

THE (NOT-SO) SECRET TO MANAGING COMMON LEADERSHIP DILEMMAS



Should a leader be structured OR flexible? Yes! Should teams focus on the team OR individuals? Yes! With a new change initiative, should the focus be on what's new OR what's being left behind? Yes!

Some complex problems simply don't have a clear solution. One key to being an effective leader is being able to recognize and manage such dynamic problems. The tool and concept of Polarity Management presents a unique model and set of principles that helps leaders (and teams) look at and address situations in new, more effective and sustainable ways.

*Based on the work of Polarity Management Associates, particularly Barry Johnson.
Authorized to use.*

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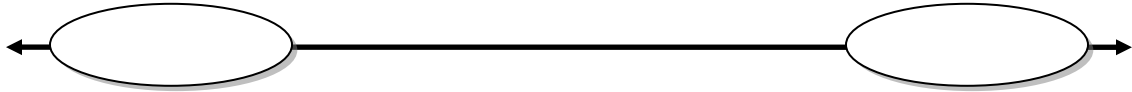
Services include:

- Leadership coaching
- Team coaching/team building
- Group facilitation
- OD Consulting, particularly related to organizational culture and managing the people side of change initiatives

DILEMMAS (AKA “POLARITIES”)

What is meant by “dilemmas?”

- ✓ A polarity, paradox, dynamic tension, or points of view
- ✓ A set of interdependent opposites (you need both, and both are “right”); focusing on one to the exclusion of the other results in negative results, or a “downside”



Examples:

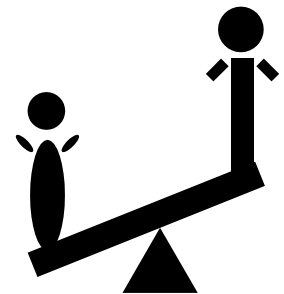
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|----------------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| ✓ Strength and flexibility | ✓ Individual and team | ✓ Centralization
decentralization |
| ✓ Being and doing | ✓ Planning and action | ✓ Stability and change |
| ✓ Activity and rest | ✓ Participation and
direction | ✓ Internal realities and
external realities |
| ✓ Saving and spending | ✓ Task and relationship | ✓ Profits and people |
| ✓ Work and life | | |

Energy cycle of polarities

You know your dilemma is a polarity to manage when both factors are interdependent and necessary over time. A polarity is often most easily recognized when it is out of balance, driving a reaction towards the opposite pole.

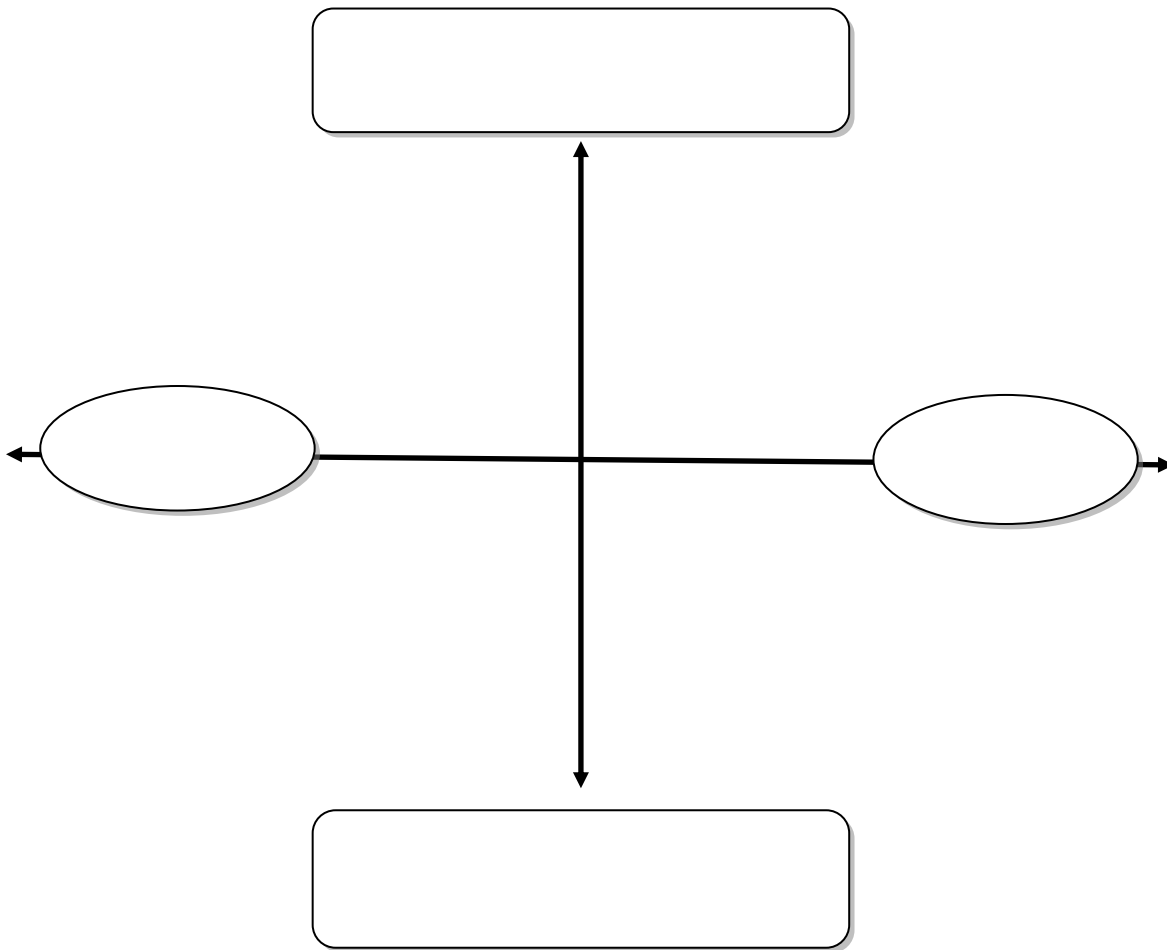
We are often pulled between multiple sets of polarities.

If we don't manage a dynamic tension well, it's like being on a seesaw.



MAPPING THE POLARITIES

Identifying the Parts of the Map:



The goals of polarity management:

- Maximize time spent on the upsides of both poles to work towards the higher purpose
- Minimize experiencing the downsides to avoid the deeper fear
- Put systems in place to recognize when the poles are getting out of balance so that one can adjust

COMMON LEADERSHIP POLARITIES

- Part and whole (individual and team, department and organization, personal interests and organizational issues)
- Self and other (community, customer, staff, family, etc.)
- Internal focus and external focus
- Productivity/task and relationship
- Spontaneity and self discipline
- Accountability and compassion (conditional regard and unconditional regard or tough love and gentle love)
- Optimism and realism
- Strategic visionary focus and tactical grounded focus
- Structure and flexibility
- Responsibility and freedom
- Strong/assertive and humble
- Action/implementation and planning (activity and rest)
- Centralize and decentralize
- Integration and autonomy
- Stability and change (preserve and shake things up)
- Inquiry and advocacy
- Internal realities and external realities
- Direction and participation (impose and facilitate)
- Assertive and collaborative
- Partnerships and hierarchy
- Retention and recruitment
- Stakeholder needs and staff needs
- Individual capabilities and system capabilities (people and system)
- Reduce cost and improve quality
- Celebrate our differences and celebrate our commonalities
- Work and home
- Profitability and growth
- Compliance and choice

IDENTIFY POLARITIES

I. STEPS TO MANAGING A POLARITY

- 1) Identify the situation/polarity you want to manage better
- 2) Map the polarity
 - a. Use value neutral words for the poles
 - b. Identify the critical upsides and downsides for each pole
 - c. Identify where you are right now, based on the behaviors or impacts showing up.
 - d. How are you out of balance?
 - e. Identify the higher purpose and deeper fear. Why does balancing this polarity manage?
- 3) Identify action items to help you manage the polarity and experience the upsides of both poles. Think SMART goals.
 - a. What specifically will you or others do? What are the first steps?
 - b. How will you measure or recognize success?
 - c. Ensure the goals are achievable – you have or can obtain the resources and availability.
 - d. How reasonable is it that what you're saying you're going to do can be done at this time?
 - e. By when, exactly, will you complete the goal (or at least the 1st steps)?
- 4) Identify critical warning signs. Be specific.
 - a. What might be the first early warning signs? Is it an event? A report indicator? Something you notice or hear?
 - b. Who is most likely to notice it?
 - c. How will you become informed?

Note: Based on the scope of the polarity you are managing, you may involve other stakeholders.

II. APPLY TO YOUR ORGANIZATION

1. Define the opportunities (or difficulties): Think about:

- What is getting in the way of your goals?
- What ongoing issues or conflicts are you regularly facing and trying to solve?
- Where are you feeling stuck?
- Where are you or those around you trying to move from?
- Where are you or those around you trying to move towards?

	<i>We could benefit from less:</i>	<i>We could benefit from more:</i>
A	"Seat of the pants" decision-making	Using detailed data to help make decisions.
B	Focusing only on tactical and operational activities	Building a strategic vision for the future development of the team
C	Autonomy for direct reports	Active management of direct reports

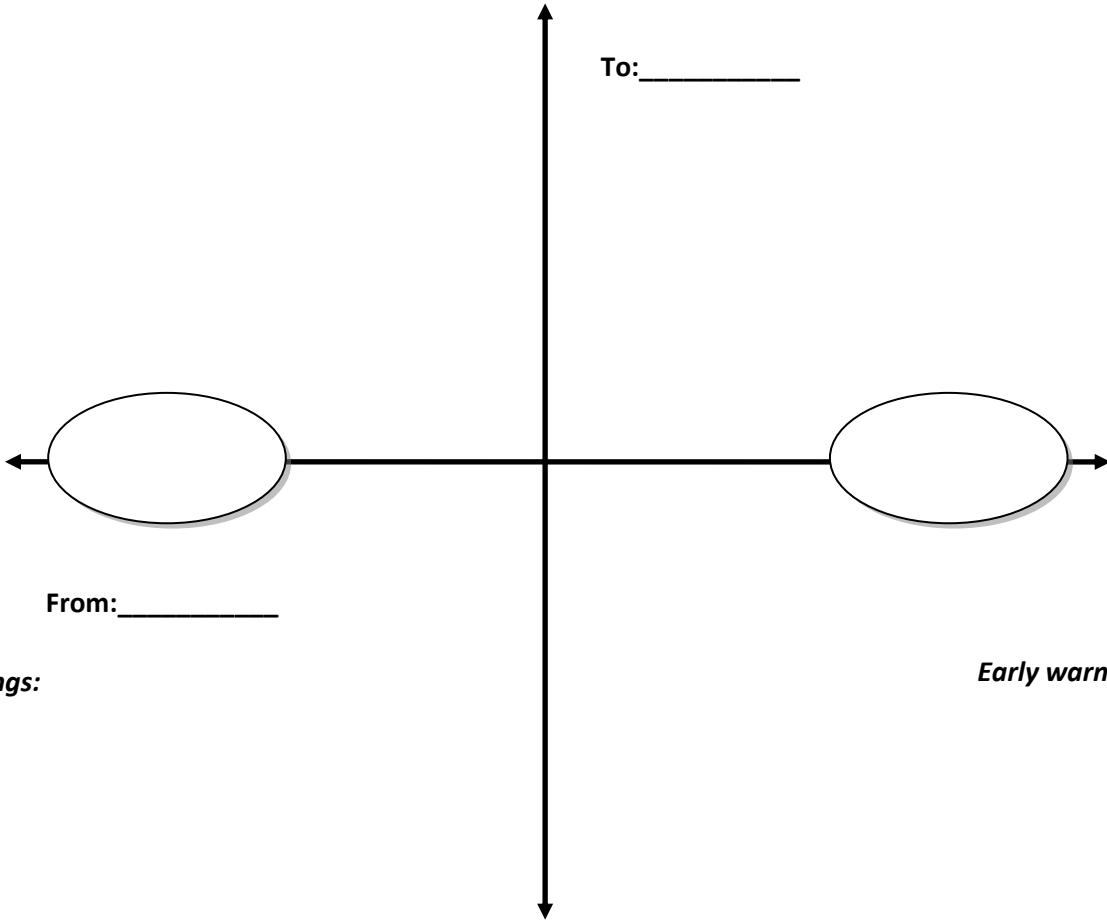
2. Using the assigned opportunity from above, identify possible polarities, using language that is neutral.
3. Map it on the next page. Come up with at least (2) action items for maintaining a balance of both upsides, and (1) early warning sign for each polarity.
4. Be ready to share with the group.

III. MAP IT

Action steps:

Action steps:

To: _____

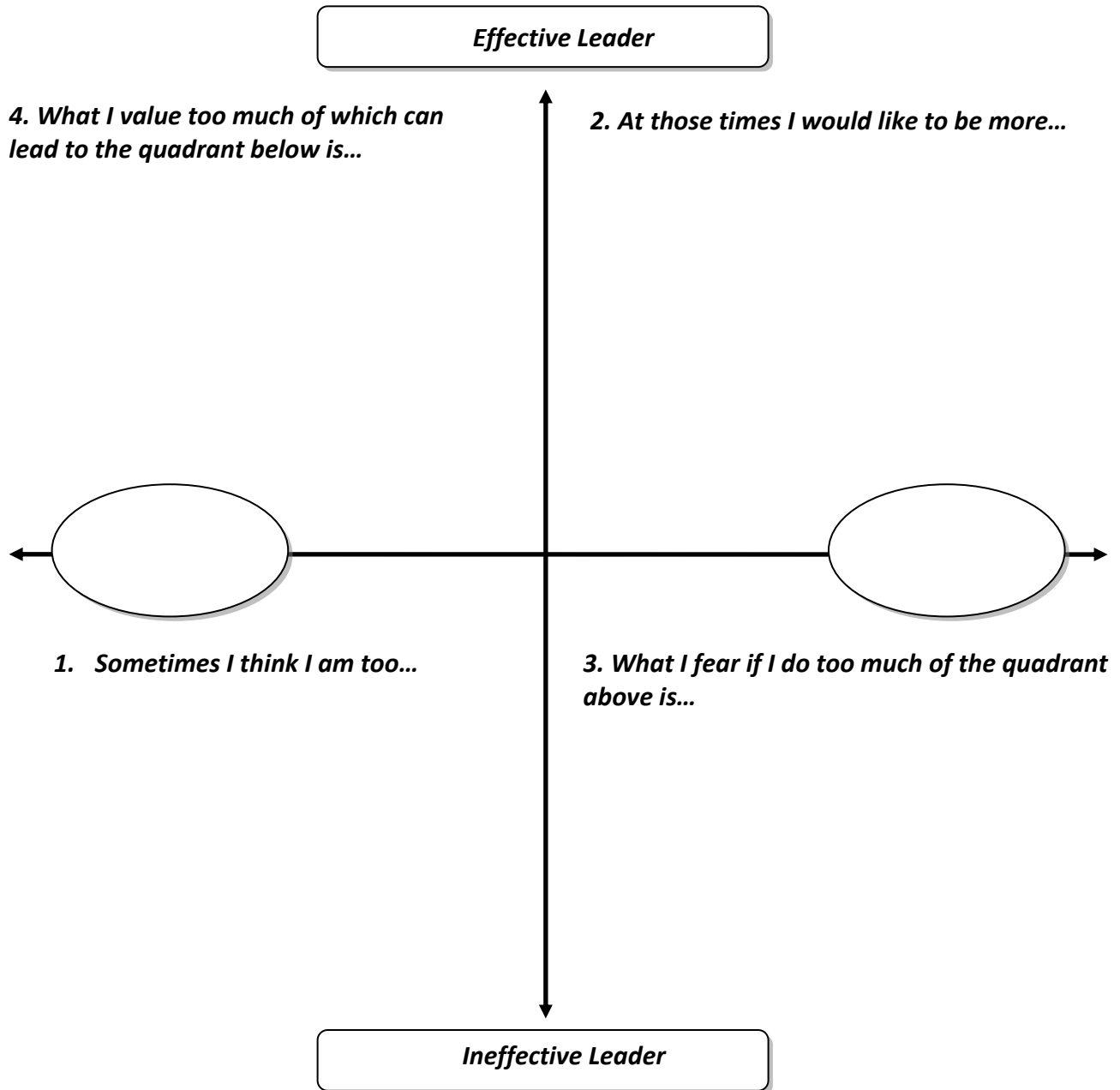


From: _____

Early warnings:

Early warnings:

IV. APPLY TO YOUR LEADERSHIP



What actions could you take to balance the polarities?

There is often a learning curve reaction, where the downside of the new pole may be experienced before fully experiencing the upsides of both poles. If you know there might be a learning curve, what might you do?