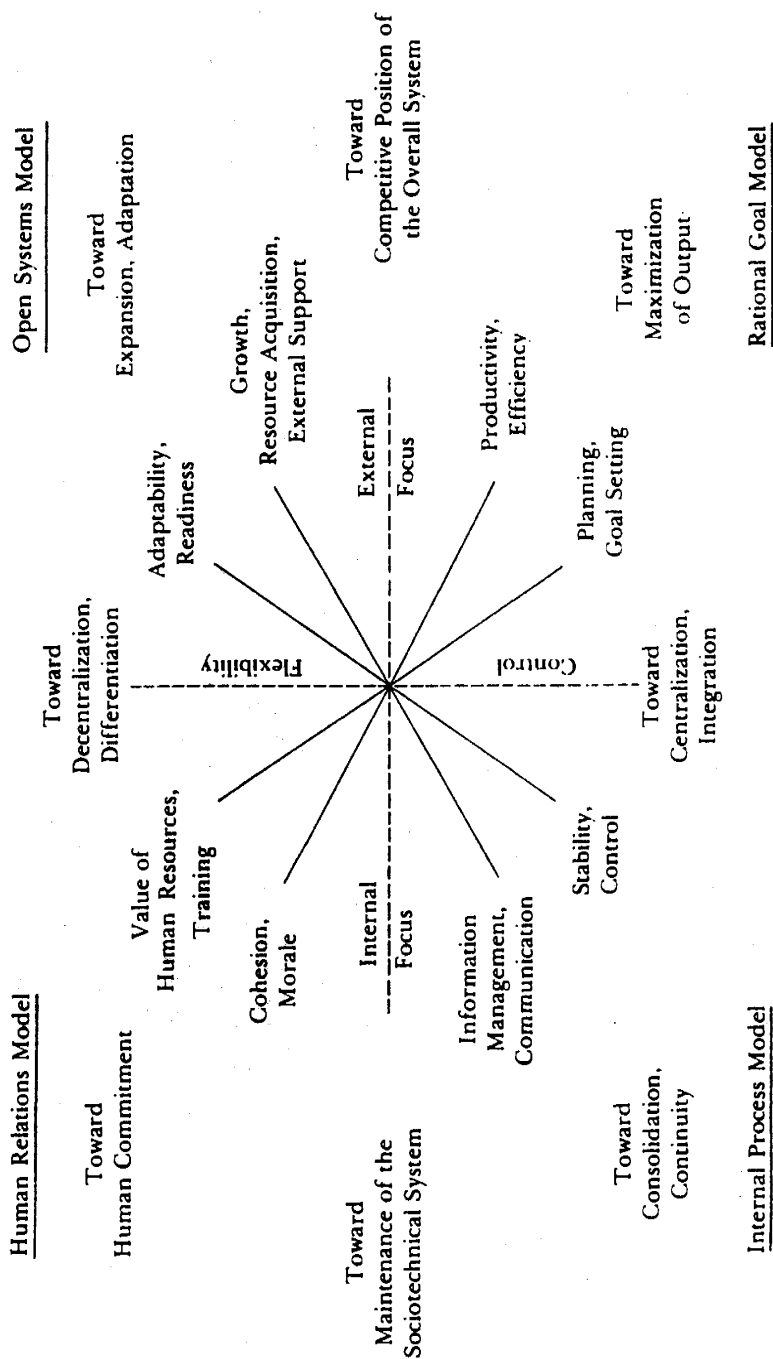


FIGURE 1. Competing Values Framework: Effectiveness

From: R. E. Quinn (1988) *Beyond Rational Management: Mastering the Paradoxes and Competing Demands of High Performance*, used with permission from Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco

of the key concepts associated with each sector of organizational performance, including relevant executive roles. (See Figure 2.)

### *1. Mobilization and Motivation of Human Resources*

One of the major sectors of executive responsibility involves the mobilization and motivation of the personnel who constitute the human resources of the organization. This sector is particularly critical in human service organizations, which are "labor-intensive," and in which most of the services are produced and delivered through person-to-person interactions. In the competing values model this sector is defined by the concepts of "internal" and "decentralized." The focus is on the role of the executive in dealing with those individuals who are "internal" to the organization, and who, as autonomous individuals with the skill competencies required in service production, represent decentralized centers of authority and influence which cannot be directly controlled by the executive. Quinn (1988) identifies two specific executive roles in this sector: *mentor* and *group facilitator*.

In many human service organizations the employed staff includes members of one or more professional disciplines, an important factor in the decentralized pattern of interpersonal relationships which must be dealt with. The human resources of human service organizations also often include a wide variety of volunteer personnel, including both service volunteers and policymaking volunteers. Moreover, given the role of co-production in the service technologies of human service organizations, service users may be a critical element in human resource mobilization and motivation. Symbols and traditions, the use of special events, and the definition of organizational values are all elements of "organizational culture" which may be significant in motivation.

The processes of human resources mobilization and motivation are often identified, as they are in the Quinn framework, with a "human relations model" and "commitment," or with an emphasis on "cohesion/morale" as in the Blake and Mouton Managerial Grid (1964). The "human relations" model for human resource mobilization and motivation, emphasizing group processes, team-

## Human Relations Model

## Open Systems Model

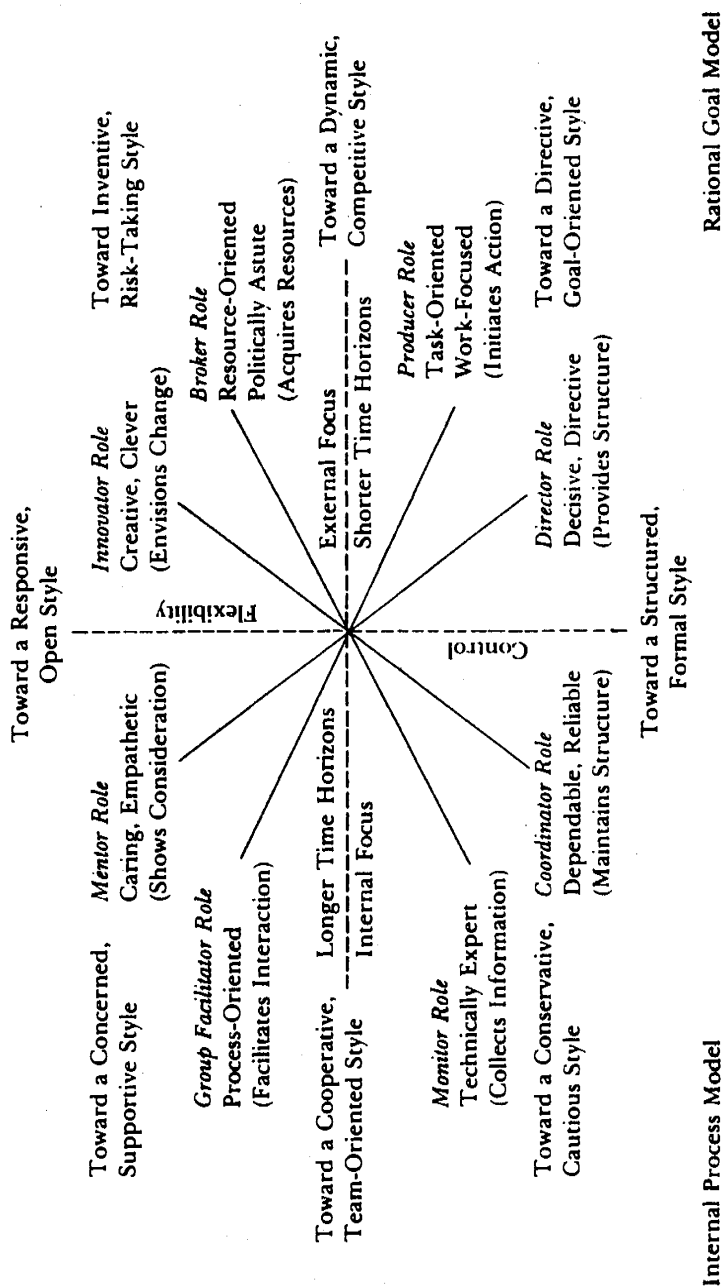


FIGURE 2. Competing Values Framework of Leadership Roles

From: R. E. Quinn (1988) *Beyond Rational Management: Mastering the Paradoxes and Competing Demands of High Performance*, used with permission from Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco