

Polarity management

An introduction

Polarities

It is not always either/or
sometimes it's both/and

This material is based on work by Barry Johnson

A great leader...

- Builds a close relationship with followers – and keeps a suitable distance
- Leads the way – and stays discretely in the background
- Displays trust – and controls what's going on
- Is tolerant – and knows exactly what he/she wants
- Plans time effectively – and is flexible
- Focuses on the department's goals – and is loyal to the bigger picture
- Sets a clear direction –and is diplomatic and considerate
- Is visionary – and keeps both feet on the ground
- Builds consensus – and cuts to the chase
- Is dynamic – and thoughtful
- Has self-confidence – and is humble

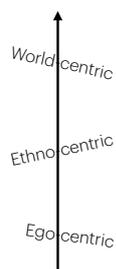
Now you understand why this is not so easy



...and why sometimes you feel your boss could do better

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

– Peter Koestenbaum
"The Fundamental State of Leadership"



Problems vs. polarities

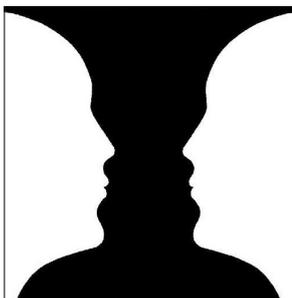
Problem	Polarity
Fish or chicken for dinner?	Direct/involve
How do we increase customer satisfaction?	Individual/communal
We need to find a new team leader?	Clients/employees
How can we reduce cost?	Listen/talk

What are the interdependent pairs?

Individual	Analysis	Task	What are the POLARITIES?
Implementation	Structure	Conditional respect	AND
Candor	Encouragement	Freedom	AND
Relationship	Expansive	Control	AND
Planning	Confidence	Logic	AND
Responsibility	Workgroup	Diplomacy	AND
Empowerment	Flexibility	Focused	AND
	Unconditional respect		AND
	Creativity	Humility	AND

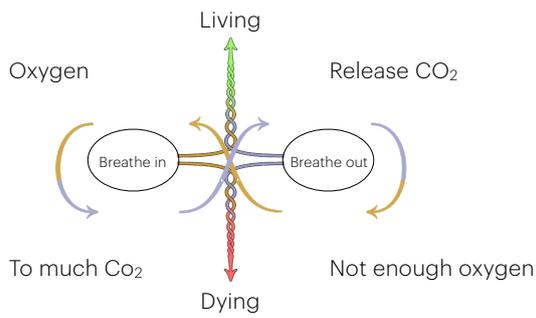
Interdependent pairs go by different names

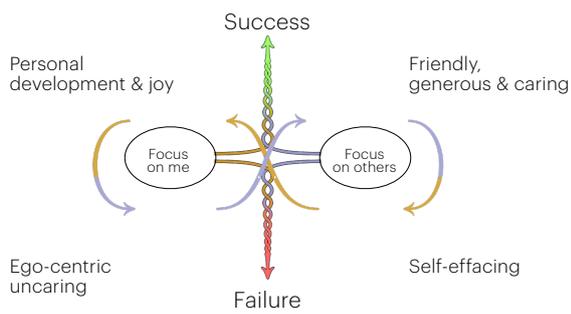
- Tensions
- Dilemmas
- Paradoxes
- Opposite strengths
- Interdependent values
- Competing values
- Contradictions
- Wicked problems



half-

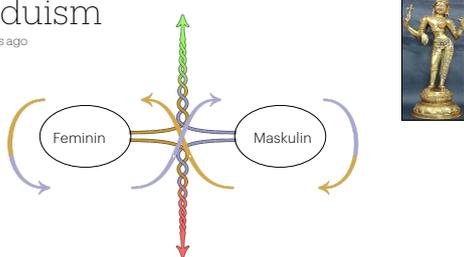
In every polarity, there are two truths -
together, they represent the whole truth





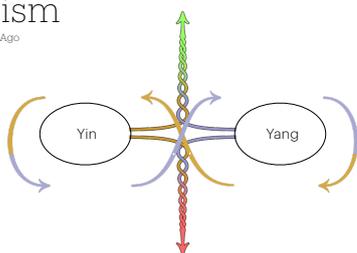
Hinduism

5000 years ago

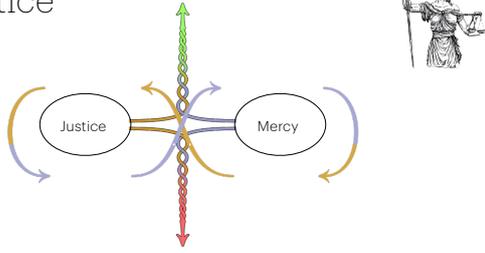


Taoism

2500 Years Ago



Justice



A practical example

Training for a marathon

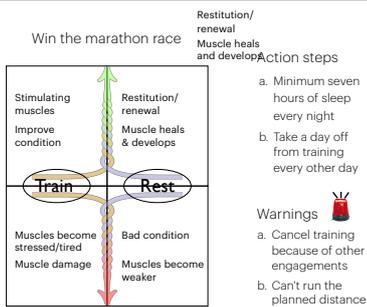


Action steps

- a. Run every other day
- b. Increase the distance by 2 Km every other week

Warnings

- a. Constant or increasing muscle pain
- b. Cramps or sharp pains



Not able to complete the race

Action steps

- a. Minimum seven hours of sleep every night
- b. Take a day off from training every other day

Warnings

- a. Cancel training because of other engagements
- b. Can't run the planned distance

Work-leisure balance

A typical polarity map

Higher purpose = Why balance this polarity?
A successful career



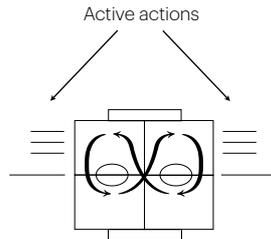
Failure

Deeper fear from lack of balance

What actions could I take to strengthen each of these two polarities?

Who, what, how & when

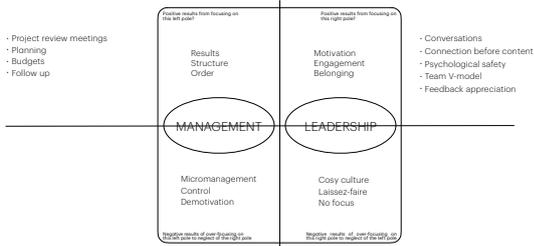
Specific measurable, attainable, relevant and time based actions



Complete your polarity map

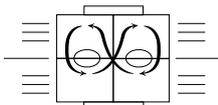
Higher purpose = Why balance this polarity?

A successful career



Failure

Deeper fear from lack of balance



Warning lamps

It must be something we can measure:
What increases or diminishes?

It needs to be specific for either side of the polarity
so that we understand what is going wrong

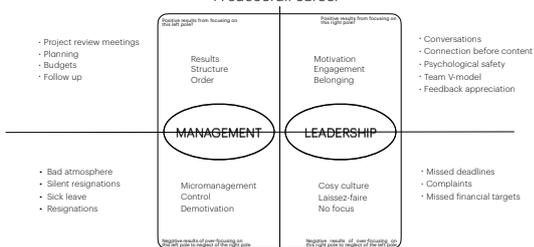


What are signs that I have gone too far down the negative side of one polarity?

Complete your polarity map

Higher purpose = Why balance this polarity?

A successful career



Failure

Deeper fear from lack of balance

Then focus on that

If this

Warning lamps

What concrete steps can I take to correct the imbalance – (look at the diagonal)?

Complete your polarity map

Higher purpose = Why balance this polarity?

A successful career

Over-focus on Management from focusing on Leadership

Over-focus on Leadership from focusing on Management

Results
Structure
Order

Motivation
Engagement
Belonging

MANAGEMENT

LEADERSHIP

Micromanagement
Control
Demotivation

Cosy culture
Laissez-faire
No focus

Project review meetings
Planning
Budgets
Follow up

Conversations
Connection before content
Psychological safety
Team V-model
Feedback appreciation

Bad atmosphere
Silent resignations
Sick leave
Resignations

Missed deadlines
Complaints
Missed financial targets

Deeper results of over-focusing on the left side to neglect of the right side

Deeper results of over-focusing on the right side to neglect of the left side

Failure

Deeper fear from lack of balance

More polarities from business:

- Listen – speak
- Risk – security
- Serious – fun
- Enthusiastic – reserved
- Thinking – feeling
- Short-term – long-term
- Independent – collaborative
- Diplomatic – direct
- Planning – acting
- Practical – beautiful
- Flexible – structured
- Creative – practical
- Stability – change

Note that:

All change projects involve polarities

If we look at polarities as if they were problems:

- Lack of results
- Slow progress
- Unsustainable results

Change process is doomed to fail if it is tied to just one polarity

However...

Whenever we can identify clear polarity, we also have a solid basis for creating sustainable change

"A visionary organisation doesn't seek the balance between short-term and long-term, for example. It seeks to do very well in the short-term and very well in the long-term.

A visionary company doesn't simply balance between idealism and profitability; it seeks to be highly idealistic and highly profitable.

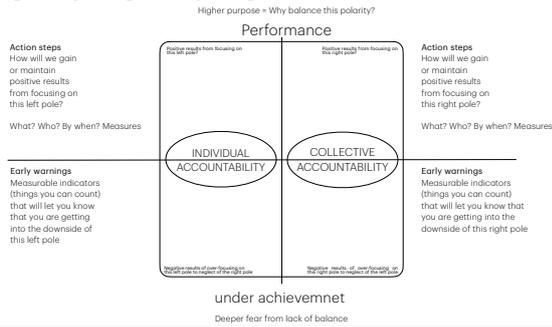
A visionary company doesn't simply balance between preserving a tightly held core ideology and stimulating vigorous change and movement; it does both to an extreme.

In short, a highly 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 'Good-to-Great'

YOUR TURN!

Complete your polarity map



COMPLETE YOUR POLARITY MAP

