Leadership Challenge: Managing Unsolvable Problems

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Educational Objectives:

- Differentiate between trends/polarities and problems to be solved
- Utilize a Polarity Matrix to analyze situation
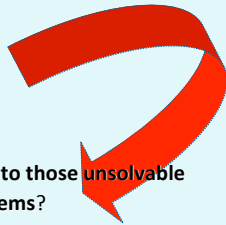- Utilize steps to manage polarity successfully

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What increases unsolvable problems?

When people are anxious they respond with :
- Reactivity
- Herding mentality
- Blaming and Gossip
- Quick Fix Mentality
- Poorly defined leadership
- Black and White answers

Could this lead us to those unsolvable problems?

From Edwin Friedman's *Failure of Nerve*

Many unsolvable problems or issues :

- Are interdependent opposites
- Keep returning up again and again
- Use up energy to no avail
- Have more than one right answer
- Keep us "in the box"
- Unproductive and frustrating

= POLARITY

Unsolvable or Polarity?

In Barry Johnson's Book *Polarity Management: Identifying and Managing Unsolvable Problem*. He states (not all) "that many issues we define as problems to be solved are actually polarities which have interdependence and need to managed not solved."
- To illustrate the point, ask your self a question:
  - Which is more important to breathing; inhaling or exhaling?
  - The question is absurd because breathing is the oscillation between these two polar activities.

Johnson, B. P. (1996). *Polarity Management: Identifying and Managing Unsolvable problems.* Amherst: HRD Press.

What kind of problems keep cropping up for you?

- Make a quick list of the kinds of issue that never seem to get solved but keep coming up again.
- Share with your neighbor

Dilemmas of Polarity crop up everywhere

Organizational issues with interdependent opposites or polarity:
- Strategic Planning & Management
- System wide change & Stability
- Client satisfaction/get the work done ($)
- Technology & Relationship Based Teaching
- Standardized & Customized
- Union & Management relationships
- Work and human spirit
- Politics
- Religion
- Teams or individuals
- Centralized or Decentralized

What do you see?

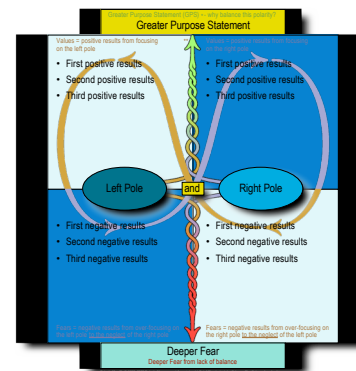One cannot exist without the other. This is called Interdependence

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Polarity Management will help you:

- Distinguish between problems you can solve and those you can't
- Manage the unsolvable problems or what we can call workplace dilemmas or polarities
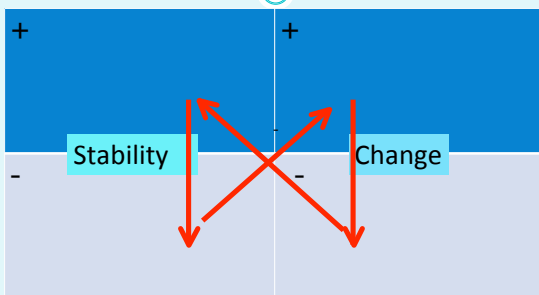
- Problems may have a solution
- Polarities have underlying interdependent opposites
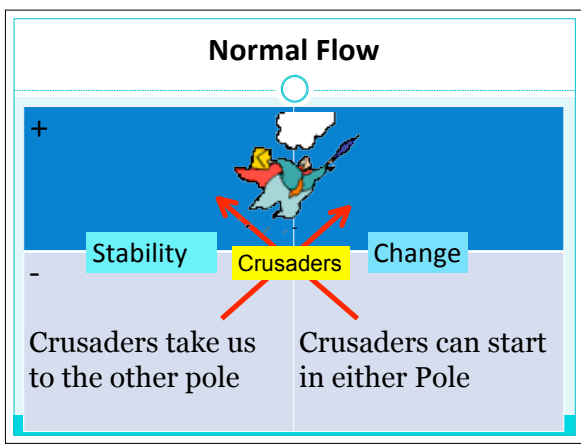

Polarity Management® Map

Greater Purpose Statement

Values = positive results from focusing on the left pole

- First positive results
- Second positive results
- Third positive results

- First positive results
- Second positive results
- Third positive results

Left Pole and Right Pole

- First negative results
- Second negative results
- Third negative results

- First negative results
- Second negative results
- Third negative results

Deeper Fear

Normal Flow Of Polarities

+   +

Stability   Change

–   –

Stability and Change

+ Continuity	+ New Energy
Loyalty	New Perspectives
Security	New Challenges, skills
Avoid Foolish Risk	Willing to take risk

Stability   Change

– Stagnation	– Chaos
No new perspectives	Reduced Loyalty
No new challenges	Feel insecure
Unwilling to take risk	Take foolish risks
	Constant realignment of relationships

Slide 1

Stability and Change

+ | +

Stability | Change

− Stagnation
No new perspectives
No new challenges
Unwilling to take risk

−

Slide 2

Stability and Change

+ | + New Energy
New Perspectives
New Challenges, skills
Willing to take risk

Stability | Change

− Stagnation
No new perspectives
No new challenges
Unwilling to take risk

−

Slide 3

Stability and Change

+ | + New Energy
New Perspectives
New Challenges, skills
Willing to take risk

Stability | Change

− Stagnation
No new perspectives
No new challenges
Unwilling to take risk

− Chaos
Reduced Loyalty
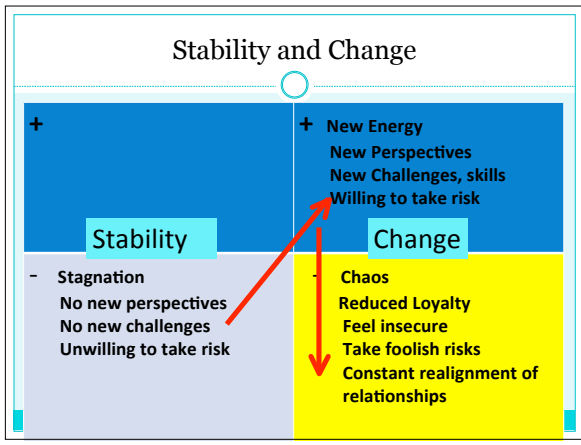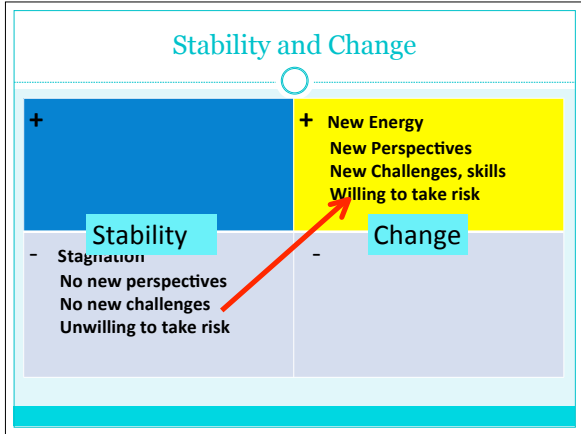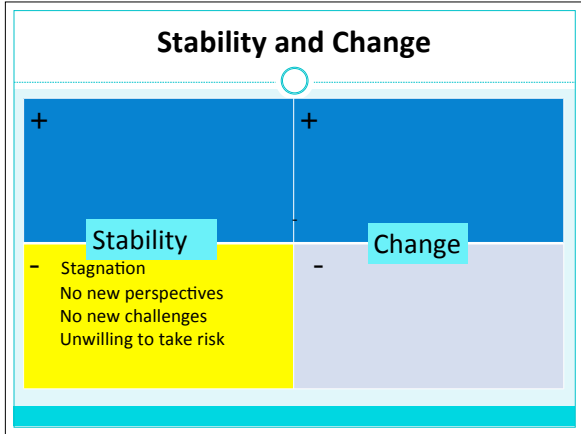Feel insecure
Take foolish risks
Constant realignment of relationships

Slide 4

Stability and Change

+ Continuity
Loyalty
Security
Avoid Foolish Risk

+ New Energy
New Perspectives
New Challenges, skills
Willing to take risk

Stability | Change

− Stagnation
No new perspectives
No new challenges
Unwilling to take risk

− Chaos
Reduced Loyalty
Feel insecure
Take foolish risks
Constant realignment of relationships

Slide 5

Stability and Change

+ Continuity
Loyalty
Security
Avoid Foolish Risk

+ New Energy
New Perspectives
New Challenges, skills
Willing to take risk

Stability | Change

− Stagnation
No new perspectives
No new challenges
Unwilling to take risk

− Chaos
Reduced Loyalty
Feel insecure
Take foolish risks
Constant realignment of relationships

Slide 6

Normal Flow

+

Stability | Crusaders | Change

−

Crusaders take us to the other pole

Crusaders can start in either Pole

Stability and Change

+ **+**

Tradition Bearer   Tradition Bearer

Stability   Change

−   **−**

One Pole Myth or Managing resistance

+ **+**

Continuity   New Energy

Tradition Bearers

Stability   Change

−   **−**

Stagnation   Chaos

Tradition bearers can make the switch to the other pole short
Over emphasis on one pole gets you the down side of the positive pole.

One Pole Myth or managing resistance

+ **+**

Continuity   New Energy

Tradition Bearers

Stability   Change

−   **−**

Stagnation   Chaos

Tradition Bearers can make the switch short to the other pole
Over emphasis on one pole gets you the down side of both.
Lose the positive emphasis of the positive pole.

How do we get unstuck or deal with Resistance to change

We must change directions to get unstuck by going counter- intuitive

+ **+**

− **−**

Crusader

+ No waiting
Own creativity and initiative
More org. support

+
-Org. gets feedback
- Org can respond & improve
- More individual support

Individual Responsibility   Organizational Responsibility

−
-Org. does not get valuable
-Org. cannot respond & improve
- More individual resistance

−
Waiting for the org. to improve
-Do not tap own initiative & creativity
- More org. resistance

Crusader

+ No waiting
Own creativity and initiative
More org. support

+
-Org. gets feedback
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Individual Responsibility   Organizational Responsibility

−
-Org. does not get valuable
-Org. cannot respond & improve
- More individual resistance

−
Waiting for the org. to improve
-Do not tap own initiative & creativity
- More org. resistance

Effective Conversation for the Crusader

The tradition bearer who wants to move R- to L+

- I know you think R+ (read the list)are all very important. I do too. And I do not want to lose them.
- And I certainly do not want us to get to L-.
- Yet I would like us to figure out a way to get L+ (read list)
4. Because I am concerned about R- (read list)

Tradition Bearer

+ No waiting Own creativity and initiative More org. support	+ -Org. gets feedback - Org can respond and improve - More individual support
Individual Responsibility	**Organizational Responsibility**
- Org. does not get valuable -Org. cannot respond and improve - More individual resistance	- Waiting for the org. to improve -Do not tap own initiative and creativity - More org. resistance

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Effective Conversation for the Tradition Bearer

The tradition bearer who wants to preserve R+ and avoid L-

- I hear your concerns about R-(read list). I agree those things need to addressed.
- And the things you are advocating like L+ (read List) are things I think are important too.
- When I think about those things, I wonder how we can prevent L-(read list)
4. Because it is important to preserve R+ (read list)

Autocratic Management & Shared Governance

+ Decisive Efficient Clear Responsibilities	+ Support For Decisions Group Wisdom used Synergy Wisdom
Autocratic	**Shared Governance**
-Lack of support for DM -Lack of group wisdom -Lack of synergy -Lack of enthusiasm	-Indecisive -Inefficient -Unclear responsibilities

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Product Driven or Market Driven

+ - **Pride in product** - **Do what we do best** - **Know our limits**	+ - Listen to client - Provide what they want - Respond to client
Service Driven	**Market Driven**
- Out of touch with client - Provide services they don't want/need	- Loss of Pride in Service - Doing what we don't do well - "Who are we?" - Out of touch with self

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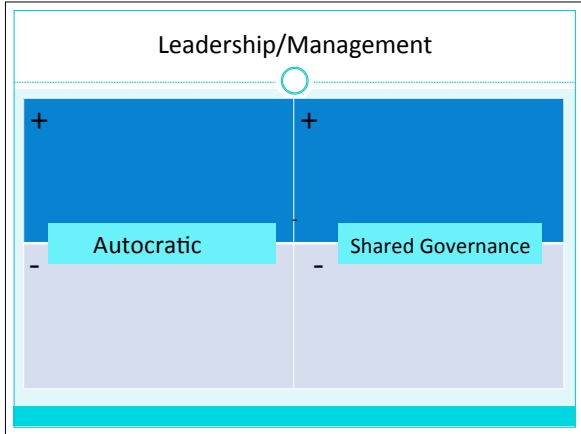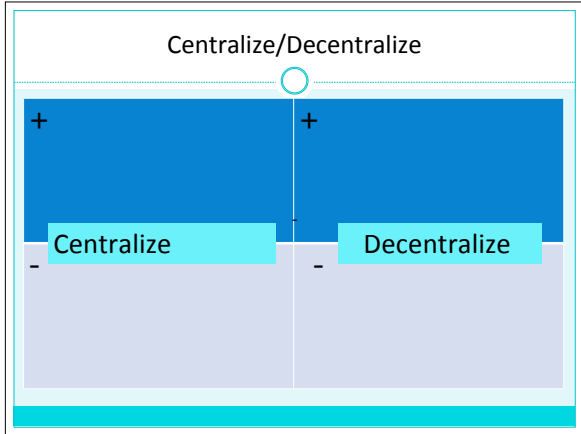## Steps to Manage Unsolvable Problems

Identify the Poles
- What issues keep occurring? Look at both poles and the plus and minus of each
- How can we gain or maintain the positive results by focusing on both the left & right pole?
- **Which side of the equation are we on now?**

How can we merge the two poles and get the best of both worlds

What are the Early Warning Signs?
(Measurable indicators) you are the down sides of the Left or right pole?
- What can we put into place to identify these signs early?
- What can we do to rebalance the equation?

Centralize/Decentralize

+ +

| Centralize | Decentralize |

− −

Leadership/Management

+ +

| Autocratic | Shared Governance |

− −

Yin and Yang or Managing Polarities

Yin and Yang: Everything has its opposite-although this is never absolute, only relative. No one thing is completely Yin or completely Yang. Each contains the seed of its opposite. For example, winter can turn into summer; "what goes up must come down".

Chinese Proverb