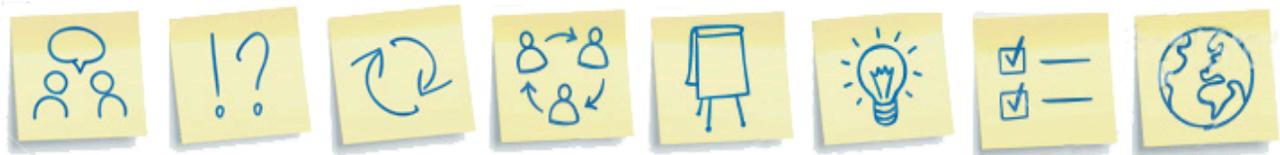


Hands-on

POLARITY THINKING

Leveraging Difference for Innovation





About CoCreative

CoCreative helps people who don't know each other (and often don't even like each other) solve complex problems together.

We work across sectors and industries—in education, food and agriculture, economic development, supply chains, health, and international development—fostering fast and deep collaboration to advance shared prosperity and sustainability. We do this by designing and supporting multistakeholder Collaborative Innovation Networks, leading Collaborative Strategy design for high-impact social ventures, and delivering capacity building to “impact multiplier” organizations.

And no, we didn't vandalize that wall.

Going Further

CoCreative offers introductory training in polarity thinking as part of its work to build capacity for multi-stakeholder collaboration. We use the framework often but we aren't the experts. For training, strategy, and assessment of polarities, visit our friends at PolarityPartnerships.com.

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About this Guide

Do you wish you had a way to transform conflict and anger into innovation and engagement? How can you help people “see together” so they can combine their diverse perspectives to create better solutions?

From Fortune 50 companies to local school systems, leaders around the world are discovering a fresh new approach through Polarity Thinking.

Developed by Dr. Barry Johnson and based on thousands of years of the “philosophy of opposites,” Polarity Thinking is a powerful way of seeing and solving “unsolvable” problems that can plague you and your organization over years. Applied effectively, it can even lead to extraordinary breakthroughs and innovations as groups see their challenges—and themselves—in whole new ways.

Learning to see polarities can be challenging. We naturally tend to see situations in either-or terms. We believe that we have to make difficult choices between incompatible alternatives. Because polarity management challenges these deeply ingrained thinking habits, it can seem unfamiliar and highly abstract.

This guide will help you learn polarity management in a way that’s direct and practical. Through hands-on examples, a few key principles, and practice, you’ll learn to see and powerfully leverage hundreds of dynamic tensions at work in your personal and work life.

In this practical guide, you’ll learn to use an accessible and sophisticated method for creating solutions that are best for the short term AND the long term, for strategically optimizing mission AND margin, for helping people be both realistic AND optimistic as they work through today’s tough challenges.

Release the untapped potential of deep innovation and engagement in your organization, community, and family through this powerful both-and approach.

A Brief History of Polarity Thinking

Polarity Thinking is a method derived from over 3,000 years of dialectical thinking.

- >1,000 BC The I Ching and earlier trigrams (ba gua) introduce the Yin/Yang polarity underlying all experience.
- 500 BC Lao Tzu documents Taoist philosophy; We can both embrace and “transcend” dualistic thinking.
- 500 BC Heraclitus talks about the “unity of opposites;” All change comes through the struggle of opposites.
- 400 BC Plato writes in the *Phaedo*, “Everything arises in this way, opposites from their opposites.”
- 30 AD Ardhanarishvara represents the synthesis of masculine and feminine energies of the universe (Purusha and Prakriti) and illustrates how Shakti, the female principle of God, is inseparable from (or the same as, according to some interpretations) Shiva, the male principle of God
- 1,300 AD Aztec belief in Teotl, an all-encompassing force comprised of opposites. In order for the universe to be created, these opposites had to come together.
- 1816 Drawing on the works of Hericletus and Kant, Hegel proposes an “identity of difference,” that we know a thing by it’s opposite or context; transcends Kant’s dualism of freedom versus nature, with “true infinity”, or the “Concept” (Begriff),
- 1938-1965 Jung identifies dualistic pairs in personality and points to the latent energy and developmental potential in one’s shadow. Based on Heraclitus, introduces Enantiodromia—the superabundance of any force inevitably produces its opposite.
- 1985 Dr. Charles Hampden-Turner distributes *Through the Looking Glass*, at Royal Dutch Shell, in which he describes Dilemma Theory and a strategy for cycling back and forth between seemingly opposing values.
- 1994 De Wit and Meyer advocate a dialectical approach to strategic paradoxes and complexity, rather than treating them as puzzles, dilemmas, trade-offs, or averages. Point out the many benefits of this approach.
- 1996 Dr. Barry Johnson publishes “Polarity Management.”
- 2004 Lowy and Hood describe the 2x2 thinking approach used by consultants beginning in the 1970’s; involves optimizing the benefits of opposition, creative tension, iteration, and transcendence to make better decisions.



The Power to Transcend Paradigms

In her now-classic list of 12 places to intervene in a system, Donella Meadows elegantly prioritizes the most effective “leverage points” for getting more of what we really want in our families, organizations, communities, nations, and global community.

Of these 12 leverage points, it’s the highest level that is the most challenging to actually put into practice. That’s the point which Meadows named simply “the power to transcend paradigms.” It’s the point that we access, she observes, only when we learn to detach ourselves from specific paradigms and realize that no one paradigm is true, even the ones that most define us.

The power of this intervention point can’t be overstated. According to Meadows, this is the place where “people throw off addictions, live in constant joy, or bring down empires.” If you really want to move the world, this point holds the one lever that’s long enough.

It’s also a dangerous place to operate because, simply put, other people don’t like it when you assert your own values over their own. And the unintended consequence of pressing on people’s deepest-held values is often to only further entrench them.

Unfortunately, given our intensely increasing interdependencies, we can no longer afford individual transcendence. We must discover ways to transcend paradigms together.

How do we do that? In part by recognizing that each and every value we hold is really only half a value.

To truly realize freedom, we must also commit to mutual accountability, and vice versa. If I thrive on change, then I must eventually acknowledge the need for stability as well. When I call for greater accountability, others will argue the need for greater support. Or, if I tend to focus on the short term, then the need to focus on the long term will inevitably assert itself. In each of these values pairs—and literally hundreds more—one value complements the other, and to reject one half of the pair over time is to make a false, often harmful, choice.

It’s those false choices—the rejection of values that actually complement and reinforce our own—that blind us to our true interdependency with others. And that blindness quickly turns to ignorance, rejection, and hate. If I deeply value individual freedom, then others’ commitment to mutual accountability seems to me like social control. If I deeply value reason, then others’ commitment to faith seems, well, unreasonable. But what about those times where reason ends and I need faith to move forward, or I find that I need to rely on others despite my best efforts at making it on my own?

For every value we hold, or anyone else holds, there is a hidden value, and we in fact hold the secret to one another’s transcendence. When we learn how to work with others to see the true interdependence of each of our closely held values, only then can we transcend paradigms together.

12 Places to Intervene in a System

According to systems dynamics expert Donella Meadows, there are 12 distinct places to intervene in any system.

The most powerful place is transcending paradigms, which is the level at which polarity thinking works.

12. Constants, parameters, numbers (such as subsidies, taxes, standards);
11. The sizes of buffers and other stabilizing stocks, relative to their flows;
10. The structure of material stocks and flows (such as transport networks, population age structures);
9. The lengths of delays, relative to the rate of system change;
8. The strength of negative feedback loops, relative to the impacts they are trying to correct against;
7. The gain around driving positive feedback loops;
6. The structure of information flows (who does and does not have access to what kinds of information);
5. The rules of the system (such as incentives, punishments, constraints);
4. The power to add, change, evolve, or self-organize system structure;
3. The goals of the system;
2. The mindset or paradigm out of which the system—its goals, structure, rules, delays, parameters—arises; and,
1. The power to transcend paradigms.

Meadows DH. Leverage Points: Places to Intervene in a System. Hartland, Vt: The Sustainability Institute; Available at: http://www.sustainabilityinstitute.org/pubs/Leverage_Points.pdf. Accessed July 5, 2009.

What is a Polarity?

Polarities are known by many names: Dilemmas, paradoxes, opposite strengths, competing values, contradictions, interdependent values, dynamic tensions, or unsolvable problems.

Whatever you call them, polarities are indestructible and never go away. Unlike problems, which can be solved, polarities cannot be solved and you can never fix them. In fact, trying to solve them only makes them worse, wastes time and money, and undermines trust.

You can, however, learn to leverage polarities. Given the right tools, you can harness the inherent power in polarities to help everyone create real win-win solutions together.

Polarities are powered by our values and our fears, including our fear of those values we consider “opposite” to our own. If, for example, I deeply value individual freedom, then others’ commitment to mutual accountability smacks to me of social control. If I deeply value reason, then others’ commitment to faith seems unreasonable.

A Definition of Polarities

A polarity is a pair of values that seem to be in opposition to each other but are actually interdependent because we need both values over time to be successful.

Characteristics of Polarities

Polarities are ongoing and unsolvable.

They are indestructible so you can’t break them—or solve them.

They are continuous and unavoidable “energy systems,” best represented by an infinity loop.

As long as we have values, we have polarities.

Some Common Polarities

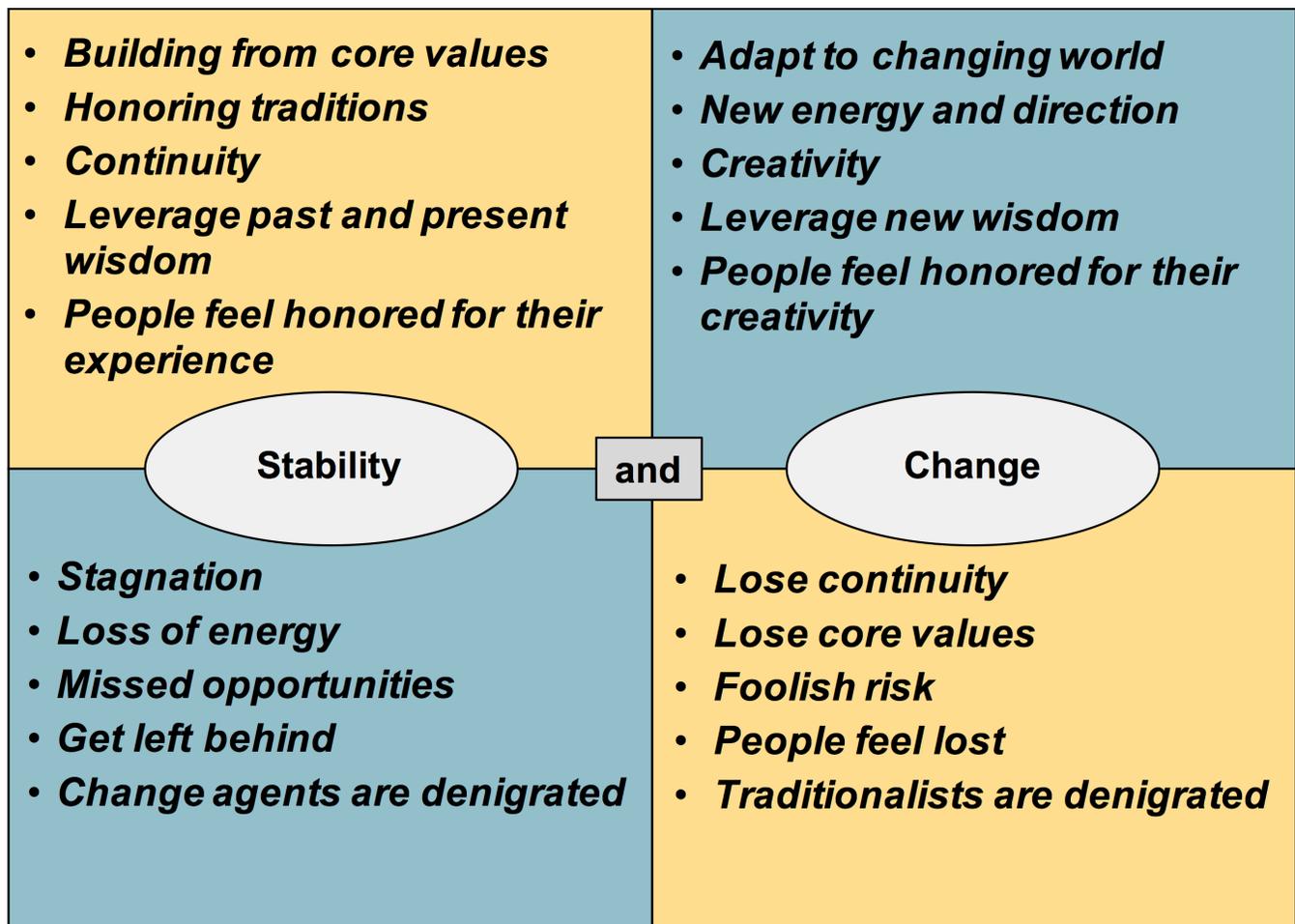
- Accountability & Support
- Action & Reflection
- Adaptation & Execution
- Candor & Diplomacy
- Centralization & Decentralization
- Conditional Acceptance & Unconditional Love
- Directive & Participative
- Doing & Planning
- Focus on Self (Intent) & Focus on Others (Impact)
- Humility & Confidence
- Inhale & Exhale
- Justice & Charity
- Mission & Margin
- National Interests & International Interests
- Personal Interests & Organization Interests
- Rest & Activity
- Short-term & Long-term
- Stability & Change
- State Interests & National Interests
- Tradition & Change
- What I Want & What We Need
- Work & Home

And there are many more! See over 500 polarities on the Polarities Master List, page 77.

A Quick Example

Ever wonder why there is so much resistance to change initiatives? Yeah, okay, people can be sometimes lazy or belligerent for no apparent reason, but that analysis often leads us to unhelpful interventions that are both counterproductive and dehumanizing.

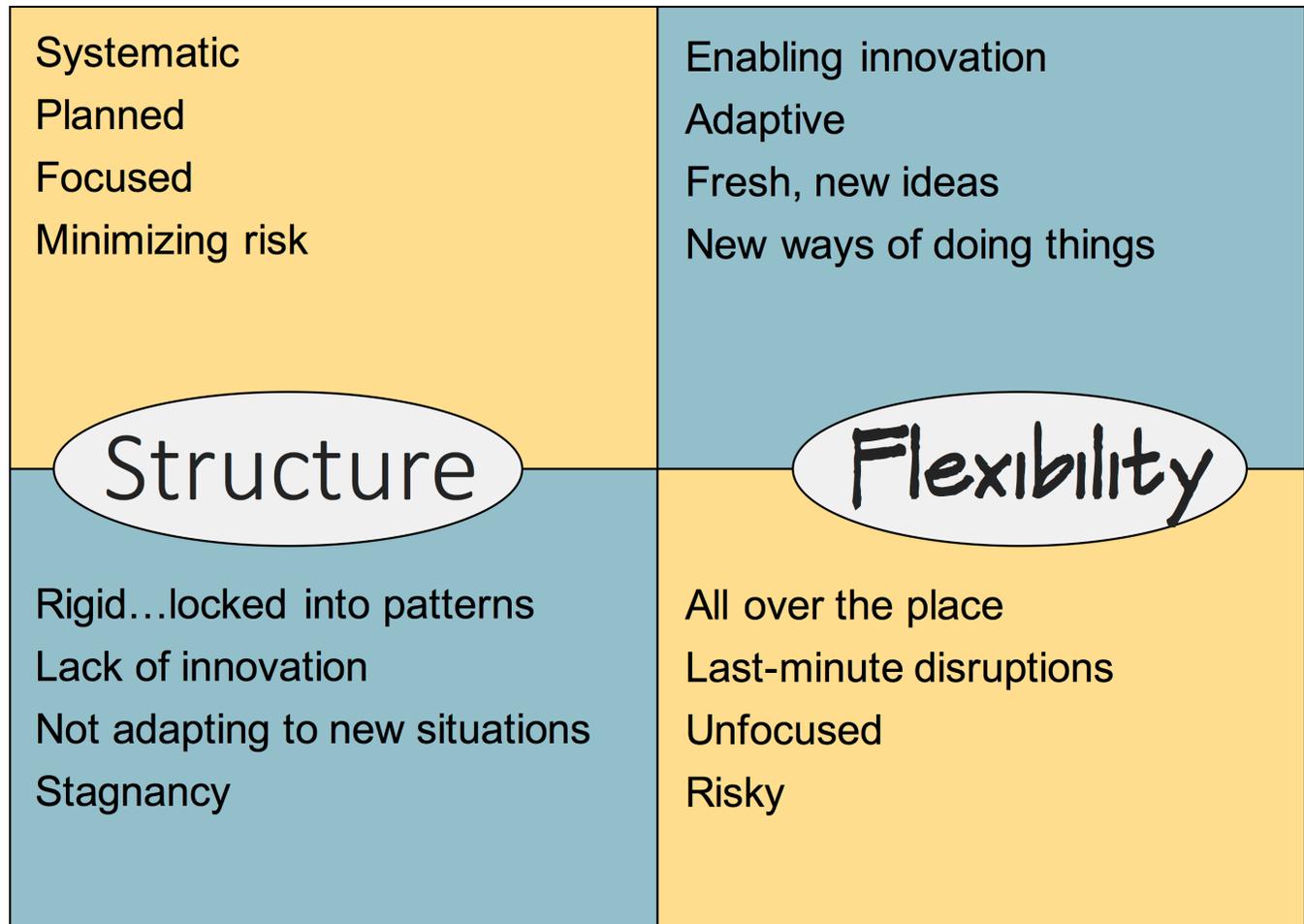
Consider the polarity of Stability & Change. How often do the plans for a change initiative focus only on what needs to change and not what we need to strengthen or retain? Because our change plans almost always detail ONLY how our current structure, roles, and processes need to change, the implication is that there is nothing of value to bring forward in the organization, so people who see some value in how things are currently being done can reasonably perceive that their values and interests are being ignored. And we wonder why they resist the change...



Another Common Polarity

Structure & Flexibility is a common tension that often shows up between team members. It might also show up in one person's personal experience ("Okay, that's it! I need to be more structured from now on...").

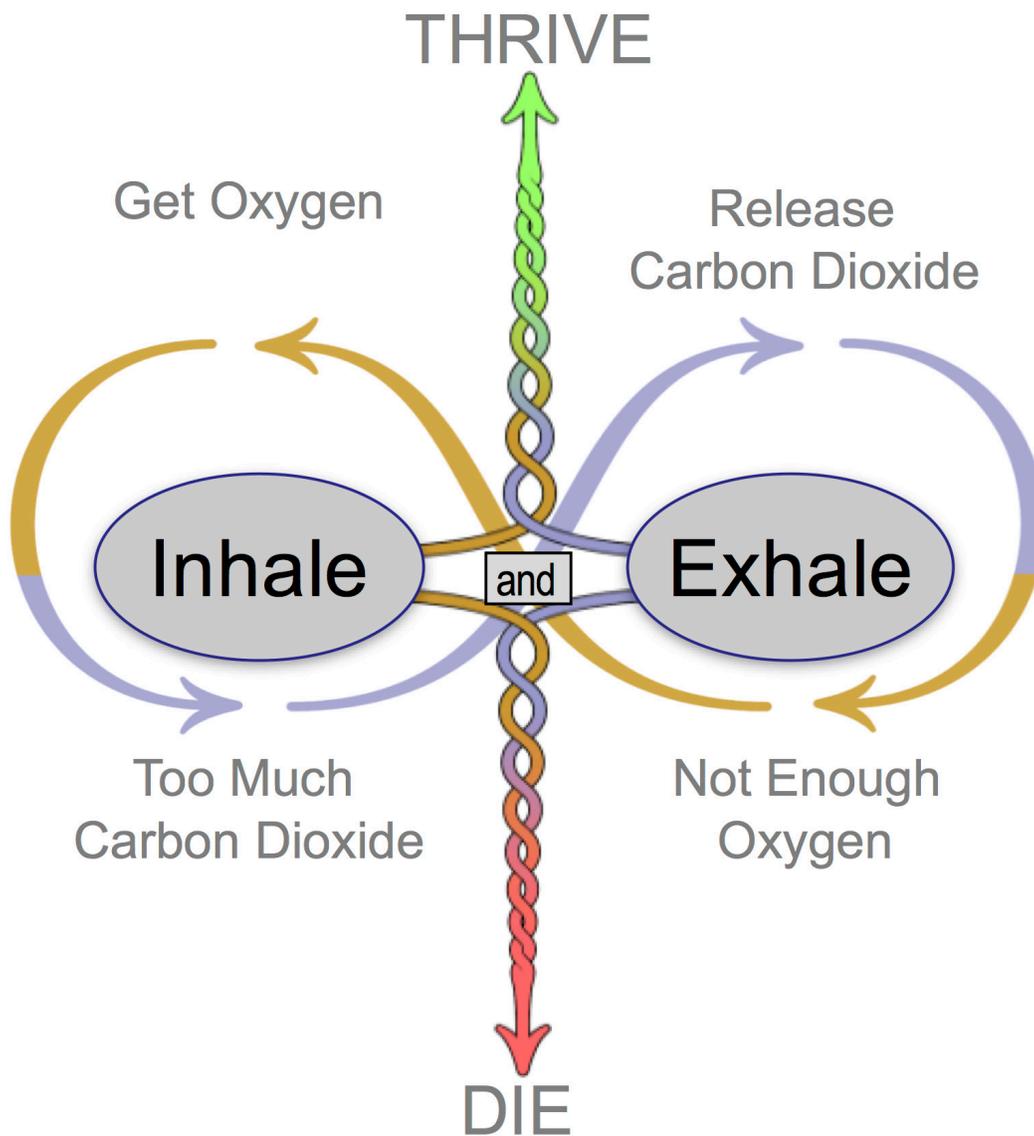
In any case, it's helpful to see the whole picture of this tension and consider how we might benefit by leveraging both values to realize the upside benefits of each and avoid the downsides of embracing one to the neglect of the other.



Example: The Polarity of Breathing

Breathing—the act of inhaling and exhaling over time—is a wonderful example of a polarity. Because it's autonomic and we run through this polarity successfully every few seconds, we rarely notice it. But it's critical to life and doesn't go away until we die, just like other polarities we experience.

Breathing is also a dynamic that we can leverage well or manage very poorly. Exhaling poorly inhibits our ability to inhale deeply, and vice versa. On the other hand, any sports coach, martial arts instructor, yoga instructor, or meditation teacher will be happy to explain the many benefits of focusing on this polarity and deeply inhaling and exhaling to leverage it well!



Inhale-Exhale image © 2002 Polarity Partnerships, LLC

A Simple Method for Leveraging Polarities

The team at Polarity Partnerships has identified 5 steps to leveraging the power of polarities:

1. **SEE** the polarities that are hidden in everyday conflicts and tensions.
2. **MAP** the polarities so you can see the whole truth in any given situation.
3. **ASSESS** the polarities so you can help people understand what's really happening.
4. **LEARN** about how polarity dynamics work so you can work with them most effectively.
5. **LEVERAGE** polarities by forming integrated action plans.

Seeing polarities is the first, most important, and usually the most difficult step for people new to polarity thinking. In order to do anything with polarities, you need to first see them.

The next section offers practical lenses you can use when looking for polarities.

SEEING POLARITIES

Listen for Polarities

To “see” polarities, you actually have to listen for them. When you hear a statement like one of the following, that’s a great clue to start looking for a polarity or two.

Dominant values, statements of pride, or favored competencies

“Our core values are X, Y, and Z.”

“We’re really good at X.”

Gap statements

“We need to be more X.”

“If only we had more X and less Y.”

“There’s way too much focus on [this] and we’re not addressing [that] at all.”

Frustrations with the way things are

“So-and-so just doesn’t understand our concerns.”

“We just can’t keep doing it this way.”

“Things have got to change.”

“I don’t understand why those people keep hammering on that.”

“We keep talking about this but nothing really changes.”

Fears or resistance about a direction, proposal, or “fix” that others are asserting

“If we do that, it will be a disaster because...”

What are people saying as they resist a new initiative, policy or program? What are they concerned about losing? What do they value about the way things are now?

Two key stereotypes...

Activists who are pressing for change, and skeptics of the change who seem unwilling to let go of the past.

Difficulties and Dreams

What is the difficult, chronic problem? What are the most exciting possibilities? What are some people strongly advocating and others strongly resisting? What are the dreams (or even the fantasies) that people have about how things could be?

Polarities Show Up at Many Levels...

Polarities operate at all levels of any system, and between levels too (as in the polarity of what I want and what we need as a group).

...and Often as Statements of Dissatisfaction

These are examples of actual statements that clued us into the presence of powerful polarities. Dissatisfaction or frustration often arise from fear of the unknown or anxiety of one's ability to adapt to changing circumstances. Note how these statements SOUND like problems, but they really represent polarity dynamics.

Personal

"I am always going, going, going and don't get downtime."

"I'm having a hard time balancing my work life and home life."

"Things are changing so fast, I can't seem to get centered."

"I seem to always sacrifice my long-term goals."

"I spend a lot of time planning and I don't get enough done."

Team

"I want more autonomy at work; my boss doesn't trust me."

"I have good intentions but seem to upset other people."

"I seem to sacrifice my own needs for what others want."

"Darryl is really selfish and never thinks of my needs."

"Jasmin just acts and doesn't think things through."

Organizational

"Too few people make the decisions around here."

"We need more accountability around here."

"We look at our belly buttons and miss the big picture."

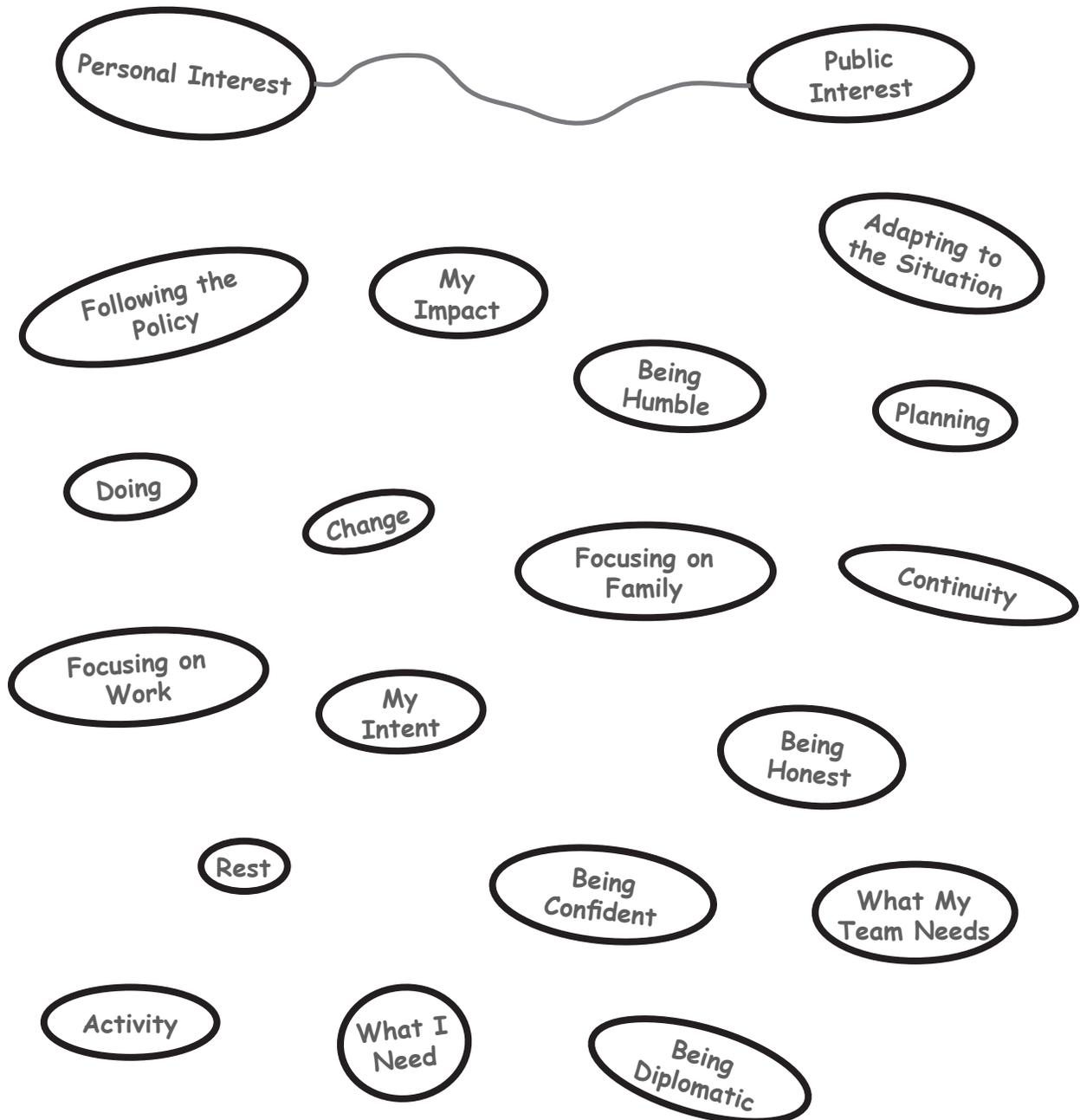
"We spend a lot of time planning and don't execute."

"We keep sacrificing our mission for money."

Exercise: Match the Values to make a Polarity!

Connect the following values into polarity pairs. The values in each pair may seem to be opposites (in tension) but they are really polarities.

The tricky part: There is more than one right answer depending on how YOU see the tensions.



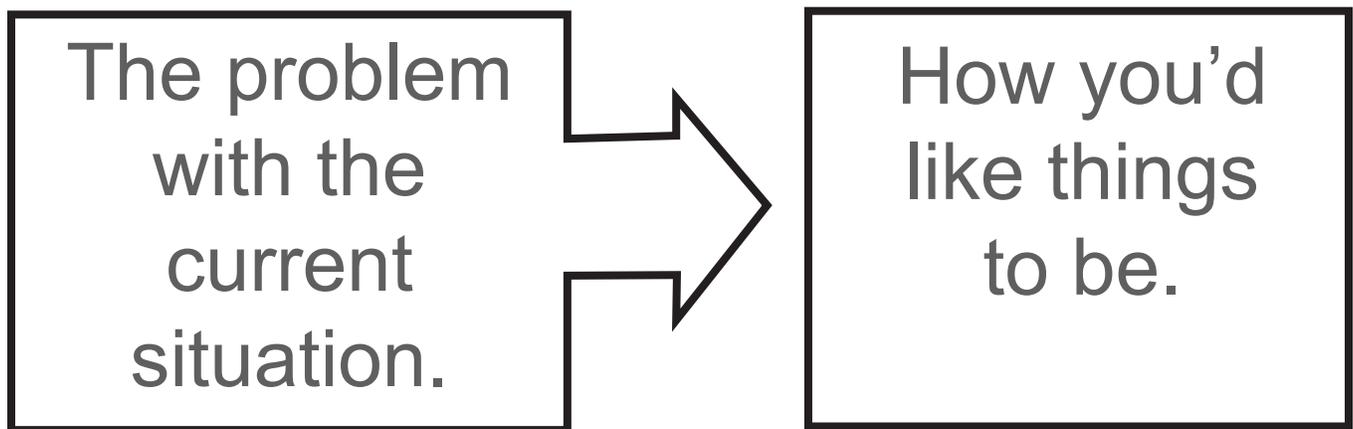
Exercise: Start with Frustration and Aspirations

Since polarities are often present in the gaps between the way things are and the way people want things to be, try this exercise to tune your ability to see polarities in those gaps.

Considering the values of Freedom and Accountability...

Think of a situation that you've been frustrated with for some time. This might be a national or social issue, or something that's not working in your community, organization, team, family, or in your own experience as an individual.

Spend 3 minutes journaling by yourself about:



As you reflect on the “downsides” of the way things are, and the “upsides” of the way you’d like things to be, do you see any general patterns?

What single value do you see in the way you want things to be? For example, you might want more freedom, more focus, or more accountability from others.

Exercise: Match the Statement with the Polarity

Here's an exercise to help you tune your ability to see values tensions (polarities) in statements that you hear.

Each statement in the list below corresponds with at least one of these polarities.

Choose the polarity that you believe most applies to the statement.

- | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Short-term & Long-term | 5. What I want & What we need |
| 2. Planning & Doing | 6. Support & Accountability |
| 3. Directive & Collaborative | 7. Intent & Impact |
| 4. Activity & Rest | 8. Action & Reflection |

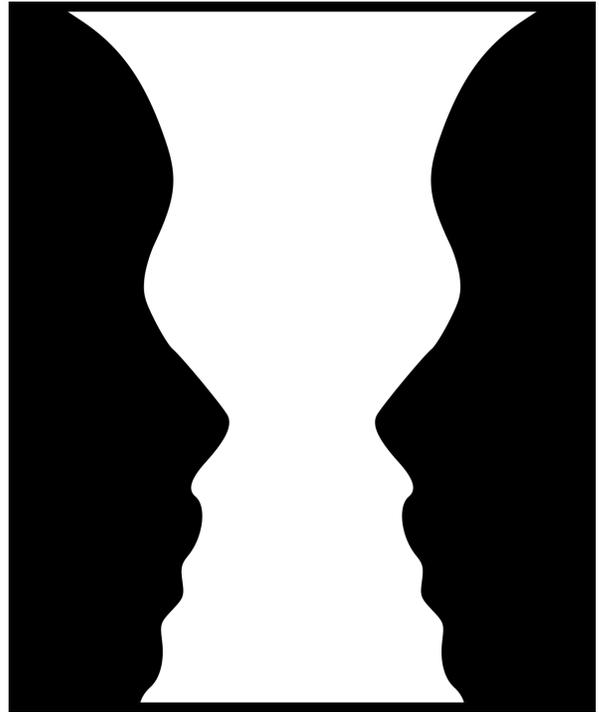
Polarity #	Statement
	"I am always going, going and don't get downtime."
	"We need more accountability around here."
	"I have good intentions but seem to upset other people."
	"We have no plan and just keep moving too fast."
	"Too few people make the decisions around here."
	"I seem to always sacrifice my long-term goals."
	"I seem to sacrifice my own needs for what others want."
	"I spend a lot of time thinking and I don't get enough done."

Figure & Ground

In the images on this page, what is in focus and what is in frame depends on how you see the image. Also known as figure-ground or ambiguous images, these images are good examples of the core dynamic in polarities: When we pay attention to one value, the other value is simultaneously present. That why when you enter a conversation and start talking about accountability, the need for support will also assert itself, especially if support is being neglected at the time.



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By Bryan Derksen CC-BY-SA-3.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>), via Wikimedia Commons



Exercise: Fill in the Other (Possible) Pole Name

Finally, let's use our intuitions to "see into" the hidden other pole of a single value.

There's no right answer but in a given situation, there will be a pair for each value below that is helpful to those involved in seeing the other, subordinated perspective.

Example: If I value structure to the neglect of _____ over time, I will become regimented and inflexible, so the hidden value is the "opposite" of inflexibility, or Flexibility.

Example: Structure & *Flexibility*

Focus on Individual & _____

My needs & _____

Task & _____

Planning & _____

Participative & _____

National interests & _____

Confidence & _____

Quantitative & _____

Inclusive & _____

Support & _____

Exercise: Find two polarities!

A bigger challenge: If you find two, keep going and see how many you can get!

Activity & Rest

Planning & Doing

Working by myself & _____

Quantitative analysis & _____

_____ & _____

_____ & _____

_____ & _____

_____ & _____

THESE ARE NOT POLARITIES	THESE ARE POLARITIES
<i>Rigid & Flexible</i>	<i>Planned & Flexible</i>
<i>Greedy & Giving</i>	<i>Taking care of myself & Giving to others</i>
<i>Long-term VERSUS Short-term</i>	<i>Long-term AND Short-term</i>

Remember: The two pole names must both be neutral or both be positive,
and polarities ALWAYS use AND, not VERSUS

THESE ARE PROBLEMS	THESE ARE POLARITIES
<i>Should we read a book on Alexander Hamilton OR Thomas Jefferson?</i>	<i>I let my kids work out their own problems AND I give them lots of support.</i>
<i>Should I give this student a A OR a B?</i>	<i>Teaching to do well on tests AND teaching to develop the whole child.</i>
<i>Should I buy Skittles Sour OR Sour Patch Watermelon?</i>	<i>I want to rest well AND work hard.</i>

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MAPPING POLARITIES

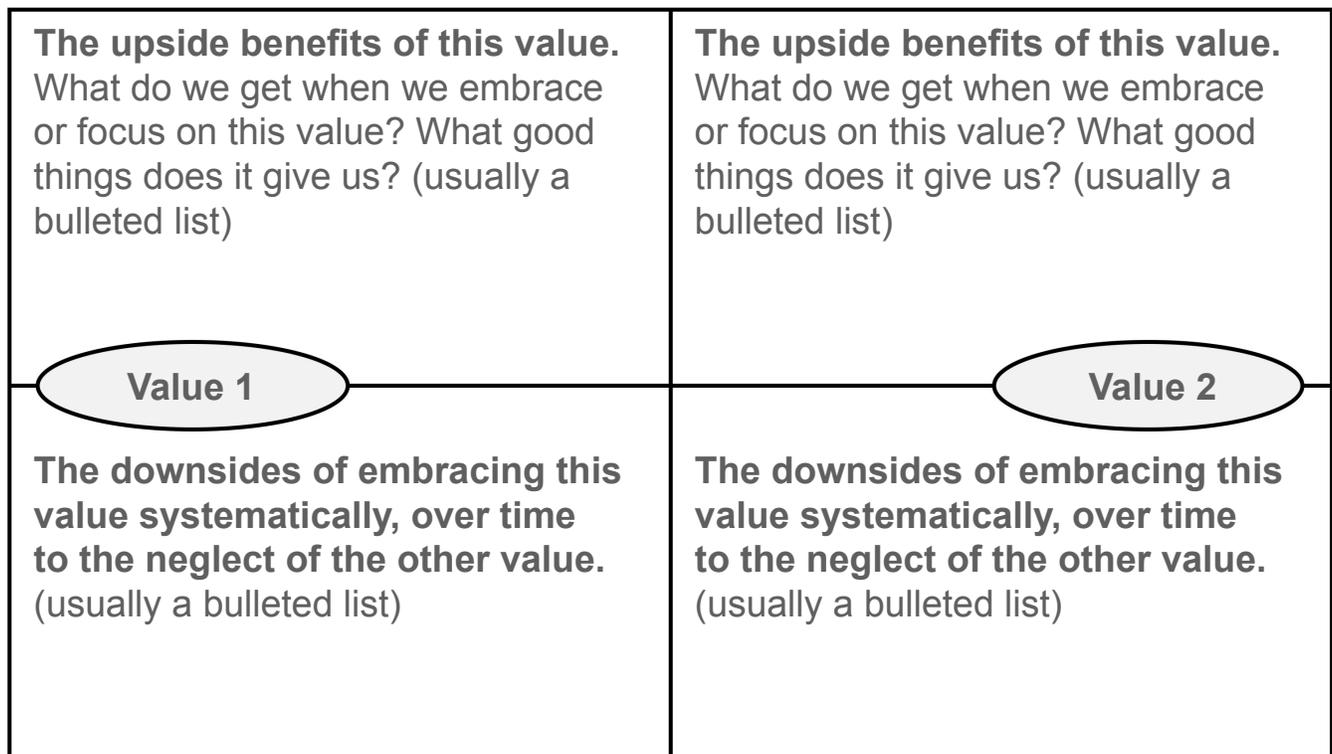
Sketching Tensions

Sketching the current tension is a way to start mapping the polarities you're seeing, so you can see them more clearly and communicate them to others.

Drawing on the exercise on the previous page if you like, consider the gap between the way things are and the way you want them to be.

Some things to know about sketching:

1. **It's not rocket science.** It's really just a way to structure your notes on what you're already hearing, so you can better see the polarities at work.
2. **No special equipment is required.** You just use a piece of paper (a napkin will do) and a writing instrument (a pencil works just fine).
3. **It's great practice for seeing polarities.** As you sketch more and more polarities, you create a kind of polarity library that will help you see polarities more easily over time.
4. **You can sketch by yourself or with a group of people.** Note, however, that mapping even a personal tension with others can help you get valuable insight into your blind spots!
5. **Every polarity map begins with a simple 2x2 grid like this.**



Exercise: Sketching a Tension

As you read the story below, start to sketch the tension using the chart on the opposite page.

Michael was angry, more angry and frustrated than he'd been with Kendra in their five years of working together. Yes, they worked well together and had built a strong foundation, but her conservative, play-it-safe approach was threatening the future of their business.

Kendra was upset too, frustrated that Michael seemed to want to risk everything they had so carefully built together. They had a terrific business with great clients but he was never satisfied. He seemed to put it all on the line with his overly-aggressive franchise plans.

The co-founders of EarthEnterprise had worked hard to build their company's reputation as a premier sustainability consulting firm, one that could help companies quickly and efficiently implement effective waste and energy-reduction programs. Internally, however, things had come to a head and the partnership between Michael and Kendra, which had made the company successful so far, seemed about to collapse.

Kendra strongly believed that EarthEnterprise needed to focus on its core business and continue to deliver strong results for clients. She liked the fact that the current path their business was on gave them predictability and stability, and that they could make reliable plans and clear financial projections.

Michael was excited about the prospect of expanding their business through franchising. It would provide new sources of revenue, maximize their income potential, and allow them to use their time growing the business rather than delivering services themselves.

Michael and Kendra had been around and around in this discussion. As Michael pressed the case for major expansion and growth, Kendra dug deeper into her commitment to sticking to the core business, arguing that he was risking everyone for money and that bringing in investors would water down their mission and their control. But Michael believed that Kendra's "hedgehog" approach was limiting their real potential to make a difference in the world.

The problem seemed clear: The two owners simply couldn't agree on how, or how fast, their business should grow. The tension was coming to a head and the partnership was falling apart. Clearly, they had to solve this problem.

Sketch the Tension

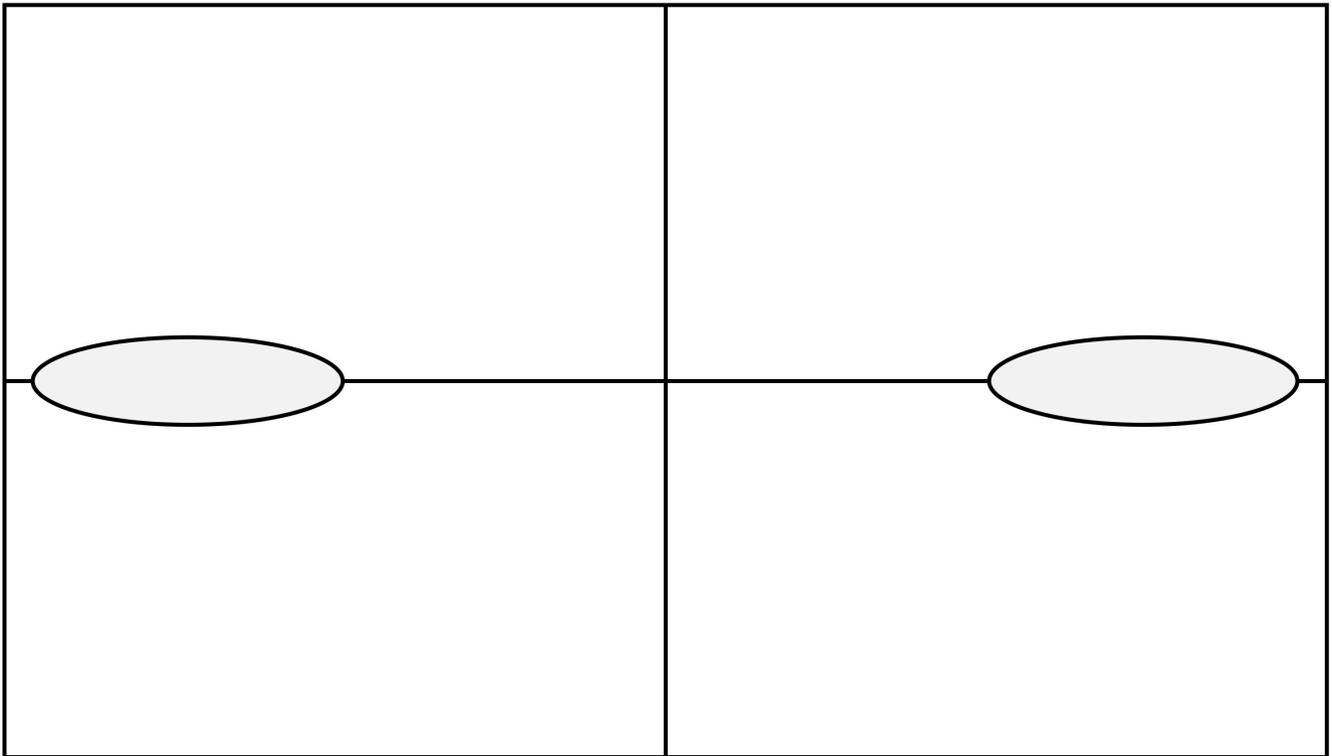
Considering the story of Kendra and Michael...

What are the downsides of Kendra's position? (lower-left quadrant)

What are the upside benefits of the direction that Michael wants to take? (upper-right quadrant)

What are the downsides of Michael's position, if taken to an extreme and neglecting Kendra's values? (lower-right quadrant)

What are the upside benefits of Kendra's position? (upper-left quadrant)



Identify the Deeper Fear and the Greater Purpose

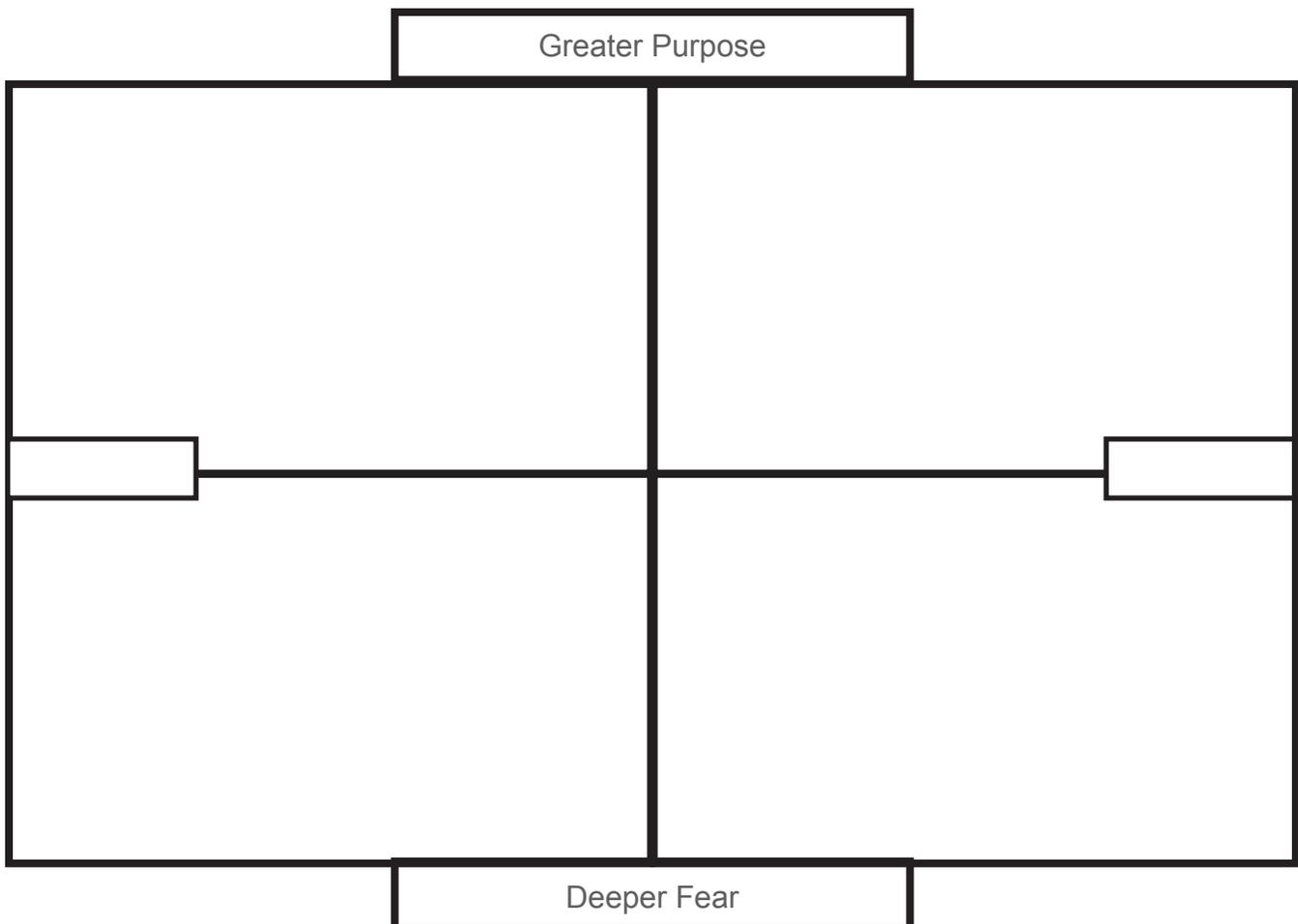
After you've named the poles, identify the one fear and one "greater purpose" that are shared by all the stakeholders. This is the fundamental values-fear dynamic.

What do we fear losing the most? Those things that we're most attached to. Michael and Kendra are both attached to creating a financially successful company (and maybe building their reputations as successful entrepreneurs and business leaders too). If they're pouring their hearts and souls into that aspiration, then the fear that the opposite could happen is always present as part of their reality.

Maybe Kendra has past experiences that cause her to be financially cautious. Maybe Michael feels like he's played it safe all his life and now it's time to take the big risks and, hopefully, get the big payoff.

Whatever their difference in dominant values, they share the same basic purpose and fear. By identifying those common fundamentals, you bring them together in the struggle.

Greater Purpose and Deeper Fear statements are usually nouns, such as "A healthy, growing and resilient business."



Exercise: Leadership Polarities

1. In each pair of values below, circle the value you prefer. For example, if you prefer Flexibility over Structure, circle “Flexibility.”
2. Identify the single polarity in which you had the easiest time choosing a preferred value.
3. Using a simple grid like the one at left, write the value name that was easiest to choose in the left pole of your blank map and write its partner value in the right pole. For example, if your easiest choice was “Expansive” in the polarity, “Focused AND Expansive,” then put “Expansive” in the left pole and “Focused” in the right pole of your blank map.

Conditional Respect	AND	Unconditional Respect
Task	AND	Relationship
Candor	AND	Diplomacy
Responsibility	AND	Freedom
Confidence	AND	Humility
Analysis	AND	Encouragement
Control	AND	Empowerment
Focused	AND	Expansive
Structure	AND	Flexibility
Logic	AND	Creativity
Individual	AND	Work Group
Planning	AND	Implementation

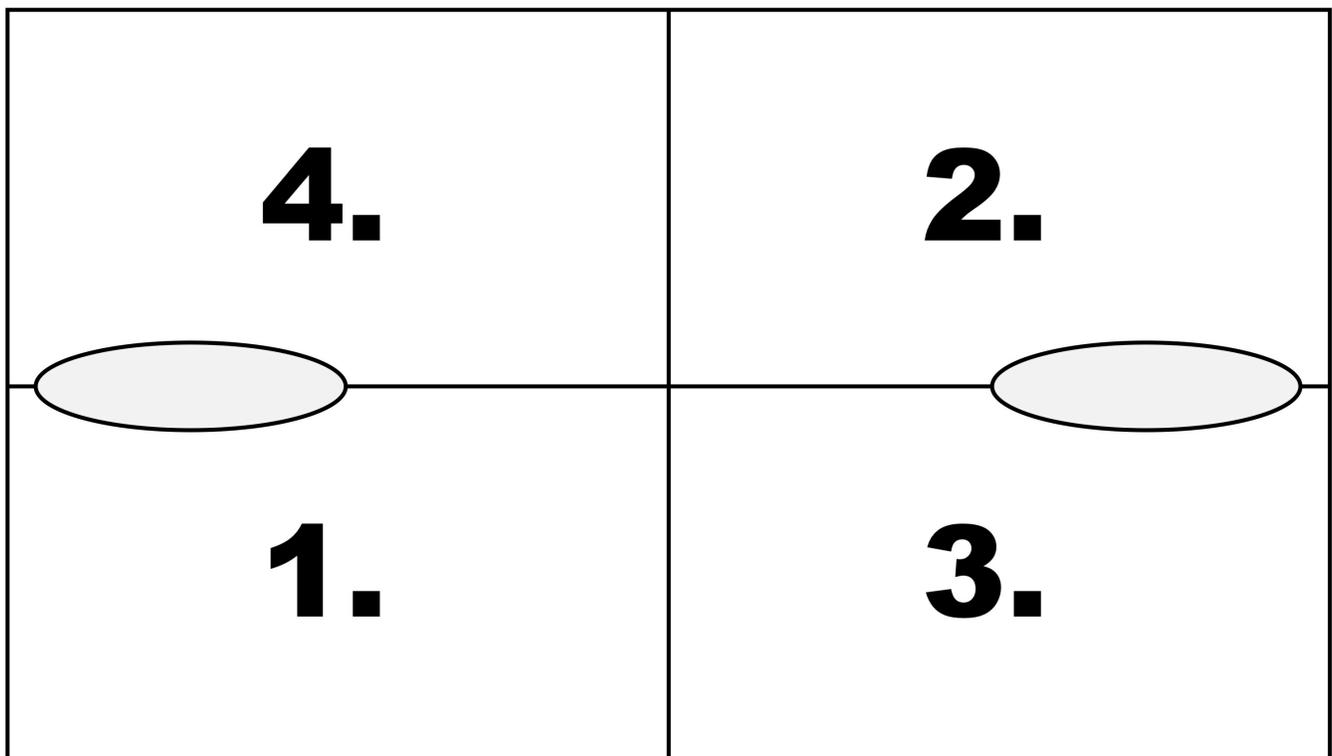
4. Now pair up with another person (preferably someone who doesn't share your same preference on that polarity) and complete the four quadrants of the map just as you did with the Kendra-Michael tension.
5. Now discuss how this bias you hold has played out in your leadership experience? Have you gotten feedback on this bias? What other insights does this way of looking at your favored value provided?

Documenting the Upsides and Downsides

As we saw in mapping the tension of Kendra and Michael, there's a common pattern in how we sketch tensions. It's really just a structured way to take notes on what you're hearing.

First draw a simple 2x2 grid, and then make notes into the quadrants like this:

1. In the lower-left corner of your chart, list some of the frustrations you're hearing with the way things are (we usually assign the current "dominant" value to the left side, so you're writing down the frustration you're hearing with the current dominant value).
Example: If you hear people saying that your organization spends too much energy coming up with new ideas and not enough energy on executing on them, put "not executing well" in quadrant 1.
2. List some aspects of the desired future state in the upper right corner, quadrant 2.
Example: If people say they'd like to make clear plans around implementing ideas, write "make clear project plans" in the upper right-hand corner.
3. Then ask yourself, "If we really overvalued the things in quadrant 2 over time, what problems would we start to see?" List some of those "downsides" in quadrant 3.
4. Finally, list some benefits of the way things are (the current dominant value) in quadrant 4.



Naming the Poles

Once you've sketched the tension, it's helpful to name the poles and clearly identify the values tension at play. Doing so creates a shared vocabulary that will help you powerfully leverage this polarity.

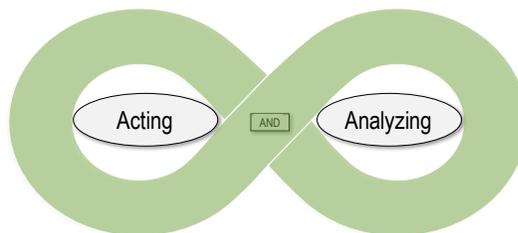
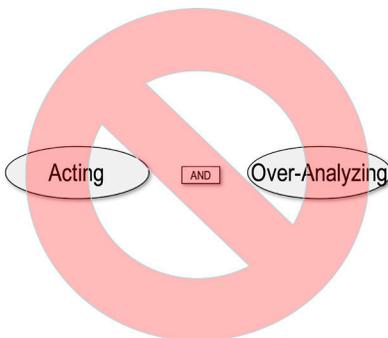
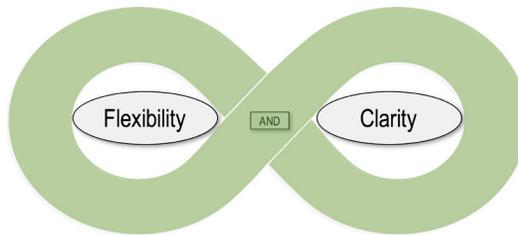
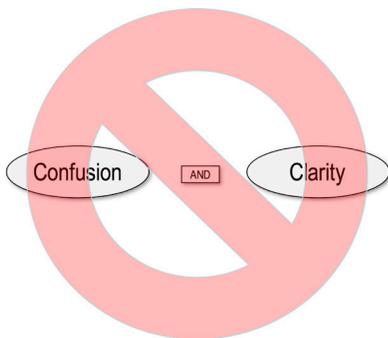
When choosing names for your poles, following these 3 easy rules of thumb:

1. Choose names that are either *neutral* or *positive*, and never a negative version of the value.
2. Check the names out with the stakeholders who helped sketch the tension in the first place and make sure that the group agrees that these names accurately represent the values at place.
3. There are no rules for length, but brief names that are 1-3 words tend to work best so that people can easily refer to them in conversations.

Consider the following possible pole names for Kendra and Michael's tension:

Execution & Innovation

More Examples:



Exercise: Rename the Poles

If the polarities listed below seem a bit biased, that's because they are! Rename one or both poles to reduce the bias in the poles names.

Remember: Names of poles in a polarity should be either neutral or positive, never a negative stereotype of the value. Example, rather than "Rigid," we could say "Structured" or "Disciplined."

Rigid & Flexible *Structured & Flexible*

Greed & Giving _____

Anarchy & Order _____

Long-term & Short-sighted _____

Deregulation & Overcontrol _____

Brashness & Diplomacy _____

High risk & Stable _____

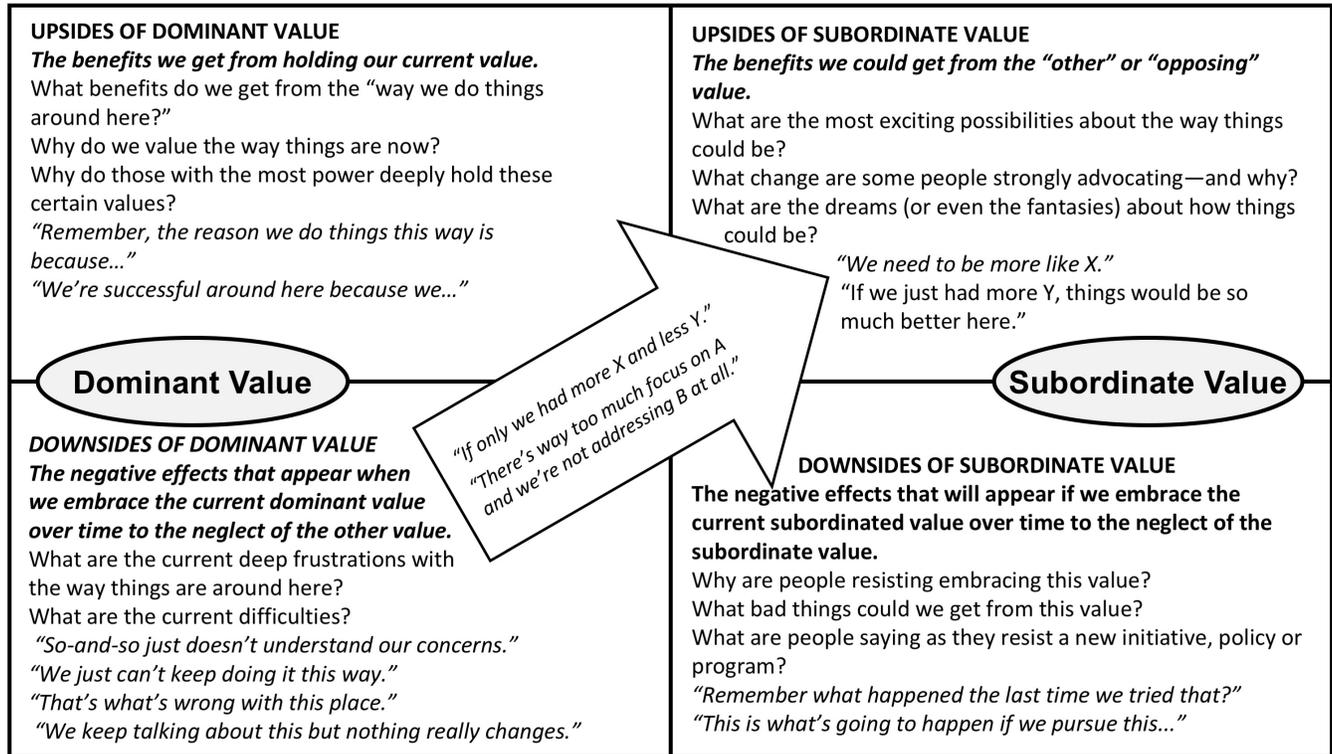
Silos & Integration _____

Autonomy & Bureaucracy _____

"Chasing the Money" & Mission _____

Dominant & Subordinate Values

We often show the current dominant polarity on the left side of the map, and the currently subordinated value on the right. That helps us be consistent in the intervention techniques we show in this guide.



ASSESSING POLARITIES

Either-Or Thinking AND Both-And Thinking

Either-Or thinking is critical for solving problems

Identify clear final answers

Enjoy the sense of accomplishment that comes through solving a problem

Move on to new opportunities and challenges



Both-And thinking is critical for managing polarities

Save time by identifying difficulties that can be leveraged, not solved

Accelerate change by seeing the whole picture more clearly

Sustain change, avoid pendulum swings & unintended consequences

Involves two or more mutually-exclusive options

Involves two equally valid and necessary points of view or truths

Distinguishing Polarities and Problems

Before you start trying to leverage polarities, it's important to consider whether you're dealing with a polarity to be leveraged or a problem to be solved.

Two characteristics indicate a polarity:

- Is the difficulty ongoing?
- Are there two alternatives that are interdependent, meaning you can only focus on one pole for so long before you are required to focus on the other pole?

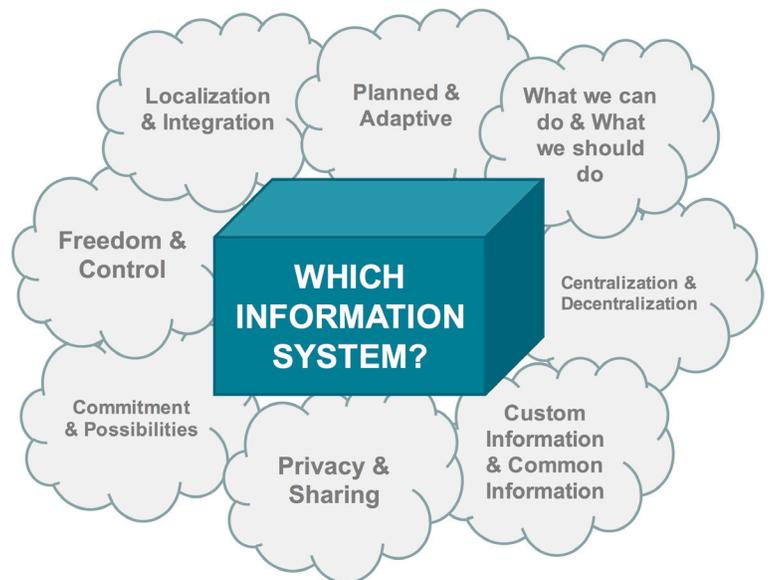
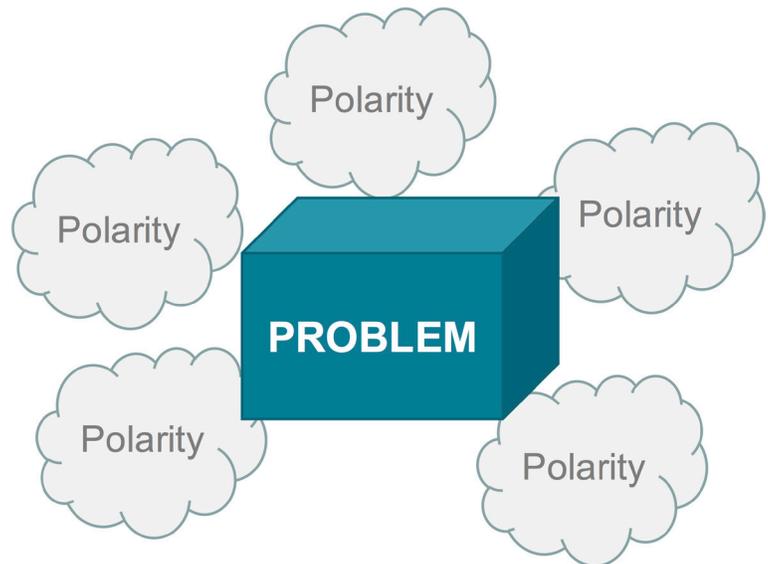
Problems to Solve	Polarities to Leverage
They are not ongoing.	They are ongoing.
There is an end point.	There is no end point.
They are solvable.	They are not solvable.
Independent alternatives	Interdependent alternatives
They can stand alone.	They cannot stand alone.
There is no need to include the other alternative for the solution to work.	The alternatives need each other to optimize the situation over time.
Often contain mutually exclusive opposites.	Always contain mutually inclusive opposites.
<p><i>Should we buy a blue or a gray car?</i></p> <p><i>Should we hire Joan for this position?</i></p> <p><i>Should we pay this bill?</i></p>	<p><i>I want to let my kids work out their own problems and I want to show them support.</i></p> <p><i>I want to get my own needs met and do what's good for the team.</i></p> <p><i>I want to rest well and work hard.</i></p>

Problems and Polarities

Though problems and polarities are different, they are intimately related. That's because every problem has one or more polarities behind it. If you can identify and address the polarities (which are usually hidden from view), you can create more complete and more resilient solutions to the problems we have.

Mapping the polarities “opens up” the energy in a room, reduces defensiveness, and increases alignment. Most importantly, it helps us see the full needs of the system in an integrated way.

Consider the problem at right and the polarities behind it. The polarities help inform the selection and design of an organization's information system. For example, the polarity of Custom Information and Common Information points to a more complete and sophisticated set of requirements than the systems designers might have previously seen.



Getting the Best of Both

By learning to solve problems quickly, efficiently, and effectively AND learning to leverage critical polarities over time, leaders build more powerful toolboxes for working through complex and critical challenges.

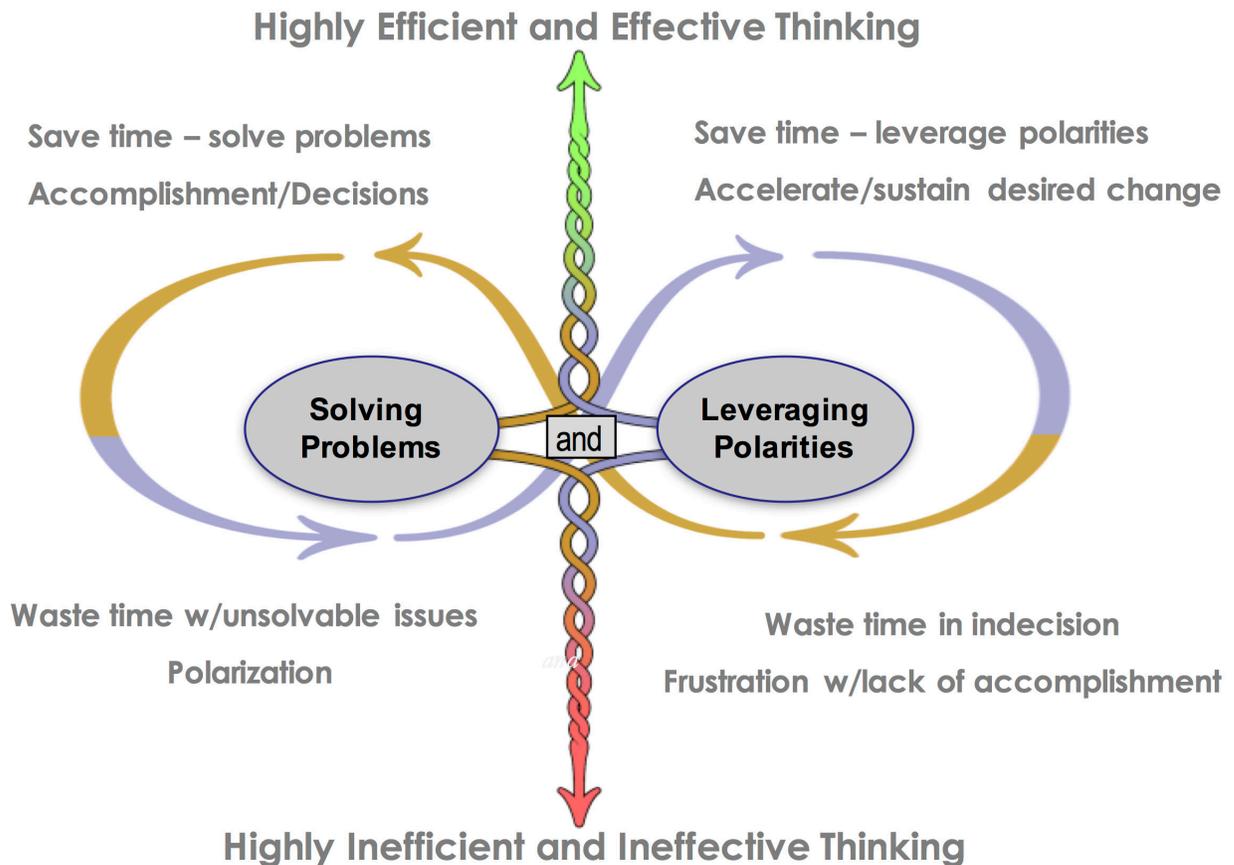


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Quiz: Problem or Polarity?

Put an X to indicate whether each sentence primarily represents a problem to solve or a polarity to leverage.

Remember to ask yourself...

1. Is the tension ongoing, like breathing?
2. Are the alternatives interdependent (including the hidden alternatives)?
3. Are there 2 or more necessary upsides?
4. Will over-focusing on one option over time undermine the higher purpose?

Problem	Polarity	What you hear...
		Should we assign Uhura or Sulu to the Enterprise?
		My employee lacks focus and follow-through. Why can't I fix that?
		Do I accept an offer for another position or stay where I am?
		People are resisting a change we absolutely have to make. How do I address that?
		Am I the right coach to work with this client?
		Why can't we get staff support for this innovation initiative?
		Our project partners have to talk to everyone before deciding. How can we get them to decide faster?

LEARNING ABOUT POLARITIES

Principles of Polarities

Here are eighteen principles that seem to hold true in all the polarities we've seen:

1. All values come in pairs.

2. Those pairs are interdependent.
3. There are two truths in those interdependent pairs.
4. Neither of those truths is the whole truth.

5. All polarities share the same predictable patterns.

6. When you actively work toward the upsides of both values in a polarity, you create a virtuous cycle leading to a higher purpose.
7. When you systematically embrace one value over time to the neglect of its pair, you get:
 - The downsides of the chosen value
 - Eventually, the downsides of the other value as well.
8. When you're in the downsides of both values, you create a vicious cycle of polarization leading to a deeper fear.

9. Polarities have predictable personal and social dynamics.

10. We fear losing the things we value most.
11. We tend to make other individuals or groups "containers" for those fears and the values we disfavor.
12. We get out of balance because we see our values as the whole truth.
13. We positively stereotype our own values as if they have no downsides, and we negatively stereotype the values of others as if they have no upsides.

14. Solving problems and managing polarities are BOTH critical skills.

15. Leveraging polarities well helps us solve *problems* better and more sustainably.

16. Leveraging polarities by optimizing both values pays the biggest dividends.

17. Balance comes from *managing* polarities.
18. Innovation arises from *leveraging* polarities.

Why We Favor One Value

Why do we have biases, attachments, and “valences” toward one value to the neglect of its pair? There are many contributing factors:

Personal & Social Forces

- **Parental Influence.** Our values are largely formed by the age of seven, so our early childhood experiences have a major impact on our values biases. Over time, we may embrace or reject the values of our parents and/or other significant others, as in the case of the child of liberal parents who becomes deeply conservative or vice versa. Rejection may arise from being exposed to the downsides of our parents’ preferred value, which we reject.
- **Other Socializing Influences.** We can start to identify a preference for one value over another even as children, and have that reinforced by others. For example, we may be frequently complimented for being thoughtful of others while not being rewarded for asserting our own needs and interests.
- **Habit.** Our values and the behaviors that represent them become ingrained into behaviors, so we become more comfortable and confident expressing certain values than others. If we’re good problem-solvers and are rewarded heavily for that, our heavy bias toward either-or thinking and seeing tensions as problems to be solved can lead us to systematically choose certain values over others over time.
- **Politics.** Political discourse from the local to the national level can influence our perceptions of the relative “value” or appeal of certain values.
- **Anxiety & Fear.** We can develop fears of the downsides of “those other” values that people assert, especially if we have subordinated those values in ourselves over time so they become unfamiliar and uncomfortable.
- **Definition of Self.** In the end, our values—and what we value—defines who we are. We will tend to label our selves, and others will label us with often the same labels, based on what we value and what we neglect or reject. That “definition of self” can be difficult and even scary to change.

Perceived Constraints

- **Lack of Time.** People will tend to choose between values in any given moment, in a project, or over time simply because they believe there isn’t enough time available to consider the more complex possibilities of a both-and approach.
- **Lack of Resources.** People may assume that it will take more resources, such as staff capacity or money, to work through a plan that pursues the benefits of both values.
- **Scope Creep.** Leaders may be concerned that by addressing those “additional” needs and interests, the scope of work will expand and become unmanageable.
- **Process Competencies.** We often observe that people simply lack the ability to facilitate “both-and” conversations, primarily because they can’t see and work with them as polarities.

Two Common Roles in Polarities

In any polarity, certain people will tend to take on certain roles. Here are two common roles identified by Dr. Barry Johnson:

Change Advocates

These folks demand a change from the status quo. They are experiencing the downside of the pole that's overvalued by the group (for example, the stagnation and "dead end" feelings of Stability) and they see the solution as moving to the upside of the opposite pole.

Continuity Advocates

These are the protectors of the status quo. They want to keep the valuable upside benefits of the current dominant value or pole, and they tend to fear the downsides of the pole that others are pushing for. For example, they may favor Stability and fear the downside problems of Change.

There is real wisdom in each position. Here are examples we've heard of balancing or optimizing statements around polarity tensions:

- "Some things need to change."
- "Let's not throw the baby out with the bathwater."
- "We really want both of these things."
- "I think this is a false choice."

Sometimes, groups like to let the Change Advocates and Continuity Advocates "pair up" and try to resolve the issue. They assume that these two people should sort out the tension because they're the most invested in it. Unfortunately, that approach usually only results in more polarization. The whole group represents the wisdom of the whole picture, so it's important to hear from everyone when creating polarity maps. We call this "tapping the wisdom of the middle."

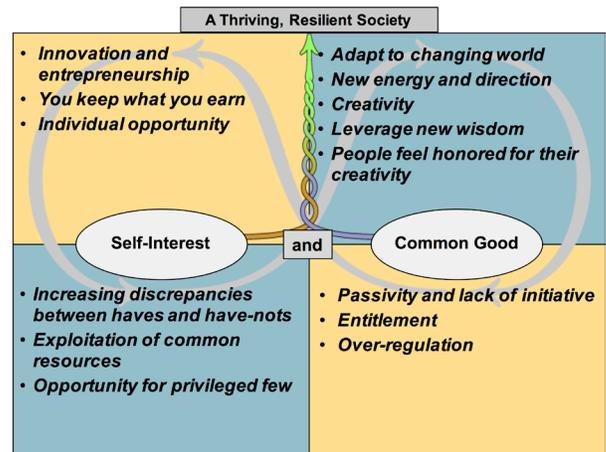


The Virtuous Cycle

When organizations systematically and purposefully work toward the upsides of both poles in a critical polarity, it naturally creates a Virtuous Cycle.

In Virtuous Cycles, not only are the two values balanced but they optimize each other in synergistic ways, often producing significant breakthroughs.

For example, one software company who decided that their clients should have both the simplest access to their data and the best data security quickly became the dominant player in the cloud storage arena. Over time, their growing customer base—and revenues—enabled the company to invest in the development of even more sophisticated solutions that actually increased convenience and security even more.



The Vicious Cycle

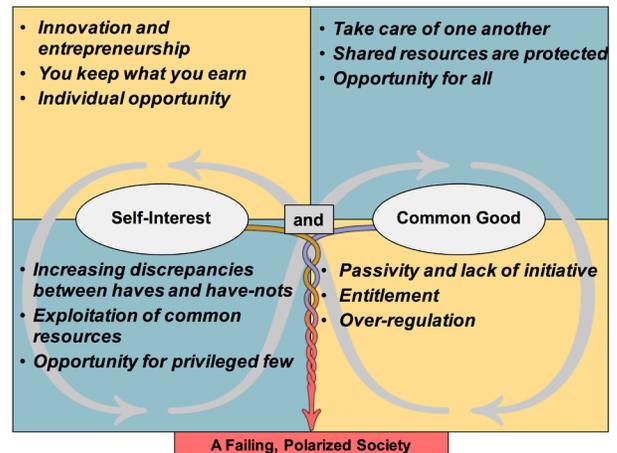
When many organizations live a “one pole reality,” overemphasizing a single pole and increasingly experiencing its downside over time.

If we over emphasize one pole for a long time, we get the downside of both poles—what we call a “Vicious Cycle.” Ironically we get what we are afraid of by clinging to its apparent opposite.

Here are two examples from the U.S. federal government:

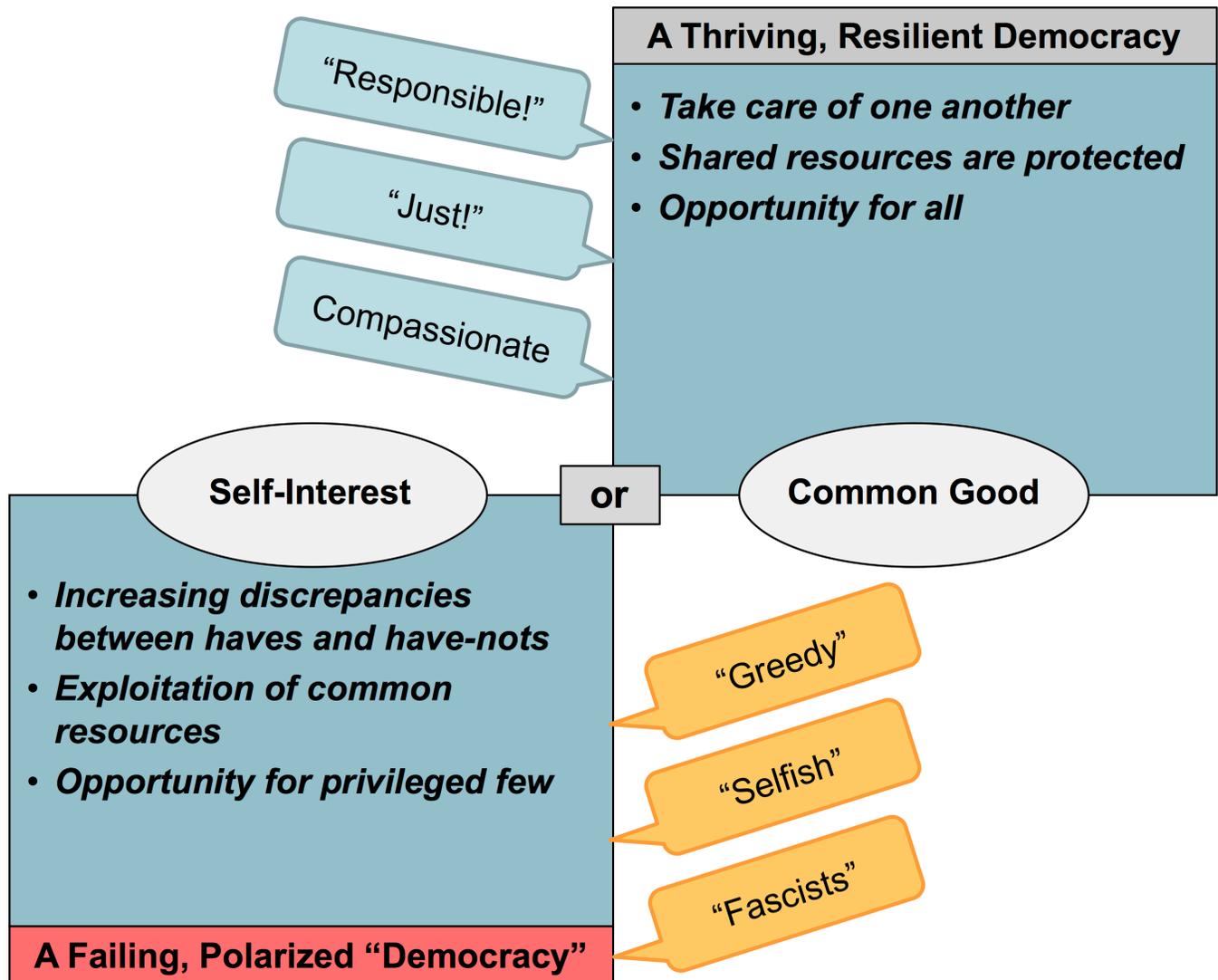
- In the interest of minimizing government control of the financial sector, the government ended up buying banks.
- In the interest of national security to protect the freedoms of U.S. citizens, the Patriot Act actually further restricted the freedoms of its citizens.

These are critiques of federal policymaking. They are examples of how solutions that only address part of the whole picture often end up getting us the opposite of what we seek.

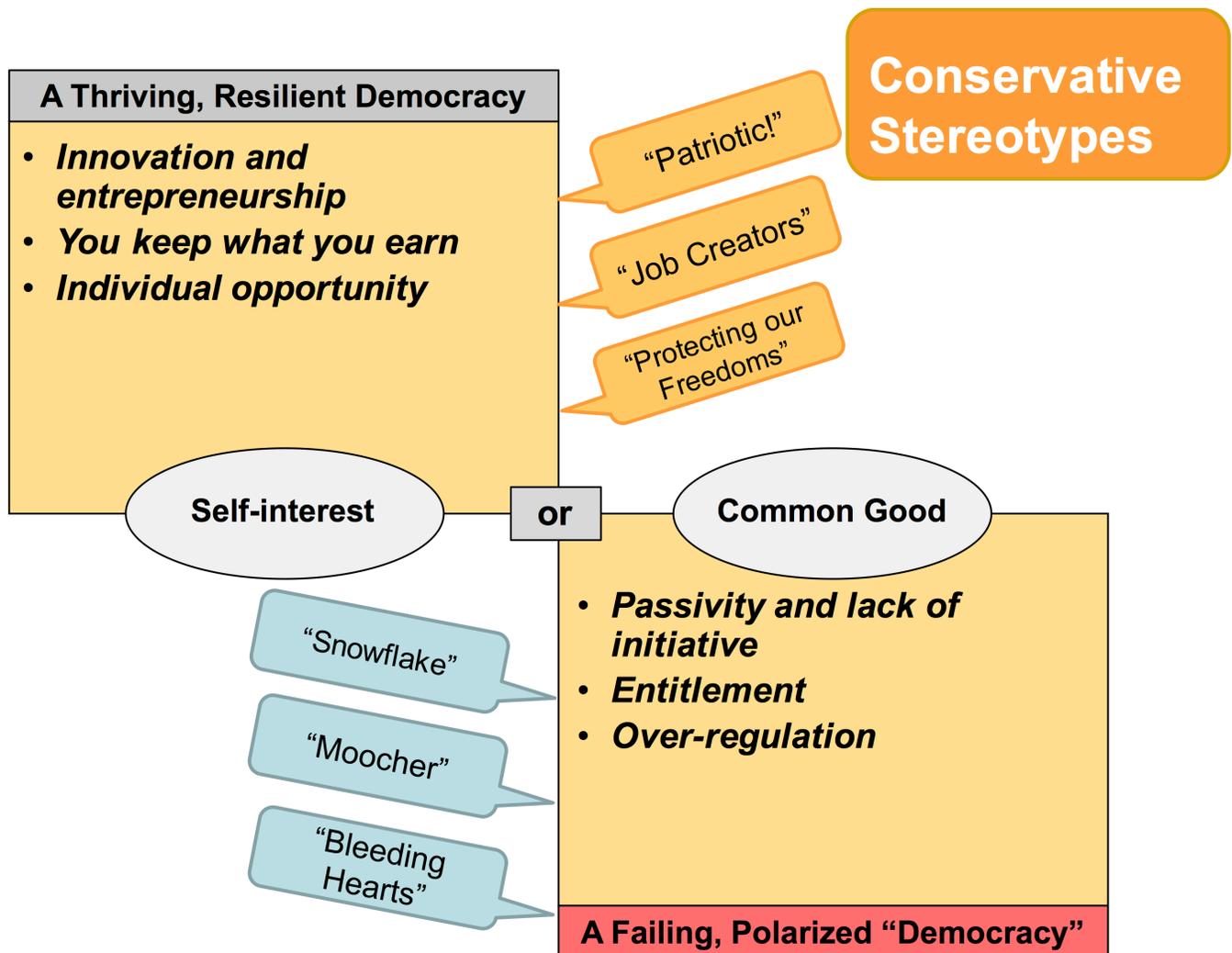


Stereotyping Others: 2 Examples

Liberal Stereotypes



Conservative Stereotypes



Polarity Thinking Concepts

Fear

In Polarity Thinking, fear arises from the belief that we are going to lose something we deeply value and gain something that repels us. We are also driven by a deeper fear that we share with those with whom we seem to be in conflict, even if we can't agree on how to get away from that fear successfully.

Conflict

In Polarity Thinking, conflict arises from (1) the lack of recognition that our underlying values are in play as we struggle to find mutually-agreeable solutions, and (2) the belief that the other person or group's positions and values are not only incompatible with our own, but in direct conflict.

Resistance

Resistance often arises from those who believe that the change being asserted will result in the loss of the upside benefits of their values (including the values of stability and continuity) and the realization of the downsides of the values being asserted in the change initiative. That's why we often see higher resistance from long-time employees, who have seen the cycle of change in the past and how one value was pursued to the neglect of the other (not that people usually describe their concerns in polarity terms!). If we can recognize and bring forward the upsides of the currently-held values, we can reduce resistance and develop more resilient change strategies.

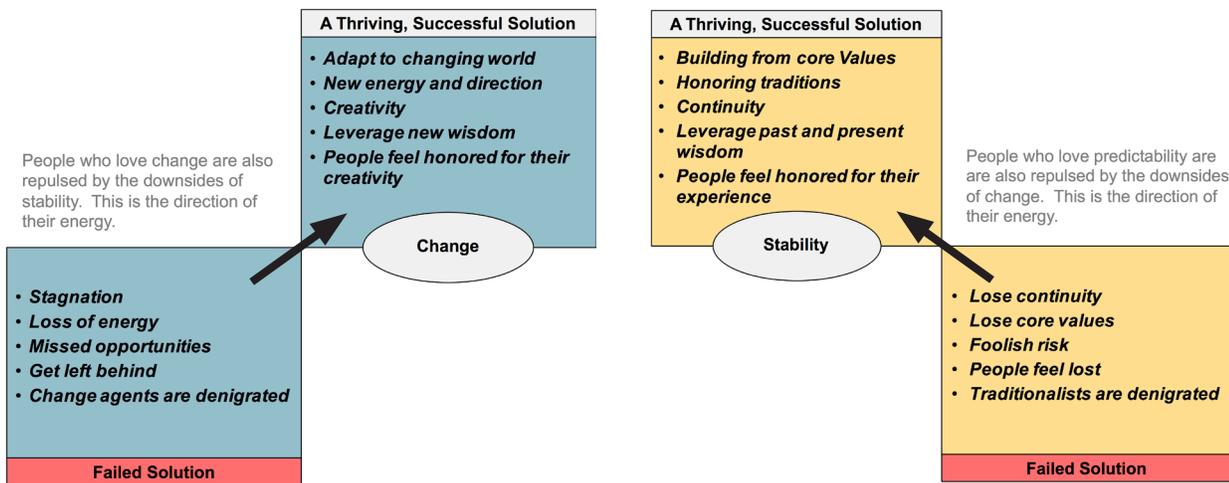
False Choices

A false choice in polarity thinking is simply choosing one value "over" another. Since the other value doesn't just disappear when we make that choice, it's a false choice.

Tunnel Vision

When we are so enamored of the upsides of our current dominant value (whichever that may be for a specific person or group), we are blind not only to the downsides of our own value and the upsides of the other value, but we hardly even recognize the other value as a legitimate value, so we can only see half of the truth in the situation.

Consider the following examples of people who prefer stability and people who prefer change. Not only do they not even see half the map, but they don't even recognize the existence of the other value.



Doubling down

When we seem to be slipping further and further from our greater purpose and are systematically moving toward our deeper fear, we double down on our values, asserting them more vigorously to try to break through the resistance of others. This only leads to deepening polarization since we're missing the other important value in the polarity.

Example: "We just haven't made our team accountable enough. We need to take away breaks until we start hitting our production quotas."

Forecasting

When we see the recommendations and plans of others representing values that are in direct opposition to our own, we start making predictions about how they are going to ruin everything, bring this company down, or destroy our country. This catastrophizing has its roots on a truth, since if the other value was to become dominant to the neglect of our own, we likely would see a vicious cycle ensue.

Example: "That president is going to totally isolate us from our allies."

Correcting

When others assert values (or positions that represent values) that are in direct "opposition" to our own, we correct them by explaining how they are wrong.

Example: "No, Vlad, if we do what you're proposing, we'll have people doing whatever they want and we can't run an organization that way."

Pre-empting

When we've stereotyped others as holding an "opposing" view from our own, we employ language and strategies to pre-empt their attempts to "undermine" our values. Since we

already know what they are going to say when we propose something that reflects our concerns and values, we shut them down early so we don't have to correct them later. This also helps us avoid having those people contaminate the thinking of others.

Example: "Maria, I already know what you're going to say, but you're wrong. We simply need more structure in the way this team works."

Scapegoating

When things don't work out, we know who to blame: those other people who undermined our efforts with their problematic values and ideas. Scapegoating is the next level up from stereotyping because now we're blaming "those people" for the failure of the project or initiative.

Example: "We haven't been successful because Frankie takes too many unproven risks and squanders our already-limited resources."

The Shadow

Hidden in that other value is our Shadow, that Jungian creature who holds our fears but also has great stores of latent energy and freedom if we only learn to embrace it.

Polarization: Why things get worse over time

A vicious cycle isn't magic; it's a predictable personal or social dynamic. When we start getting the downsides of one pole, we end up getting the downsides of the other because no one is intervening to stop a worsening dynamic. When polarization is social, we start to blame other people and resist any of their recommendations, we double-down on our own positions, and the more we do that, the more they double-down on theirs.

Example: When I don't get enough rest, I'm unproductive at work. When I'm unproductive at work, I get stressed, stay up late, and don't sleep well.

The Pendulum (and why it's so predictable)

As we saw in the breathing example, our cycle of inhaling and exhaling is autonomic and has very short feedback loops (that is, even if breathing weren't autonomic, it would only be a matter of seconds before we realize we needed to inhale again to get oxygen).

In a polarity like centralization and decentralization, however, the feedback period might be years, so we fail to see the whole dynamic. And the longer that feedback period, the more a polarity looks like a problem to solve rather than a polarity to leverage.

Example: In the polarity of Individual Liberty & Social Responsibility, the feedback period might be a generation, so we cycle between these every 20 years or so, constantly shifting back and forth across generations.

Interdependence

We are subconsciously aware that an interdependent relationship exists between certain values. After all, we only know hot because of cold and vice versa. However, we tend to assume that the more we have of one value in a polarity, the less we'll have of the other. When we see how one value actually needs another over time, then we understand the true nature of interdependence and the need to hold and express both values.

The Greater Purpose

Even though we may not agree on how to get there, most people agree on how they want things to be. That Greater Purpose is the tie that binds people together across their differences and is the reason that people will come together to leverage the polarity in the first place.

Balance

Balance is okay, and it's a lot better than being in a vicious cycle of polarization headed toward our deeper fear. If we can actively work toward the upsides of both values in a polarity, we create the virtuous cycle leading to a greater purpose—and thriving!

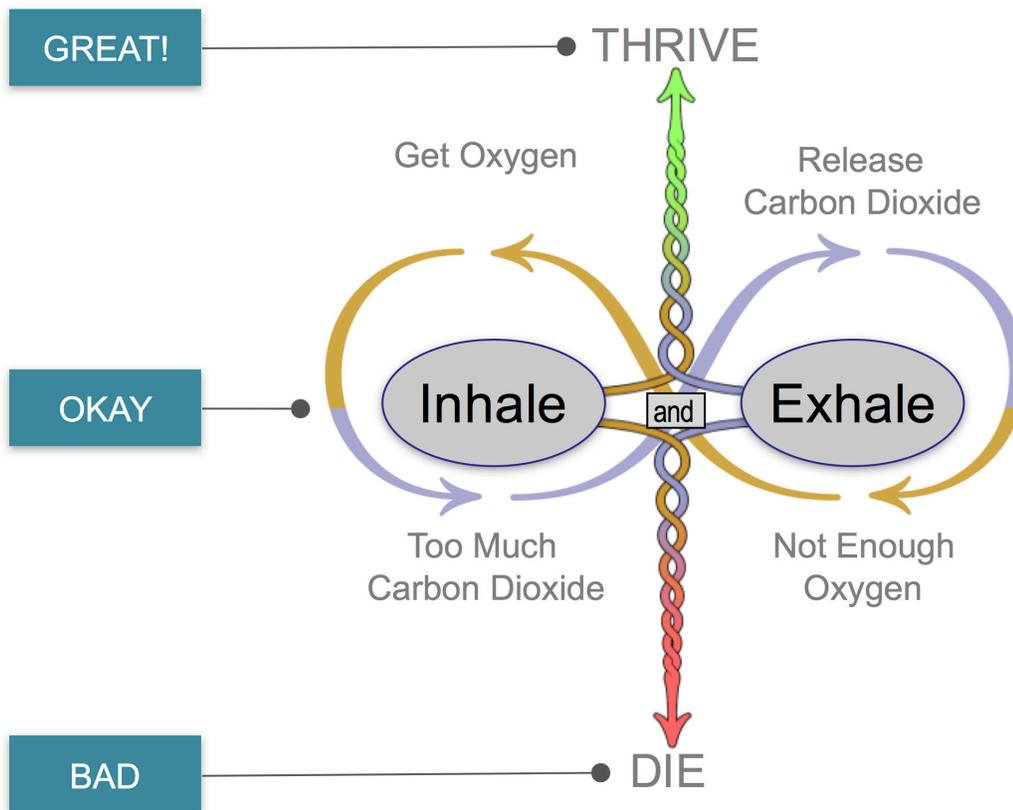


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Power & Organizing

We often analyze interpersonal dynamics using a power lens. In our attempts to understand what's going on and how to intervene, we wonder who has power, who's trying to get power, and what everyone's agenda is.

But a power lens, when overused, can be limiting and dehumanizing. After all, most people value more than just power. More than anything, most people would like to see their values being expressed in their families, communities, and workplaces. If we view any conflict using a polarities lens to understand the value dynamics at play, we can see a much richer tapestry of fears and interest, and have many more options for intervening.

That said, if the current dominant value systematically subordinates the other value over time, we have a problem (as in a polarity that's badly out of balance problem) and sometimes that means that we have to stick it to the man and get him to wake up and pay attention to the other pole.

Example: Economic interests dominated until folks started organizing the environmental movement in the 1970s. That organizing not only brought the polarity into greater balance through the 80's and 90's but is now a key driver of economic growth today.

Abundance and Scarcity

Being in a vicious cycle in any polarity is an experience of scarcity. We believe that time, attention, and capacity are limited resources, so we must choose one value over another, and others reach the same conclusion and embrace the exact opposite value. As we race toward the deeper fear in a polarizing competition for people's allegiance, our sense of scarcity—and our desperation—deepen and intensify.

Being in the upsides of both poles in a polarity, however, leads to an experience of abundance. Even if our resources are limited, we are able to express our deepest values and have them be recognized and honored by others. For most of us, abundance and scarcity are matters of the mind, not material concerns, and living in a virtuous cycle leads to feelings of real abundance.

Predicting the Future

While pre-empting others is one form of predicting the future (based on our projections of what others are going to “do to us,” we can also use polarity thinking to anticipate concerns or reactions of others to any specific proposal. By viewing the situation through a polarity lens, we can:

1. Predict when a change initiative is likely to fail because certain values are being embraced to the neglect of others.
2. Predict resistance and fear to a recommendation before the recommendation is even made.

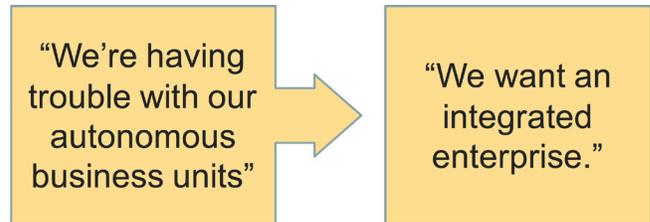
- Predict when another value is going to assert itself (because we know that when one value is in focus, its pair will be in the background at the same time).

Feedback Loops

Feedback loops are the early warning signs and other data that tell us that we've systematically embraced one value to the neglect of its pair.

Gap Analysis

When we view the polarity as a problem to solve, we only see the downsides of the current dominant value and the possible upsides of the other value. In fact, all we see of the polarity is the current and future state, since we're obviously not seeing the polarity at all!



Fixes that Fail

When we see the polarity as a problem to solve, we conduct our gap analysis, and we implement our "solution," we end up with a "fix" that doesn't work at some point because we failed to account for the whole polarity.

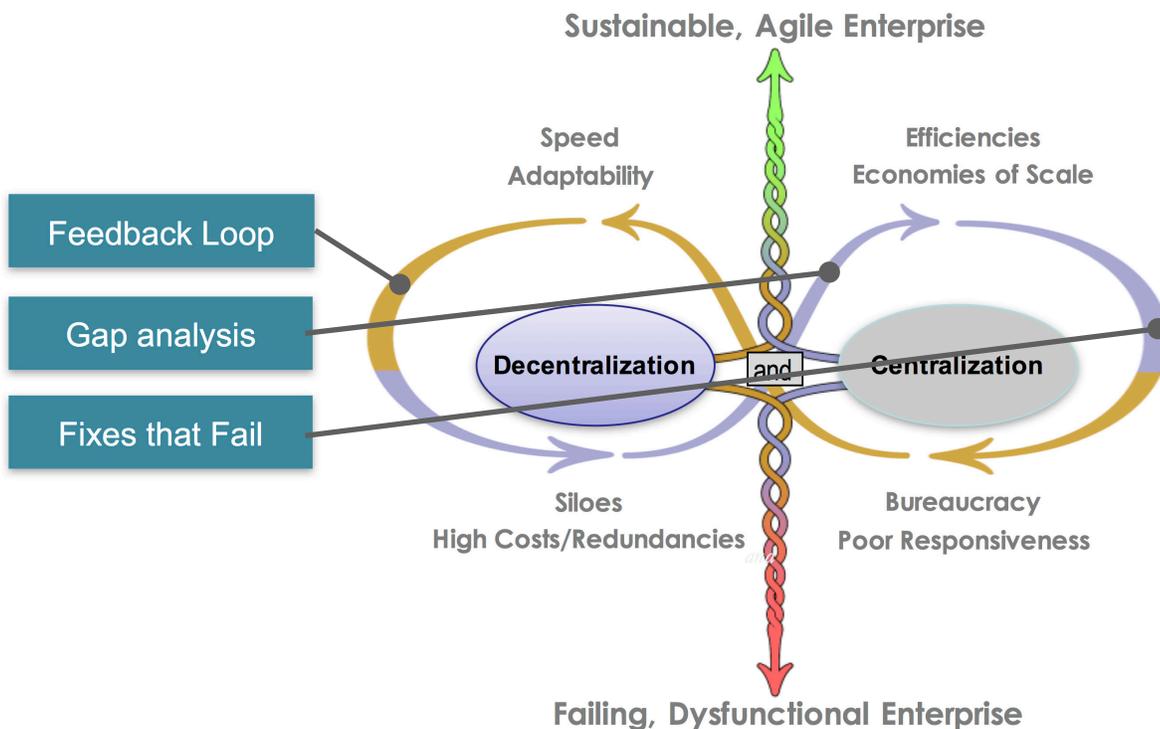
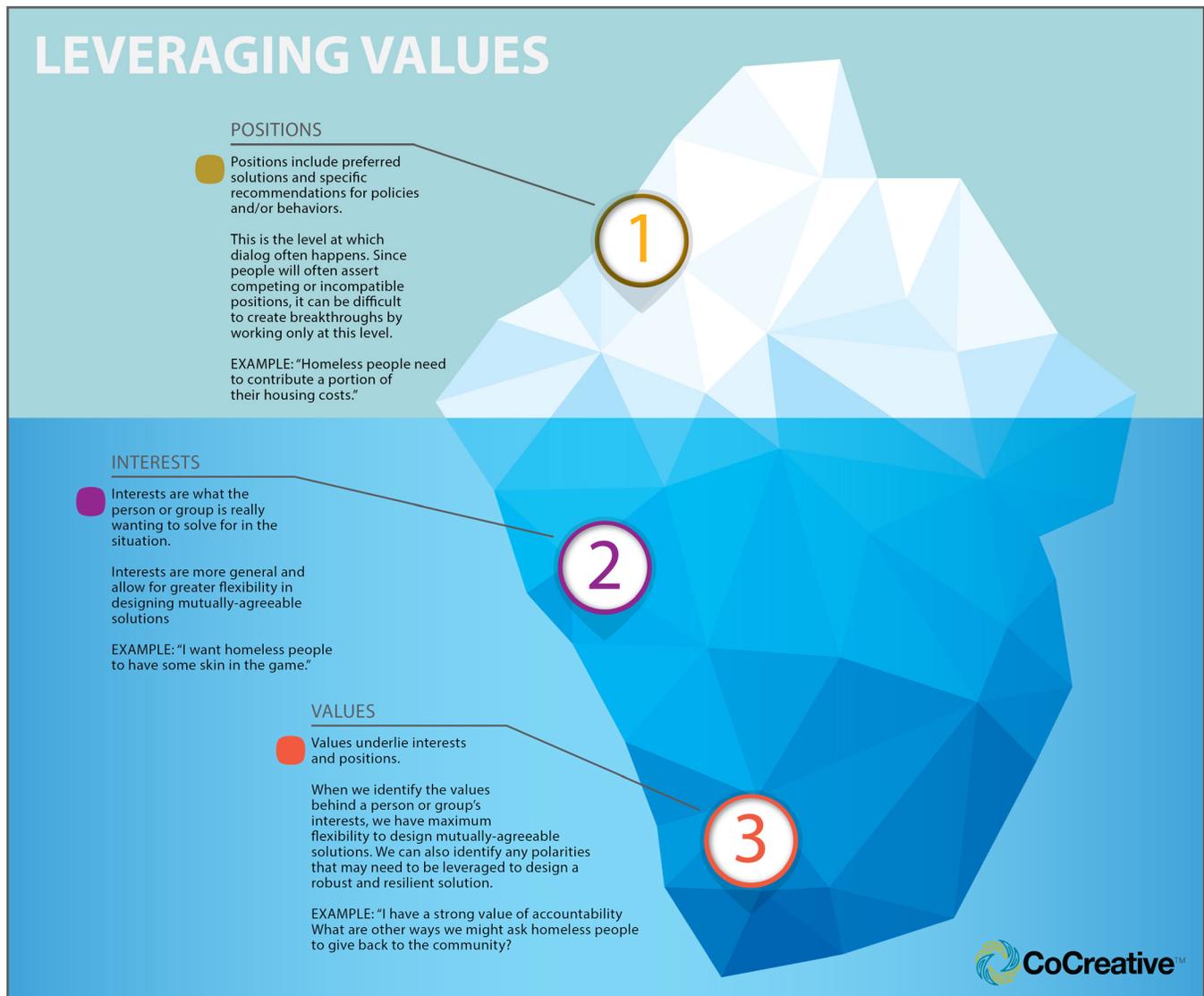


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Positions, Interests, and Values

If we can work at the level of values, not just at the levels of positions and interests, we have a much wider range of choice for how to solve the problems we face.



Multarities

We also encounter multarities, polarities with three or more interdependent elements. These are obviously a bit trickier to map!

- People & Profit & Planet
- Knowing & Being & Doing
- Head & Heart & Hands & Spirit

LEVERAGING POLARITIES

3 Levels: From Imbalance to Managing to Leveraging

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
<i>“We’ve got some chronic conflict and unresolvable issues.”</i>	<i>“We’re getting to balance and things seem like they’re working well enough.”</i>	<i>We’ve thriving by actively leveraging our differences and strategic tensions.”</i>
Unproductive Conflict Polarization Winners/Losers Big Pendulum Swings Fixes that Fail Vicious Cycles	Productive Conflict Balance Compromise Alignment Sustainable Change Survival	Conflict is a resource Optimization Collaboration Resilience Innovation Virtuous Cycles

Signs of a Well-Leveraged Polarity

When an organization leverages its polarities well, you can almost feel it in the air. People feel engaged, confident and wise.

In these situations, the person or group tends to experience the upsides of both poles. You might hear, for example, that “We have strong operations and we’re highly innovative too.”

If you looked at all the to do lists for the people in this type of organization, you would see action steps that support the leveraging of polarities.

You also see clearly-defined warning signs and feedback loops to help people see when they are over-emphasizing one pole at the expense of the other. For example, if everyone feels like they are getting adequate information during a fast-moving strategic change process, that’s a good sign that the Vision & Reality polarity is being well-leveraged.

Finally, in organizations that leverage polarities well, you’ll tend to see a healthy respect for differences in perspectives and thinking styles. For example, both people pushing for change and those trying to slow it down will tend to cooperate together to maximize the upsides of their poles toward a clear, shared Greater Purpose.

Signs of an Imbalanced Polarity

When polarities aren't being successfully managed by the members of an organization, we tend to hear statements like:

"They just don't understand our concerns."

"If only we had more X and less Y."

"We just can't keep doing it this way."

"Things have got to change."

"There's way too much focus on this and we're not addressing that at all."

"I don't understand why those people keep harping on that."

"Why is there so much resistance to this proposed change?"

"We keep talking about this but nothing really changes."

In groups that are having problems managing a critical polarity, the Change Advocates are often derided as activists who are never satisfied, while the Continuity Advocates are criticized as reactionaries who are unwilling to let go of the past.

When polarities are poorly managed, a group will respond to the unresolved tension in a variety of unproductive ways, like those identified by group theorist Wilfred Bion:

- They become dependent on their leader to resolve the tension. Then they usually reject that leader as incompetent when the leader fails to "save" the group from its tensions.
- They allow two members of the group to pair off around the core tension, with one person representing the group hopes that these two people will resolve the basic tension on behalf of the group. Since this happens often in group settings, let's play this out in our group. I need a volunteer from each group who will argue your group's position. While this happens, I want the other members of each group to communicate their feelings to one another non-verbally.
- They identify some entity as their enemy—like the federal government, for example. They then proceed to either Fight that enemy (though maybe not openly) or Flee from that enemy.

In any case, the group fails to resolve the core tension that is the source of its anxiety. That's because underneath all the basic assumptions above, there is a fundamental assumption that the tension can be resolved in the first place!

Key Elements of a Polarity

From our breathing example earlier, we can identify the key elements of any polarity. Note that we often use the term “values” in lieu of “poles” because it sounds less wonky.

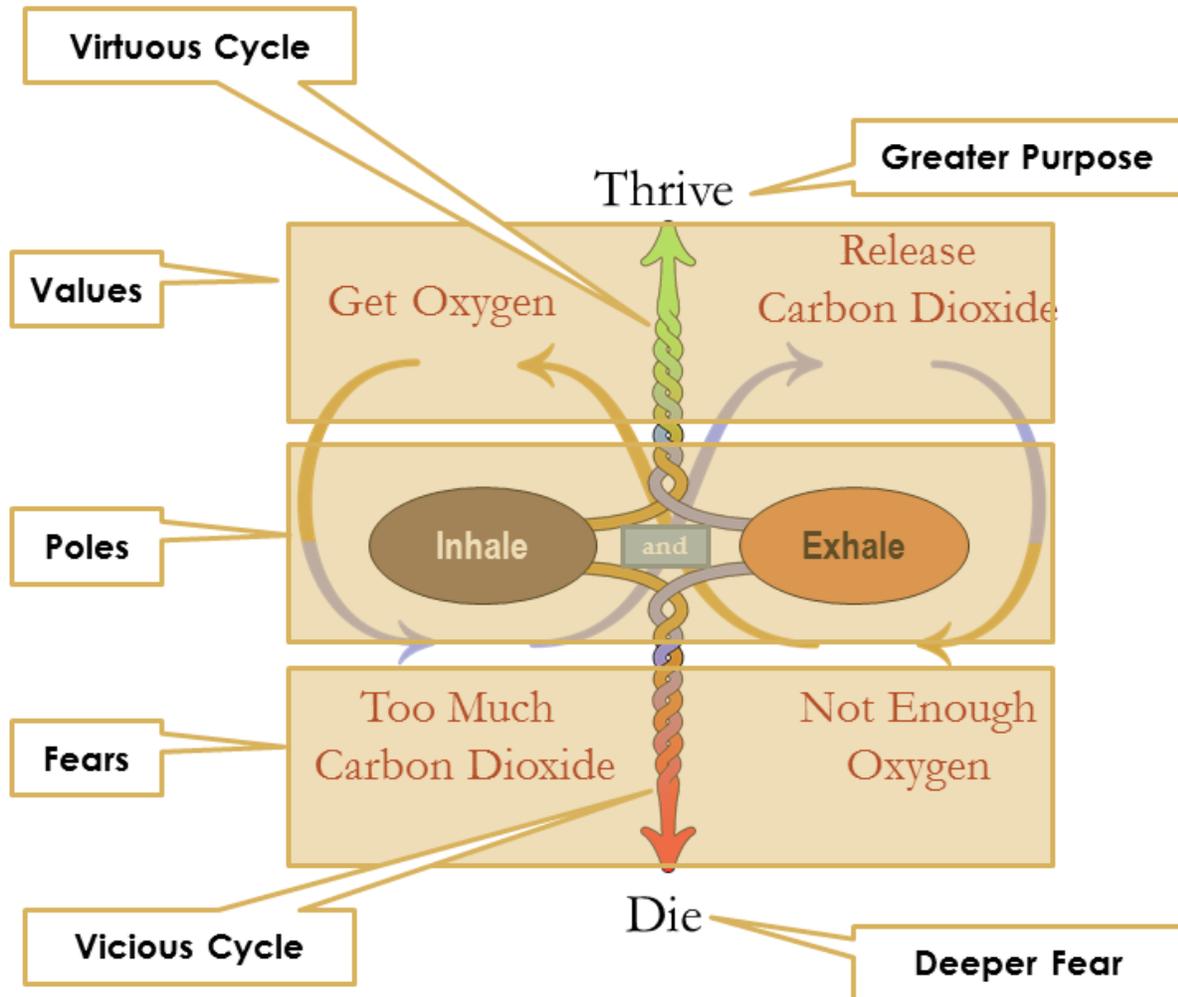


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Fully Mapping a Polarity

Below is a tool developed by Dr. Barry Johnson that shows all elements of a polarity.

Action Steps

*How will we gain or maintain the positive results from focusing on this left pole?
What? Who? By When? Measures?*

Action Steps

*How will we gain or maintain the positive results from focusing on this right pole?
What? Who? By When? Measures?*

Early Warnings

Measurable indicators (things you can count) that will let you know that you are getting into the downside of this left pole.

Early Warnings

Measurable indicators (things you can count) that will let you know that you are getting into the downside of this right pole.

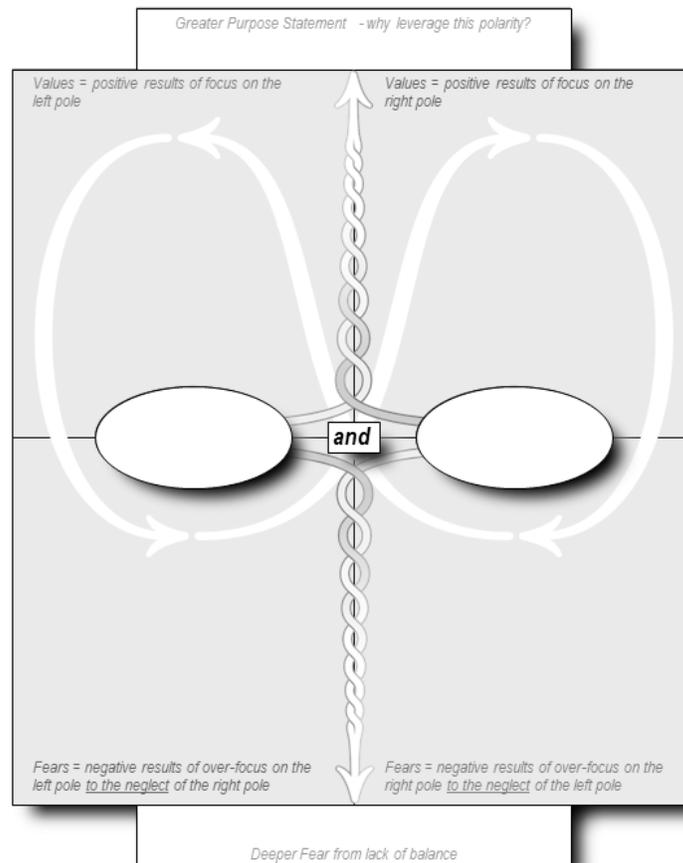


Image © 2002 Polarity Partnerships, LLC

Create Action Steps

Once you've identified the Greater Purpose and the Deeper Fear, you want to figure out what Actions Steps you'll take to work clearly and consistently toward the higher purpose.

Note the two sections for Action Steps. For each upside of each pole, you want to identify those actions that will help you realize the upside benefits of both poles.

A good action step:

- Is a specific, clearly-defined action.
- Is assigned to a person or team.
- Has a deadline.

Identify Early Warning Signs

Early Warning signs flag you when you, your team, or your organization are beginning to experience the downsides of a pole. This usually happens when you're favoring one pole to the neglect of the other. Remember, you want to pursue the upside benefits of BOTH values in a polarity. When you're not, you'll start to hear feedback, but only if you know what to listen for.

A good warning sign is a specific thing that you will see or hear that will tell you that you're starting to get the downsides of one pole or the other. For example, Kendra and Michael start to neglect Execution because they're focusing so heavily on Innovation, they might start to see slippage in delivery times for client projects, or they might start to hear complaints about the quality of the work.

Warning Signs are documented for the downsides of each pole. See the full map on the opposite page.

Setting the Context for Collaboration

We often name the polarities that will show up in a meeting as part of the meeting itself, just like setting groundrules. This helps everyone relax a bit because they see up front that we're paying attention to their needs, interests, and concerns. A common "Setting the Context for Collaboration" list includes:

- Fast & Slow
- Content & Relationships
- Going Broad & Going Deep
- Tight & Loose
- Long-term & Short-term
- Introversion & Extraversion
- Data-driven & Intuitive
- Objective & Intersubjective

We might, for example, point out that we're going to focus on our short-term results in this meeting but that we're going to address our long-term strategy in a separate, upcoming meeting.

Easy Preventions & Interventions

Here are 6 simple ways to shift a conversation away from polarization toward understanding and collaboration:

Set the Context for Collaboration

Name the strategic tensions that will be in play during a collaboration, observe how different people's preferences will be addressed at different times throughout the work, and seek agreement from the group to leverage the polarities together. (Of course, this assumes that you've designed a process that will leverage the polarities well!)

Differentiate>Validate>Integrate

Name and honor the distinct value of the diverse values in the room before attempting to align people around an analysis or strategy.

Map the Quadrants

Map the upsides and downsides of both values without actually trying to name the poles at first, and then test some possible pole names with people.

Do a Quick Reframe

Observe the interdependency between the two values and what things look like over time if we embrace one over the other. Example: "I hear conflict here but I believe you're both right. Let's look at how things would work if we did one of these over time to the neglect of the other."

Do a Go Around

When two people are "pairing off" in a heated debate, it's usually around a polarity of some sort. Ask those people to hold off for a few minutes and go around the team or group to hear everyone else's input on the issue. This will help to flesh out the thinking and analysis without even using polarity language or analysis. Once you've do the "go around," consider using one of the interventions above.

Identify the Focus & the Frame

Talk about the need for both interests or values, and suggest that one might be the group's focus while the other might be put "in frame," meaning that we will track impacts and outcomes in that area even if it's not our strategic focus. For example, "Can we agree that we'll focus on reducing worker exposures to hazardous chemicals, and we'll put environmental discharges in our frame?"

Foster Mutual Appreciation

Have each person share 2 benefits (or upsides) of the other person's perspective, then move to one of the interventions above to flesh out the shared understanding even more.

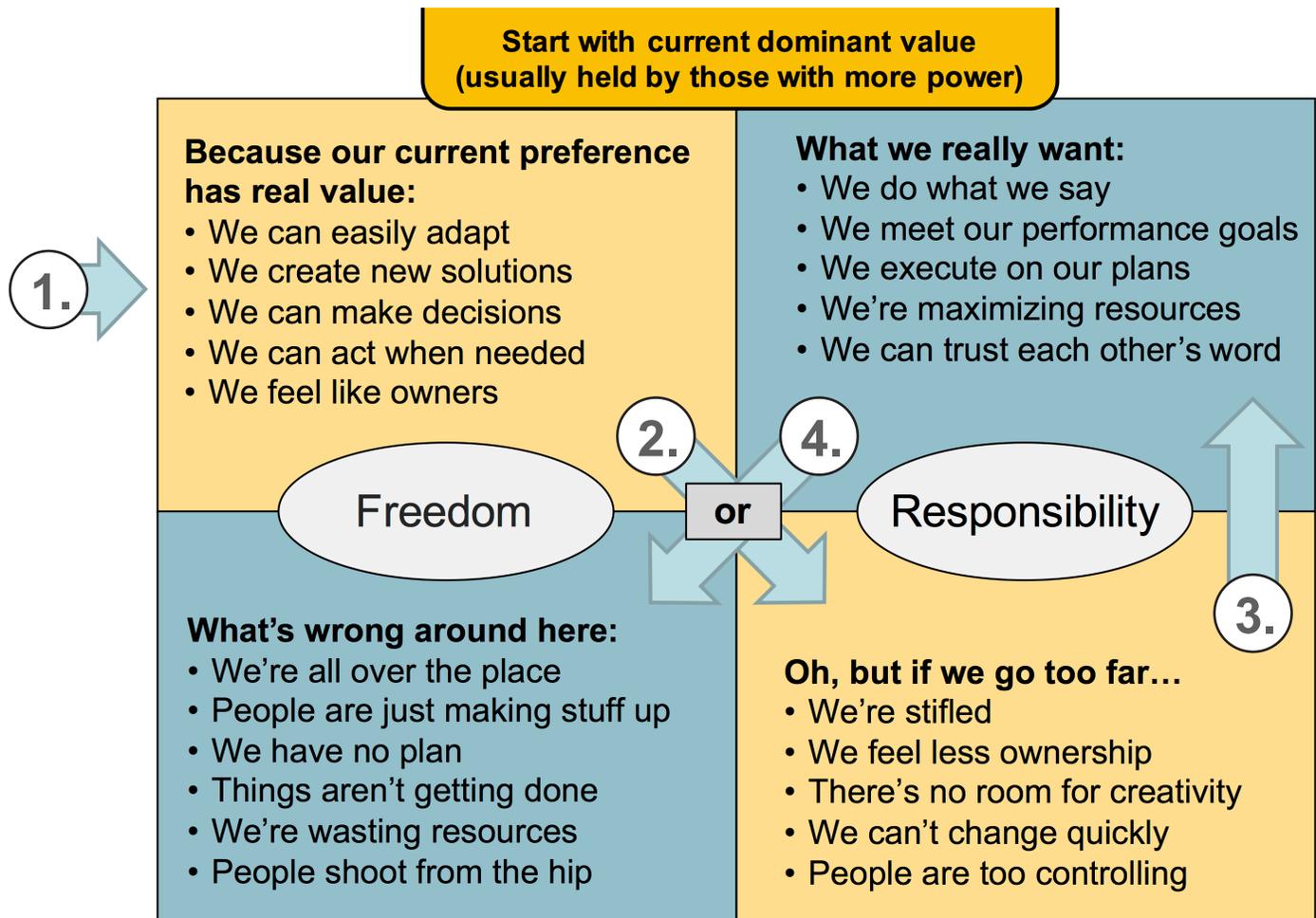
Develop Design Criteria

Use the upsides and downsides of your polarity as design criteria to design a better approach or solution. Example: How might we design a great workplace culture that's both highly accountable and deeply supportive?

Intervening with Established Power Structure

This may be the the most common intervention since it first acknowledges the values and fears of the current dominant thinking in the group, usually that of the people with the most power.

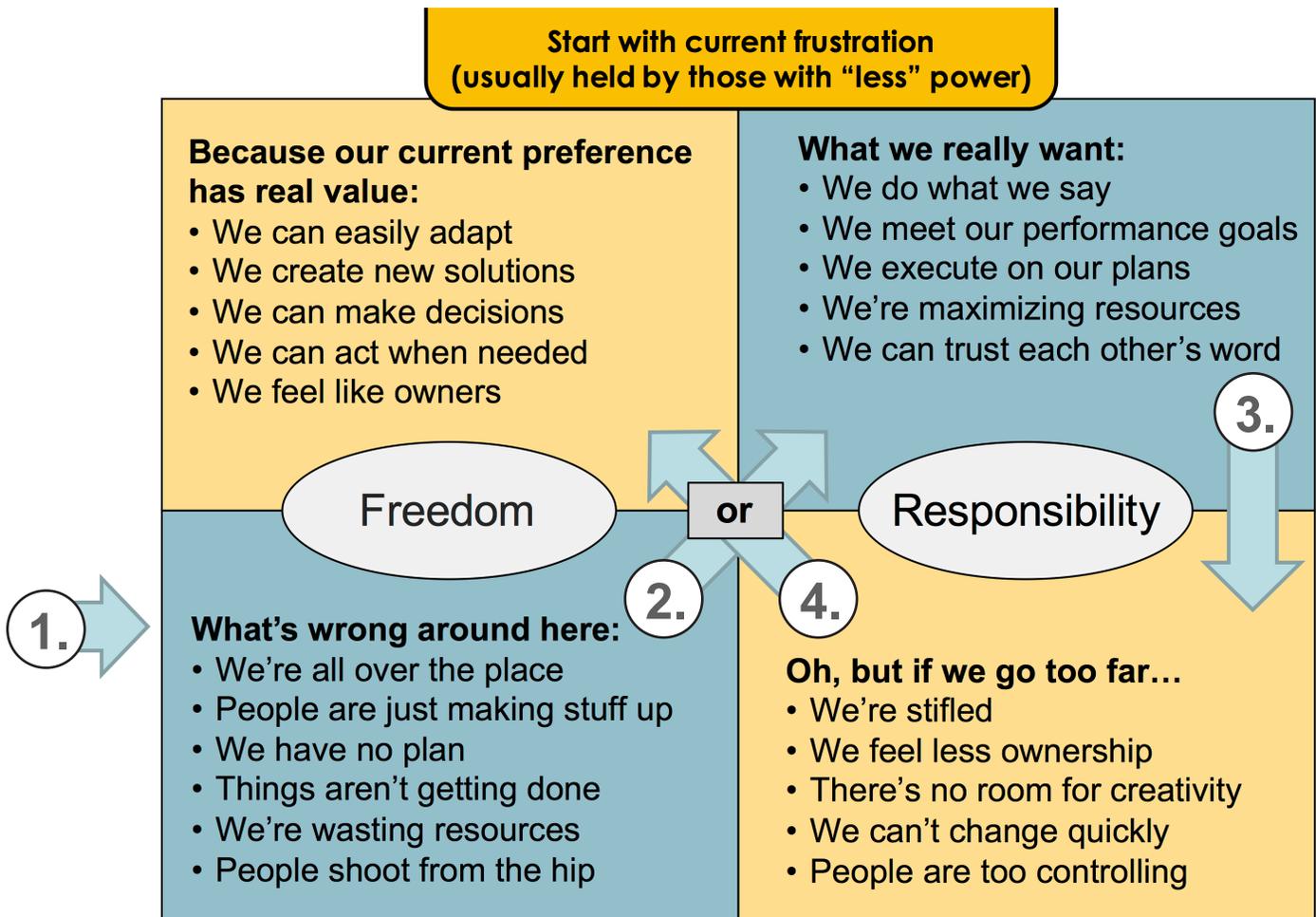
We start by acknowledging the upsides of the dominant value and then the downsides of the subordinated value. Once we've done that, the people who hold that dominant value are much more likely to be willing to explore the rest of the map.



Intervening with High Frustration/Revolt

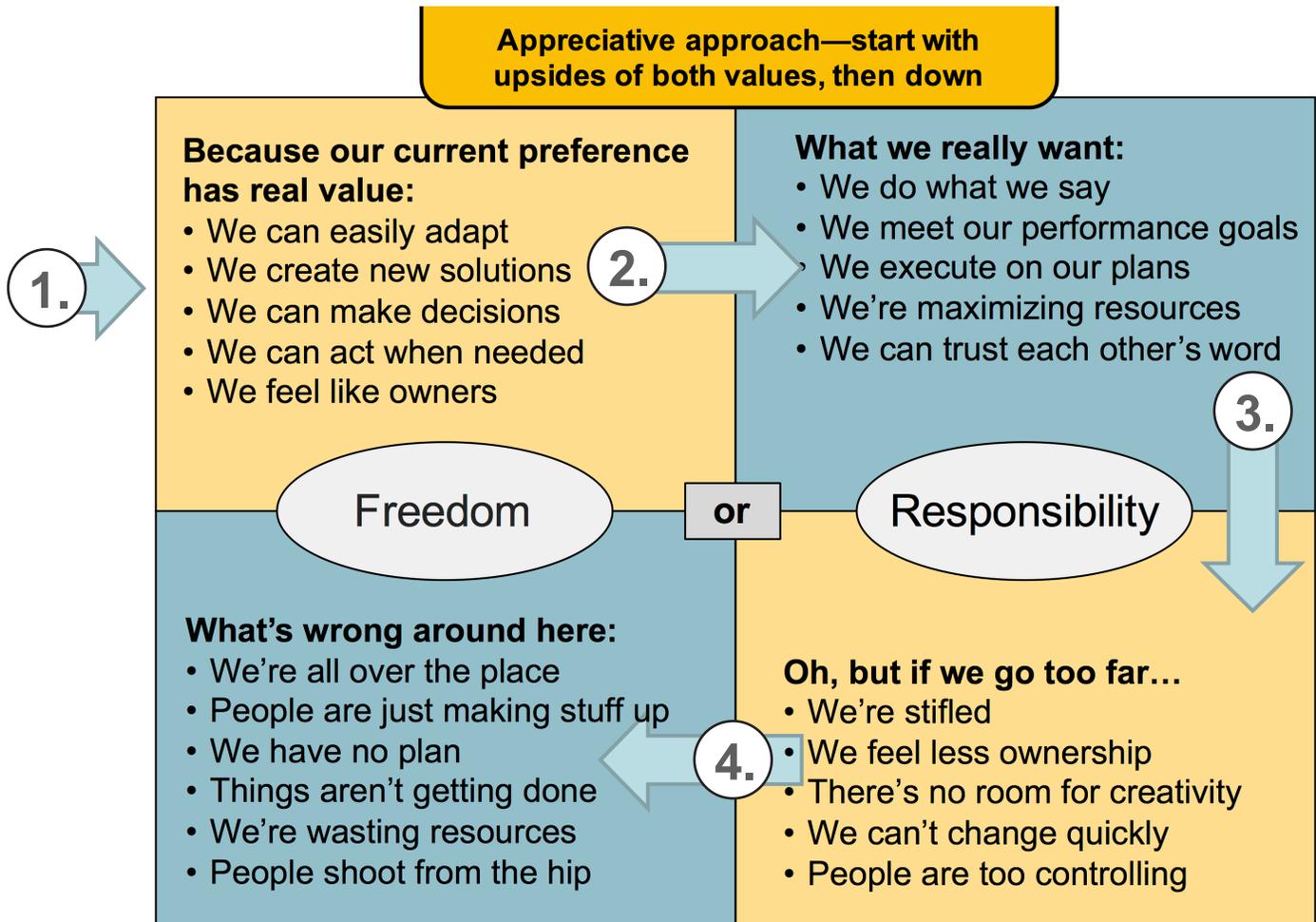
When a group within the group has revolted against those in power, they may have more immediate power, especially if the urgency and legitimacy of their concerns are high.

In this situation, we might start by acknowledging the downsides of the current dominant value and from there through the map. You will probably want to work with the formal leaders before you take this approach so they are open to starting the conversation this way.



An Appreciative Approach

This way of intervening in a polarity is the safest bet, since it starts by acknowledging the upsides of both values. However, it isn't the strongest way to approach polarities in all situations. Let your intuition tell you when this or other interventions might be the best approach. Or better yet, test your plan with a colleague who thinks differently than you!



Assessing Polarities

Once we've refined the values and fears in the four quadrants of the polarity, we can convert the map into a useful assessment tool. By asking stakeholders to indicate how often they are experiencing the values and fears, we can assess together how we're doing in leveraging the polarity.

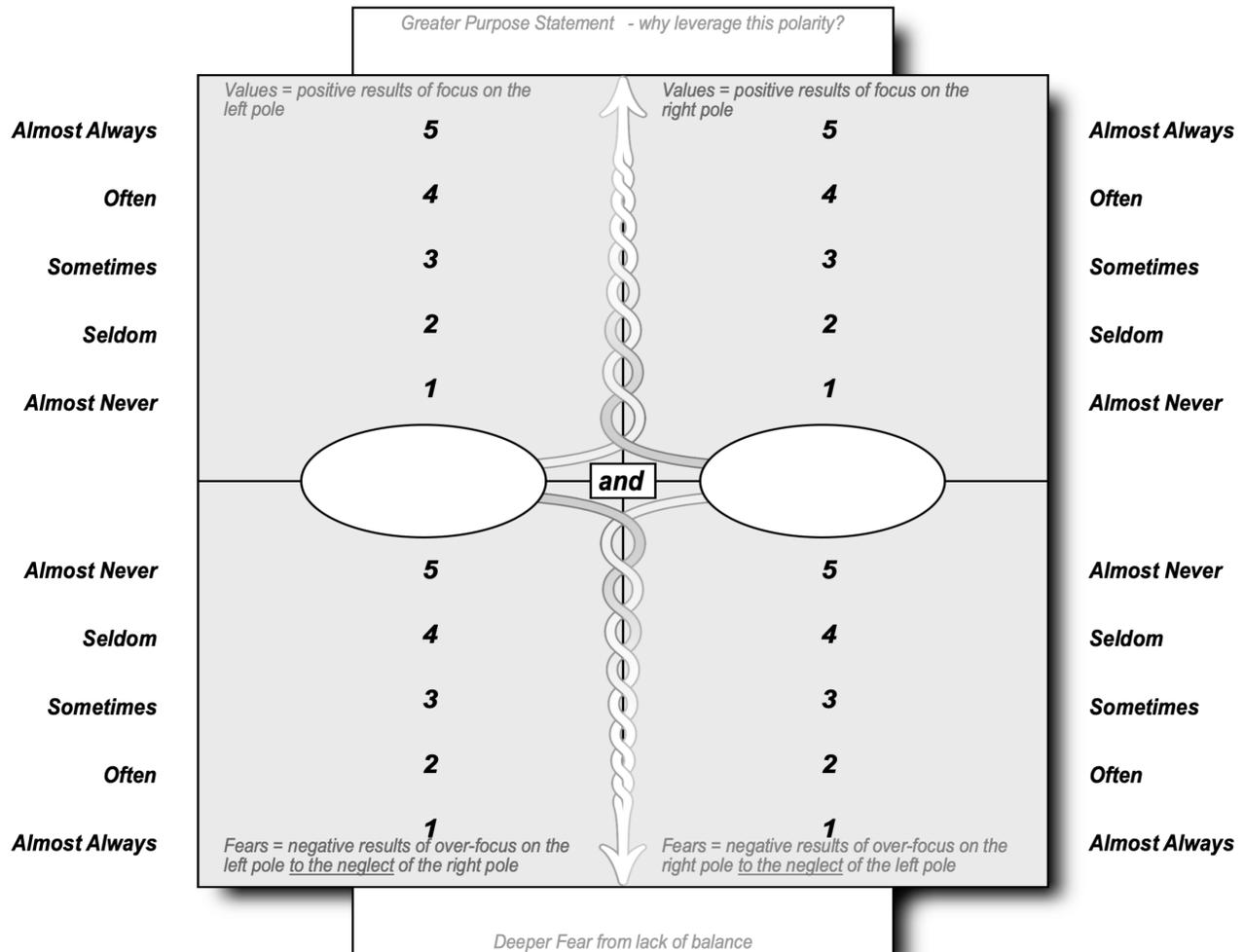


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Unleashing Innovation

Don't make the mistake of thinking of polarity management as simply achieving balance between two opposing forces. Balance is about getting to a static compromise that holds.

Leveraging polarities is a *dynamic* process of actively working towards the upsides of both poles, driving deeper innovation and genuine inclusion.

Achieving balance in a polarity is like mixing the ingredients for a cake.
Leveraging a polarity to get more of each pole is like baking and eating the cake!

In fact, the cake metaphor is quite appropriate because the poles of a polarity actually "feed" each other when the polarity is well-leveraged!

Consider how the following companies leverage core strategic polarities to their competitive advantage:

Google	Innovation & Stability
eBay	Buyer interests & Seller interests
Toyota	Stability & Innovation
Green Mountain Coffee Roasters	Company benefit & Social benefit
Seventh Generation	Safe & Effective
Royal Dutch/Shell Group	Centralization & Decentralization
Virgin Group	Business profit & Anti-establishment protest
AMD (Dresden plant)	American can-do optimism & German thoroughness
Hanover Insurance	Strong branches & Strong central staff

Our favorite example is Z Energy, a New Zealand energy company that has positioned 8 key polarities at the center of its strategy framework, called "A World of Both." The company is driving innovation with polarities like delivering premium services in a low-cost model.

The same is also true for larger "systems" than companies.

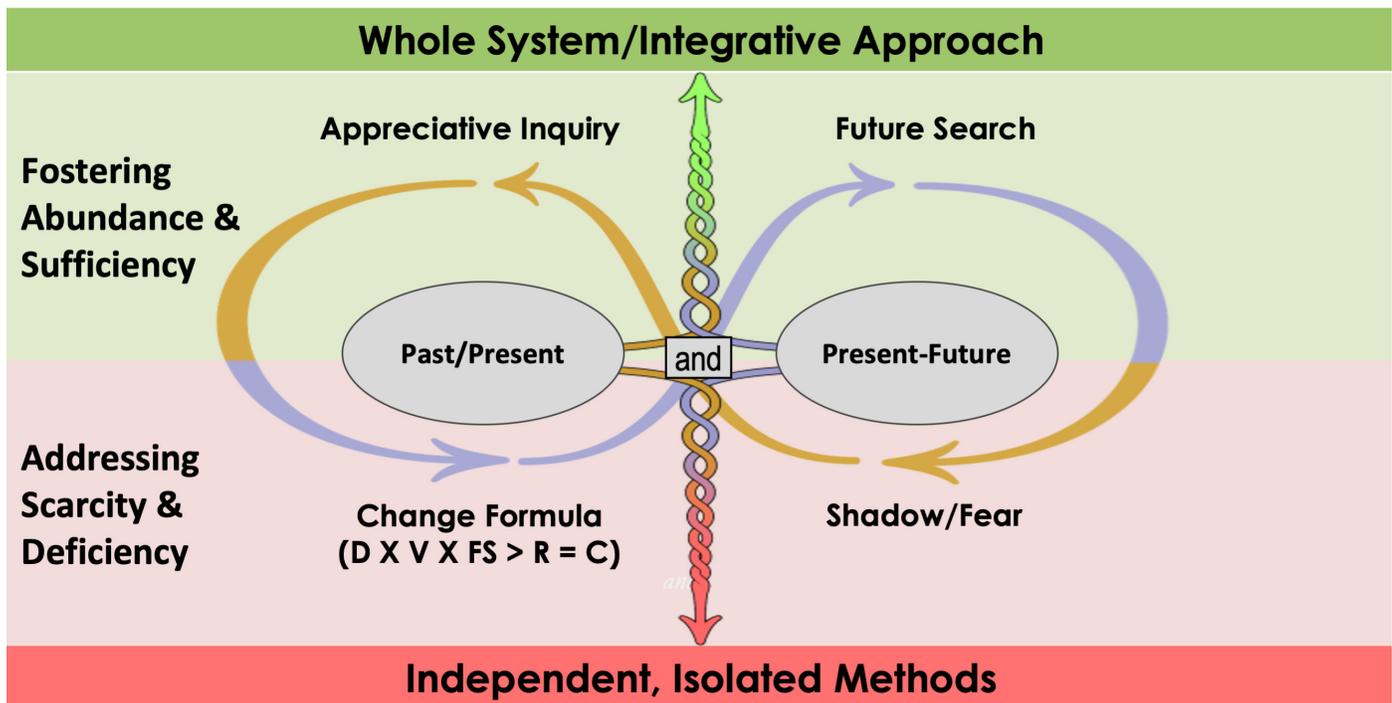
Consider the following social innovations and the values polarities behind them. In a sense, a poorly-leveraged polarity is a "false choice," where people believe we must have one value OR it's "opposite."

We are now beginning as a society to think more integratively and synergistically about these tensions and, as we've started to leverage these tensions more fully, we're driving massive innovation on a national and international scale.

Employment & Environment	Green jobs
Business & Environment	Green business/commerce
Business & Society	CSR
Individual success & Success for all	Social entrepreneurship
Focus on production & Focus on distribution	Smart grid
Energy & Environment	Clean energy
Public interest & Private interest	Charter schools
Commerce & Development	Microfinance
Philanthropy & Commerce	Cause marketing
Poverty alleviation/Development & Commerce	Bottom of the pyramid” business
Focus on waste & Focus on resources Focus on inputs & Focus on outputs	Closed-loop processes, Product take-back

An Integrative Approach

You may be familiar with various approaches to collaboration, meaning-making, and change. Seeing these in the context of a Past-Present & Present-Future polarity helps us better understand the unique contribution of each and develop a more complete and integrative approach to continuity and change.



Next Steps

Six simple ways to exercise your polarity thinking muscles:

Practice Mapping

Use the basic polarity grid to structure what you're hearing—start with frustrations or fears, or people talking about their values or interests and sketch the map from there. Pencil in potential pole names as you complete the map.

Watch for Pairing

Look for people “pairing off” around polarity tensions. You'll probably see this within a week of the training!

Read the News!

News articles and talk shows are full of polarities because journalists are taught to report in the point-counterpoint style (it's supposed to be “balanced” reporting, but it's often polarized reporting).

Find a Polarity Partner

Try mapping with another person because your values blind you to the other value. Try mapping a dimension of Myers-Briggs or cultural differences, for example.

Build Your Repertoire

Develop a “polarity repertoire,” by listing polarities that you see over time in your personal polarity notebook (which we assume you have now).

Deepen Your Learning

Get advanced training from Polarity Partnerships. Learn more at www.polaritypartnerships.com

POLARITY RESOURCES

Archetypal Polarities

- Rational & Existential
- Part & Part
- Part & Whole
- Differentiating & Integrating
- Action & Meaning
- Order & Chaos
- Events & Patterns
- Content & Process
- Cause & Effect

Examples from Real Organizations

Private Sector

EILEEN FISHER

- Up-front commitments & Business flexibility
- Cost of goods & Fair wages & eco-preferred materials
- Vendor quality attributes & Eco/ethical attributes
- Consumption & Fashion & Conscious capitalism and sustainability

Ben & Jerry's

- Product/profits & Social Outcomes
- Pioneering innovations & Cost cutting
- Technological advancements & Pure & natural
- Suppliers needs & interests & Brand needs and interests
- Brand interests & Owner/parent interests
- Social purpose & Economic/profitability & Quality

eBay (Marketplace)

- Seller interests & Buyer interests. How do we create this program so that it delivers additional value for sellers and is easy to administer and participate in for sellers?
- Getting what I want & Buying greener. How do we ensure that customers are getting good value on the basics while we work to green the products and shipping?

eBay Enterprise

- Stability & Change
- Vertical management & Horizontal collaboration
- R&D / technical creativity (what we can make) & Market/Customer needs (what we can sell)
- Reduce cost & Innovate
- The formal structure & The informal organization
- Centralize & Decentralize
- Leading others & Act as subject matter expert

Fortune 500 Pharmaceutical Company

- Complexity & Simplicity: The nature of our business is complex by design. How do we handle the complexity and keep things clear and simple strategically and tactically?
- Short-term & Long-term: How do we optimize a dual focus on short-term tactical results while clarifying our long-term strategic needs?
- Formal Structure & Information Relationships: How do we get the discipline and clear process of working through the formal structure while gaining speed and agility by working through informal relationships, without creating a sloppy process?
- Directive & Collaborative: How do we manage to engage and get the best of everyone's contributions while leading and directing where needed?
- Big Pharma & Biotech: How do we create stability based on our strong tradition and pharma success as we strive for the benefits of agility and innovation from biotech?
- Science or Market: How do we listen to and respond to the markets needs as a source of innovation while we also leverage our science as a source of innovation?
- Shareholder interests & Stakeholder interests: How can we financial return to shareholders and social return for stakeholders?

Consulting Firm

- Traditional & New
- Team & Individual
- Entrepreneurial & Methodical
- Waiting for business & Pursuing new business
- Preserve the Core & Stimulate progress
- Think & Do
- Relating with the consultant & Relating with the brand
- Working under a single brand & Working independently
- Embedding internally & Consulting externally
- Diagnostic & Dialogic
- Owners' interests & Team's interests

Government—National

Third Way Ideas Retreat with Senior Congressional Leaders

- Efficient spending & Sufficient revenues
- Private sector & Public sector
- Asserting US interests & Ensuring a fair playing field
- National interests & Global interests
- National interests & Local concerns
- Corporate-friendly taxation & Strong enforcement
- Private interest & Public interest
- Autonomy & Responsibility
- Education investment & Accountability for performance
- Local responsibility & Federal responsibility
- Adequate immigration levels & Selective immigration policies
- Individual interests & Whole economy interests
- Sufficient investment & Efficient/effective investment
- Support & Accountability
- Private investment & Public investment

Key Executive Leadership Conference, American University

- Expansive & Structured
- Individual autonomy & Collective purpose
- Information sharing & Information security

U.S. Food & Drug Administration

- Vision & operational reality
- Build Faith & Manage Expectations
- Engage & Lead
- Execute/Implement & Communicate
- Personal views & Unified approach
- Intent & Impact
- Taking responsibility myself & Relying on others to take responsibility
- Specialist & Generalist
- Valuing the old & Embracing the new
- Maintaining old systems & Designing new systems
- Making plan happen & Making plan work for people

- Getting the work done & Investing in people
- Effective & Efficient

New Zealand Transport Agency/Waka Kotahi

- Growth & Efficiency
- Save money internally & save money for our customers
- Safety & efficiency/cost
- Be adaptive & Do what suits the organisation as a whole.
- Political & Industry decision-making.
- National office & Regional office
- Leadership & Management
- Service relationships & Partnering relationships
- Technical & Customer
- Construction & Whole of life cost
- Demand management & Capacity
- Certainty & Ambiguity

ThinkCamp: New Zealand and Australia Public Sector Leaders

- Design thinking & Political imperatives

New Zealand Department of Labour/Hikina Whakatutuki

- Short-term & Long term
- Following the plan & adapting
- Directive & Participative
- Honesty & Diplomacy
- Do it fast & Do it well
- Effective & Efficient
- Caring for the people & Achieving the task

New Zealand Institute of Management (Public Sector Leadership Seminar)

- Innovative & Operational
- Collaborative & Directive
- Agile & Systematic
- Intuitive & Data-driven
- Value-driven & Pragmatic

Leadership Development Centre/Ara Kaiarahitanga

- Conditional respect & Unconditional respect
- Task & Relationship
- Candor & Diplomacy
- Responsibility & Freedom
- Confidence & Humility
- Analysis & Encouragement
- Control & Empowerment
- Focused & Expansive
- Structure & Flexibility
- Logic & Creativity
- Individual & Work group
- Planning & Implementation

Government—Local

Sustainable DC

- Internal priorities & External priorities
- Working to our priorities & Engaging/leveraging others
- Sticking to the plan & Adapting to the best course
- Short term focus & Long term focus
- Quick wins & Systemic change

Auckland Council

- Government & Community
- Quick wins & Systemic change
- Strengths approach & Recognition of serious social problems
- Localized & Centralized
- Unity & Diversity

Faith Communities

Episcopal Clergy

- Work & Home: A priest has a 24/7 job. How do we fulfill our pastoral duties well and also enjoy fulfilling personal lives?
- Action & Reflection: As we take care of daily administrative tasks, are we ensuring that we also have the time and space for preparation and reflection?

- Inward Serving & Outward Reaching: As we focus on our flocks during this difficult time, how do we also reach out and care for our communities?
- Accountability & Support: How do we ensure that we are both accountable to one another and our congregations and get the support we each need?
- Action & Reflection: As we take care of daily administrative tasks (like having something repaired in the building), are we ensuring that we also have the time and space for reflection?
- Centralization & Decentralization: The Church is both hierarchical and democratic. How do we get the best of both?
- Tradition & Change: The Church has a powerful tradition and also needs to adapt to changing times. How do we carry forward our traditions while being innovative in how we adapt?
- Short-term & Long-term: How can a priest who is focused on short-term needs of the parish also be thinking about the long-term health of the church?
- Parish responsibility & Diocese responsibility
- Leadership & Followership
- Conditional acceptance (behaviors) & Unconditional love (person)

Catholic Clergy

- Work & Prayer
- Action & Contemplation

Social Sector/NGOs

Engineers Without Borders Canada (based on their annual “Failures Report”)

- Risk & Caution
- Short-term focus & Long-term focus
- Bottom-up approach & Top-down approach
- Doing project independently & Partnering on projects
- Decentralization/autonomy & Centralization/coordination
- Managing knowledge & Leveraging knowledge at hand
- Constituent insight & Whole system perspective
- Field insight & Influence on partners
- Building relationships & Building ownership
- Building the program & Supporting partners to build the program
- Funders’ interests & Project needs
- Relying on successful partnership & Reassessing partners for new projects
- Efficiency & Inclusion
- Leadership development & chapter development
- Financing & Social impact

- Margin & Mission
- Capitalizing growth & Investing in learning
- Official government & Traditional governance
- Seeing individual cases & Seeing systemic trends
- Responsibility & Support
- Talking the talk & Walking the walk
- Transparency & Discretion
- Formulating strategy & Testing assumptions
- Engaging leaders in change & Engaging organization in change
- Implementing change & Communicating change
- Vision & Operational realities

Labor/Unions

National Education Association

- Compliance & Capacity
- Service organization & Organizing
- Student-centered & Teacher-centered
- Stick by principles/positions & Be open to collaboration/compromise
- Reality & Faith
- Tradition/core values & Innovation/change
- Preserve core & Stimulate change
- Freedom & Responsibility
- Reality & Faith
- Humility & Will

Development

UN Development Program

- Centralized & Decentralized
- Continuity & Innovation
- Taking a multi-disciplinary approach & Leveraging technical silos
- Capturing results & “Doing the work”
- Keeping people and communities safe & Embracing risk

Education

Center for Reinventing Public Education

- Protecting teachers & Reforming education: How do we develop “Teacher-Leaders” who strongly advocate for teachers AND are strong leaders in education reform?

Waters Foundation/Systems Thinking in Schools Institute

- Individual responsibility & Teamwork
- Individuality & Community
- Curriculum & Instruction
- Local needs & Global needs
- Skills & Application
- Requirements & Relevance
- Today’s Education System & Tomorrow’s educational system
- Speaking & Listening
- Career prep & College prep
- Independent work & Cooperative work
- Expectation (student) & Belief system (teacher)
- Home/parent support & Classroom/teacher support
- Direction by student & Direction by teacher
- Belief & Faith
- Self-interest & Common good
- Intent & impact
- Thinking skills & Behavior skills

Innovation Networks

Common Collaboration Polarities

- Self-interest & Common good
- Quick wins & Systemic change
- Focus on tasks & Focus on relationships
- Action orientation & Learning focus
- Head & Heart
- Being intuitive & Being analytical/ data-driven
- Fostering unity & Encouraging debate
- Highest leverage actions & easily sellable actions

- Humility & Confidence
- Visionary & Practical
- Being open & Being discreet
- Simplicity & Deep understanding
- Purists & Pragmatists
- If & How

Clean Electronics

- Eliminating hazard & Eliminating exposure
- Worker exposures & Environmental discharges
- Quick wins & Systemic change

Carbon Farming

- Commodity scale & Integrated production

50x50 (growing employee ownership in the U.S.)

- Workplace democracy & Employee ownership
- Employee retirement security & Employee ownership

Healthcare Anchor Network (directing health system economic assets toward communities)

- Clinical interventions & Socio-economic interventions
- Advancing business needs & Affecting upstream determinants
- Procuring at lowest cost & Supporting local suppliers
- Reliable supply & Procuring locally
- Maximizing ROI across portfolio & Community investment
- Getting top talent & Hiring local residents
- Facility placement/supporting staff & Facility placement/supporting community
- Whole community development & Address disparities
- Raising the playing field for all & Leveling the playing field

Human Rights Measurement Initiative

- Meaningful metrics & Feasible metrics

CoCreative's Key Polarities

Leadership

1. Visionary & Pragmatic
2. Analytical & Intuitive
3. Authentic & Diplomatic
4. Confident & Humble
5. Directive & Participative
6. Systematic & Flexible
7. Focused on planning & Focused on implementation
8. Focused on short-term & Focused on long term
9. Focused on tasks & Focused on relationships
10. Ensuring accountability & Ensuring autonomy
11. Simplifying things & Ensuring deep understanding
12. Encouraging disruption & Encouraging operational excellence

Private Sector

1. Profitability & Growth
2. The whole & The parts
3. Preserve the core & Stimulate progress
4. Rational & Intuitive
5. Planned & Emergent
6. Needs-based opportunities & Resource-based opportunities
7. Responsiveness & Integration
8. Competition & Collaboration
9. Compliance & Choice
10. Control & Chaos
11. Globalization & Localization
12. Profitability & Responsibility

12 Organizational Polarities

1. Centralized coordination & Decentralized initiatives
2. Recognize the individual & Recognize the team
3. Reduce cost & Improve quality
4. Competing with others & Collaborating with others
5. Stability & Change

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6. Celebrating our differences & Celebrating our commonalities
7. Care for my part of the organization & Care for the whole organization
8. Showing respect for every person & Showing respect based on performance
9. Short term (Tactical) & Long term (Strategic)
10. Taking care of the organization & Taking care of the customer
11. Work & Home
12. Growth & Profitability

Polarities Master List

A few people diving deep/shaping up & Getting perspective/insight from everyone
 Above the neck learning & Below the neck learning
 Absolute truth & Relative truth
 Accountability & Support
 Accuracy & Thoroughness
 Action & Reflection/Contemplation
 Action orientation & Learning focus
 Activity & Rest
 Adaptive & Systematic
 Adequate immigration levels & Selective immigration policies
 Advocacy & Inquiry
 Affect & Intellect
 Agency & Patience
 Agile & Systematic
 Alignment & Diversity
 American can-do optimism & German careful thoroughness
 Analysis & Encouragement
 Analytical & Action-oriented
 Analytical & Intuitive
 Analyzing & Imagining
 Anticipate customer needs & Respond to customer feedback
 Apology & Forgiveness
 Applying & Learning
 Asserting US interests & Ensuring a fair global playing field
 Assertive & Cooperative
 Assertive/bold & Compassionate/concerned
 Authentic & Diplomatic
 Autonomous & Integrated
 Autonomy & Mutual accountability
 Autonomy & Responsibility
 Be adaptive & Be efficient
 Be adaptive & Do what suits the organisation as a whole
 Be here & Be at work
 Be hopeful (Opportunity) & Be wary (Danger)
 Belief & Faith
 Big pharma & Biotech
 Big picture strategy & Operational objectives
 Bottom-up approach & Top-down approach
 Brand interests & Owner/parent interests
 Breakthrough & Incremental
 Build faith & Manage expectations
 Building great teams & Leveraging individuals' capabilities
 Building relationships & Building ownership
 Building the program & Supporting partners to build the program
 Business & Environment
 Business & Society
 Business profit & Anti-establishment protest
 Businesses & Consumers
 Buyer interests & Seller interests
 Candor & Diplomacy
 Capitalizing growth & Investing in learning
 Capturing results & "Doing the work"
 Care for my part of the organization & Care for the whole organization
 Care for self & Care for others
 Career prep & College prep
 Caring for the people & Achieving the task
 Celebrating our differences & Celebrating our commonalities
 Centralization & Decentralization
 Centralize & Decentralize
 Centralized & Decentralized
 Centralized coordination & Decentralized initiatives
 Certainty & Ambiguity
 Champion/push & Accept/learn
 Choice & Compliance
 Clear & Open
 Clinical Interventions & Socio-economic Interventions
 Collaborative & Directive
 Collegiality & Individuality
 Commerce & Development
 Commitment & Possibilities
 Commitment & Skepticism
 Commodity scale & Integrated production
 Common purpose & Program priorities/needs
 Competence & Respect
 Competing with others & Collaborating with others
 Competition & Collaboration

Competition & Cooperation	coordination
Complexity & Simplicity	Deductive & Inductive
Compliance & Capacity	Deep understanding & Simplicity
Compliance & Choice	Defending our members/constituents & Leading the profession
Concentrating & Disbursing	Deliberate & Emergent
Conditional acceptance (Behaviors) & Unconditional acceptance (Person)	Demand management & Capacity
Conditional respect & Unconditional positive regard	Depth & Breadth
Confidence & Competence	Design thinking & Political Imperatives
Confident & Flexible	Detachment & Attachment
Confident & Humble	Details & Big picture
Consistency & Agility	Developing people (fostering the leadership of others) & Getting the work done (leading it myself)
Consistent & Adaptable	Diagnostic & Dialogic
Constituent insight & Whole system perspective	Differentiation & Integration
Construction cost & Whole of life cost	Direction & Participation
Consumer benefit & Producer benefit	Direction by student & Direction by teacher
Consumption/fashion & Conscious capitalism/ sustainability	Directive & Collaborative
Consumption & Reduction	Directive & Consultative
Content & Context	Directive & Participative
Continuity & Innovation	Directive leadership & Collaborative leadership
Control & Chaos	Discipline & Encouragement
Control & Empowerment	Discipline & Entrepreneurship
Control costs & Improve quality	Discussing & Doing
Convergent & Divergent	Dissatisfaction & Inspiration
Corporate-friendly taxation & Strong enforcement	Distinctions & Interrelations
Cost of goods & Fair wages/eco-preferred materials	Diverging & Converging
Courage & Caution	Diversity & Homogeneity
Creativity & Logic	Do & Think
Creativity/innovation & Continuity/stability	Do it fast & Do it well
Cultural & Multicultural	Doing & Planning
Curriculum & Instruction	Doing project independently & Partnering on projects
Custom information & Common information	Doing the best & Being the best
Cutting edge & Continuous improvement	Doing the work & Managing knowledge
Data-driven & Intuitive	Doing things right & Doing the right things
Dealing with details & Looking at the big picture	Doing work & Deepening relationships
Dealing with reality & Dealing with possibilities	Driven by principles & Pragmatic
Debate (dialectic approach) & Co-design ("yes, and" approach)	Durability & Pliability
Debate & Unity	Early wins & Deeper innovation
Decentralization/autonomy & Centralization/	Economies of scale & Adaptability
	Economy & Environment
	Education investment & Accountability for performance

Effective & Efficient	Facts & Story
Efficiency & Effectiveness	Faith & Reality
Efficiency & Inclusion	Familiar & Novel
Efficient & Effective	Fast & Slow
Efficient spending & Sufficient revenues	Faster & Better
Eliminating hazard & Eliminating exposure	Feasibility & Impact
Elitist & Pluralistic	Field insight & Influence on partners
Embedding internally & Consulting externally	Financial self-interest & Common good
Embracing ambiguity & Creating clarity/ certainty	Financing & Social impact
Empirical & Theoretical	Finite & Infinite
Employment & Environment	Focus & Frame
Encouraging disruption & Encouraging operational excellence	Focus on inputs & Focus on outputs
Energetic & Reflective	Focus on one unit (personalize) & Focus on whole population (scale)
Energy & Environment	Focus on productivity & Focus on relationships
Energy today & Energy for the future	Focus on self & Focus on other
Engage & Lead	Focus on task & Focus on relationships
Engage & Listen	Focus on waste & Focus on resources
Engaging leaders in change & Engaging organization in change	Focused & Expansive
Enlightenment, consciousness, (manifestation) & Illusion, pre or unconscious (incubation)	Focused & Flexible
Ensuring accountability & Ensuring autonomy	Focused on planning & Focused on implementation
Enthusiastic & Reserved	Focused on short-term & Focused on long term
Entrepreneur leading & Partners leading	Focused on tasks & Focused on relationships
Entrepreneurial & Methodical	Focusing on beneficiaries & Taking care of ourselves
Equity & Equality	Focusing on home & Focusing on work
Evaluation & Imagination	Following the plan & Adapting to new information
Evolutionary & Revolutionary	Formal structure & Informal relationships
Exclusion & Inclusion	Formulating strategy & Testing assumptions
Execute/Implement & Communicate	Fostering personal responsibility & Fostering social supports
Exhale & Inhale	Fostering unity & Encouraging debate
Expansive & Structured	Freedom & Accountability
Expectation (student) & Belief system (teacher)	Freedom & Equality
Expectations & Discovery	Freedom & Fairness
Expertise & Beginner's Mind	Freedom & Mutual accountability
Explicit & Implicit	Freedom & Responsibility
Exterior & Interior	Fun & Serious
External focus & Internal focus	Functional & Beautiful
Extraversion & Introversion	Functional lines & Service lines
Facility placement that supports staff & Facility placement that supports the community	Funders' interests & Project needs
Facts & Inspiration	Getting the work done & Investing in people

Getting top talent & Hiring local residents	Individual identity & Organization assimilation
Getting what I want & Buying greener	Individual interests & Institutional interests
Giving value by showing how to succeed & Seeking help to learn about the project	Individual interests & Whole economy Interests
Globalization & Localization	Individual needs & Community needs
Going Broad & Going Deep	Individual responsibility & Teamwork
Going fast to perform & Going slow to prepare	Individual success & Success for all
Government & Community	Individual success/recognition & Collective success
Growth & Efficiency	Individuality & Community
Growth & Profitability	Information for a fee & Information as free
Hard minds & Soft hearts	Information sharing & Information security
Head & Heart	Innovating & Staying the course
Here & Away	Innovation & Integration
Highest leverage & Easily sellable	Innovation & Operational excellence
Highest leverage actions & easily sellable actions	Innovation & Stability
Highest leverage solutions & Easily sellable solutions	Innovative & Operational
Hold responsible & Give freedom	Inside government & Outside government
Home/parent support & Classroom/teacher support	Insider knowledge & Outside perspective
Honesty & Diplomacy	Intellectual Inquiry & Knowing Action
How things are & How things can be	Intent & Impact
Human health & Environmental health	Internal & External
Humility & Confidence	Internal focus & External focus
Humility & Will	Internal priorities & External priorities
I am teaching & I am intervening	Internal stakeholders & External stakeholders
I want & We need	Introvert & Extravert
If & How	Intuitive & Analytical/data-driven
Image & Substance	Inward serving & Outward reaching
Implement & Plan	Judging & Perceiving
Implementing & Planning	Justice & Charity
Implementing change & Communicating change	Justice & Mercy
Imposing & Facilitating	Keeping people and communities safe & Embracing risk
Independence & Interdependence	Keeping people safe & Taking risks/creating space for failure
Independent work & Cooperative work	Known & Unknown
Independent/strong & Humble/open	Lead & Follow
Individual & Collective	Lead & Manage
Individual & Work Group	Leadership & Followership
Individual autonomy & Collective purpose	Leadership & Management
Individual behavior & Personal meaning	Leadership & Participation
Individual company initiatives & Moving together	Leadership development & chapter development
Individual effort & Group effort	Leading & Serving
Individual goals & Organizational goals	Leading directly & Fostering the leadership of others

Lead others & Act as subject matter expert	opportunities
Learning & Doing	Negotiation & Ventilation
Learning & Solutioning	Niche & Mainstream
Learning from experience & Learning from books	Normative & Contextual
Left-brain & Right brain	Nurturing people/Support & Demanding High Performance/Accountability
Levels/stages & Dimensions	Objective & Subjective
Leveraging technical silos & Taking a multi-disciplinary approach	Objectively real & Subjectively problematic
Liveability & Sustainability	Observe & Imagine
Local focus & National focus	Official government & Traditional governance
Local needs & Global needs	Open & Discreet
Local procurement & Economies of scale	Open to events & Intentional about results
Local Responsibility & Federal Responsibility	Openness & Discretion
Localized & Centralized	Opposing authority & Supporting authority
Logic & Creativity	Optimistic & Realistic
Logical & Metaphorical	Order & Chaos
Long-term & Short-term	Our people leading & Partners leading
Maintaining old systems & Designing new systems	Output & Input
Maintenance & Emergence	Owners' interests & Team's interests
Making a living & Making a life	Parish responsibility & Diocese responsibility
Making the plan happen & Making the plan work for people	Part & Part
Making things simple & Fostering deep understanding	Part & Whole
Manage costs & Equip people	Participate & Observe
Managerial & Transformational	Partnering/collaborator & Leading/entrepreneur
Managing knowledge & Leveraging knowledge at hand	Passion & Competence
Mandatory & Discretionary	People & Planet
Margin & Mission	Performance & Perception
Materialization & Intention	Personal Interests & Organization Interests
Maximize & Meta-mize	Personal responsibility & Social support
Maximizing ROI across portfolio & Community investment	Personal views & Unified approach
Meaningful Metrics & Feasible Metrics	Philanthropy & Commerce
Meritocracy & Diversity	Pioneering innovations & Cost cutting
Method & Meaning	Plan & Improvise
Mission & Margin	Planned & Emergent
Moving fast & Moving Slow	Planned & Opportunistic
National interests & Global interests	Planning & Execution
National interests & International Interests	Planning & Implementation
National interests & Local concerns	Plans & Issues
National office & Regional office	Policies/systems & Practices/behaviors
Needs-based opportunities & Resource-based	Political & Industry decision-making.
	Poverty alleviation & Commerce
	Power & Love
	Practical & Idealistic
	Preparation & Incubation
	Preserve & Grow

Preserve core & Stimulate change
Principled & Engaged
Private interests & Public interest
Private investment & Public investment
Private sector & Public sector
Proactive & Reactive
Problem & Polarity
Proceeding with confidence & Proceeding
with humility
Procuring at lowest cost & Supporting local
suppliers
Product/profits & Social outcomes
Product driven & Market driven
Professional & Grassroots
Profitability & Growth
Profitability & Responsibility
Projection & Introjection
Protecting myself & Opening up
Protecting teachers & Reforming education
Prove/verify & Envision
Public interest & Private interest
Purists & Pragmatists
Push & Pull
Pushing entrepreneur & Patient partner
Pushing maverick & Patient partner
Quantitative & Qualitative
Quick wins & Systemic change
R&D/technical creativity (what we can make)
& Market/customer needs (what we can sell)
Raising the playing field for all & Leveling the
playing field
Rational & Intuitive
Realistic & Optimistic
Reality & Faith
Reality & Vision
Reason & Faith
Reasonable & Faith
Recognize the individual & Recognize the
team
Recruitment & Retention
Reduce & Expand
Reduce cost & Improve quality
Reduce cost & Innovate
Relating with the consultant & Relating with
the brand
Reliable supply & Procuring locally

Relying on successful partnership &
Reassessing partners for new projects
Requirements & Relevance
Responsibility & Freedom
Responsibility & Support
Responsiveness & Integration
Results & Process
Revolutionary & Evolutionary
Rigor & Creativity
Risk & Caution
Risk & Safety
Safe & Effective
Safety & efficiency/cost
Sagely wisdom & Child-like inquiry
Save money internally & save money for our
customers
Scale & Values
Science or Market
Seeing individual cases & Seeing systemic
trends
Segmented & Contextual
Self & Organization
Self & Other
Self service & Community service
Self-interest & Common good
Seller interests & Buyer interests
Sensing & Intuition
Seriousness & Playfulness
Service relationships & Partnering
relationships
Service to customers & Service to
organization
Serving & Leading
Shaking things up & Preserving
Shareholder interests & Stakeholder interests
Sharing & Inquiring
Short-term focus & Long-term focus
Showing respect for every person & Showing
respect based on performance
Simplicity & Deep understanding
Simplifying things & Ensuring deep
understanding
Skills & Application
Skills application & Awareness
Social purpose & Economic/profitability &
Quality

Sort/separate & Integrate/blend	Leveraging technical silos
Space for self & Space for others	Taking action & Inquiring into problem
Speak & Listen	Taking care of the organization & Taking care of the customer
Speak your mind & Speak from your heart	Taking responsibility myself & Relying on others to take responsibility
Speaking & Listening	Talking & Listening
Special interests & Common interests	Talking the talk & Walking the walk
Specialist & Generalist	Tangible & Intangible
Spontaneous & Disciplined	Task & Relationships
Stability & Change	Teach & Learn
Stability & Innovation	Teachers & Learners
Staff needs & Customer needs	Team & Individual
Staff needs & Organizational needs	Technical & Customer
Standardization & Innovation	Technological advancements & Pure/natural
Standing for principle & Adapting to conditions	Technology fads & Pioneering
State interests & National interests	Technology/mass & High touch/personal
Steaming ahead & Bringing up the rear	The formal structure & The informal organization
Sticking by principles & Being open to Compromise	The Parts & The Whole
Sticking to the plan & Adapting to the best course	The person & The persona
Sticks & Carrots	The power of some & The power of all
Stimulating change & Preserving the core	The whole & The parts
Strategies & Possibilities	Theory & Application
Strategy & Operations	Think & Do
Strengths approach & Recognition of serious social problems	Thinking & Doing
Strong back & Soft front	Thinking & Feeling
Strong branches & Strong central staff	Thinking skills & Behavior skills
Structure & Flexibility	Tight & Loose
Student-centered & Teacher-centered	Today's education system & Tomorrow's education system
Successive & Simultaneous	Tradition & Change
Succinct & Broad/connective	Tradition/core values & Innovation/change
Sufficient Investment & Efficient investment	Traditional & New
Sun & Shadow	Transactional & Relational
Suppliers needs & interests & Brand needs and interests	Transparency (Candor) & Judgement (Discretion)
Support & Accountability	Transparency & Discretion
Sustainable revenue & Building capacity	Transparent & Opaque
Swiftness & Mindfulness	True to self & True to other
Systematic & Flexible	Trust your experience & Trust my process
Systems and processes & Culture and shared values	Trying & Preparing
Systems view & Experience view	Understand/appreciate self & Understand/appreciate others
Tactical & Strategic	Uniform & Situational
Take risks & Support one another	Uniqueness & Connectedness
Taking a multi-disciplinary approach &	

Unity & Diversity
Upfront commitments & Business flexibility
Utilize talent & Develop talent
Value-driven & Pragmatic
Values-driven & Pragmatic
Valuing the old & Embracing the new
Vendor quality attributes & Eco/ethical attributes
Vertical (efficiency/hierarchy/functional) & Horizontal (speed/flat/matrix)
Vertical management & Horizontal collaboration
Vision & Current Reality
Vision & Operational realities
Visionary & Grounded
Visionary & Practical
Visionary & Pragmatic
Waiting for business & Pursuing new business
We are all teachers & We are all learners
What I want & What we need
What is & What can be
What we want others to do & What others want to do
When we lead & when they lead
Where we're going & How we're getting there
Whole community development & Addressing disparities
Will & Humility
Willfulness & Humility
Work & Home
Work & Prayer
Worker exposures & environmental Discharges
Working from expertise & Working from human experience
Working in small groups & Working in large groups
Working to our priorities & Engaging/leveraging others
Working under a single brand & Working independently
Workplace democracy & Employee ownership

Polarity-related Readings

Learn more about Polarity Thinking from these sources.

Books about Polarity Thinking

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Books that Discuss Paradoxes, Dilemmas, and Tensions

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Sisodia, Raj, Jag Sheth, and David B. Wolfe. *Firms of Endearment: How World Class Companies Profit from Passion and Purpose*. Wharton School Publishing, 2007.

Takeuchi, H., Osono, E. & Shimizu, N. (2008). *The Contradictions That Drive Toyota's Success*. Harvard Business Review, Harvard Business School Publication Corp. 86, 96-104.

Polarity Quotes

“To succeed in an increasingly interconnected world, creative leaders avoid choosing between unacceptable alternatives. Instead, they use the power inherent in these dualities to invent new assumptions and create new models geared to an ever-changing world.

*Barbara Lombardo & Daniel John Ruddy
IBM Global Services Executive Report
Cultivating organizational creativity in an age of complexity*

“Holding ‘two opposing ideas’ in mind will be even more important in the future...The dilemmas of the future will be more grating, more gnawing, and more likely to induce feelings of hopelessness. Leaders must be able to flip dilemmas over and find the hidden opportunities.”

*futurist Bob Johansen, Institute for the Future
Leaders Make the Future*

“I believe that the central leadership attribute is the ability to manage polarity.”

Peter Koestenbaum

“A visionary company doesn’t seek balance between short-term and long-term, for example. It seeks to do well in the short-term and in the long-term. A visionary company doesn’t simply balance between idealism and profitability: it seeks to be highly idealistic and highly profitable. A visionary company doesn’t simply balance between preserving a tightly held core ideology and stimulating vigorous change and movement; it does both to an extreme. In short, a visionary company doesn’t want to blend yin and yang into a grey, indistinguishable circle that is neither highly yin nor highly yang; it aims to be distinctly yin and distinctly yang—both at the same time, all the time.”

Jim Collins

“The nature of paradox, turning things on their head, flipping ideas upside-down—and knowing how to reconcile and ride the tension of opposites—is at the heart of leadership and indeed life.”

Sir Paul Callaghan

“In general, opposition appears as an obstruction, but when it represents polarity within a comprehensive whole, it also has its useful and important functions. The opposition of heaven and earth, spirit and nature, man and woman, when reconciled, bring about the creation and reproduction of life. In the world of visible things, the principle of opposites makes possible the differentiation by categories through which order is brought into the world.”

The I Ching: Book of Changes (Trans. Richard Wilhelm and Cary Baynes)

“Systems that strive for stability decay, and those living at the edge of chaos thrive.”

Dean LeBaron

“The leaders I have studied share at least one trait, aside from their talent for innovation and long-term business success. They have the predisposition and the capacity to hold two diametrically opposing ideas in their heads. And then, without panicking or simply settling for one alternative or the other, they’re able to produce a synthesis that is superior to either opposing idea...that is that hallmark of exceptional businesses and the people who run them.”

Roger Martin

“The opposite of a correct statement is an incorrect statement, but the opposite of a profound truth is another profound truth.”

Niels Bohr

“Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right doing there is a field. I’ll meet you there. When the soul lies down in that grass the world is too full to talk about.”

Rumi

“The test of a first rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function.”

F. Scott Fitzgerald

“We need a new way of thinking about our problems and our futures...Paradox, I now see to be inevitable, endemic and perpetual. The more turbulent the times, the more complex the world, the more paradoxes there are. We can, and should, reduce the starkness of some of the contradictions, minimize the inconsistencies, understand the puzzles in the paradoxes, but we cannot make them disappear, or solve them completely, or escape from them. Paradoxes are like the weather, something to be lived with, not solved, the worst aspects mitigated, the best enjoyed and used as clues to the way forward. Paradox has to be accepted, coped with and made sense of, in life, work and in the community and among nations.”

Charles Handy, The Age of Paradox

“The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift.”

Albert Einstein

“Individuality is only possible if it unfolds from wholeness.”

David Bohm

“When we sit in a circle of trust, we are given one experience after another in holding the tension of opposites; experiences that slowly break our hearts open to greater capacity.”

Parker J. Palmer

“What is needed is a realization that power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love.”

The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King

“Leadership and followership are linked concepts, neither of which can be comprehended without understanding the other.”

Heller & Van Til

“We see things not as they are, but as we are.”

John Milton

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