

Beyond Either-Or and Both-And: Polarity Management as a Key Tool to Spark Collaboration and Deeper Engagement

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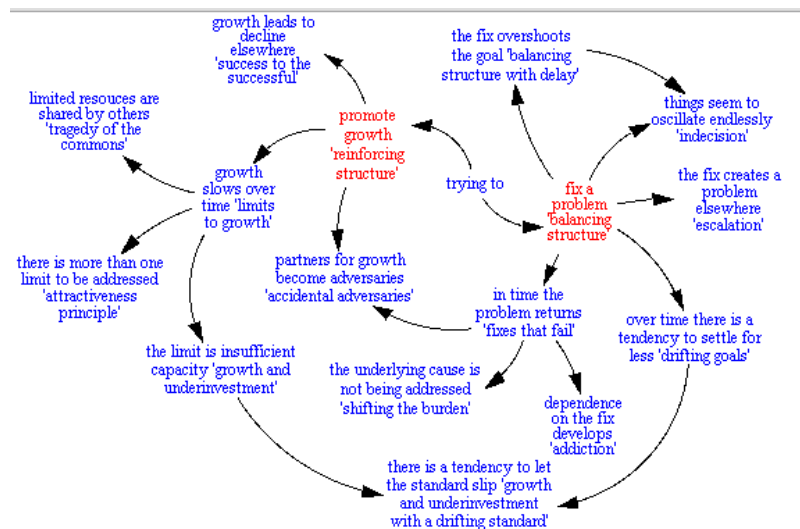
*Dedicated to enhancing local democracy through improved public communication and
community problem solving*

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Wicked problems inherently involve **competing underlying values**, paradoxes, and tradeoffs that **cannot be resolved** by science.



Water in Northern Colorado as a Wicked Problem

Some things we care about:

**Healthy river with
healthy ecosystems**

**Recreational
opportunities**

Economic vitality

**Water for homes &
lawns**

**Open space and
wildlife habitat**

Low cost of living

**Water for local
farms**

**Local food
economy**

**Freedom of choice
of where to live**



HEALTH CARE AS A WICKED PROBLEM



Capitalism or Sustainability as a Wicked Problem

- The “Triple Bottom Line” of
 - Profit (economics, also tied to jobs and taxes)
 - People (social justice, equality, fairness)
 - Planet (environment)



We the People of the United States, in Order to
form a more perfect Union, establish Justice,
insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the
common defense, promote the general
Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to
ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and
establish this Constitution for the United States
of America.

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish **Justice**, insure **domestic Tranquility**, provide for the **common defense**, promote the **general Welfare**, and secure the Blessings of **Liberty** to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

Key American Values

Preamble	Current Phrasing
Justice	Justice
Domestic Tranquility/ Common defense	Security/Safety
General Welfare	Equality
Liberty to ourselves	Freedom (for us)
Liberty for our posterity	Freedom (for future generations)

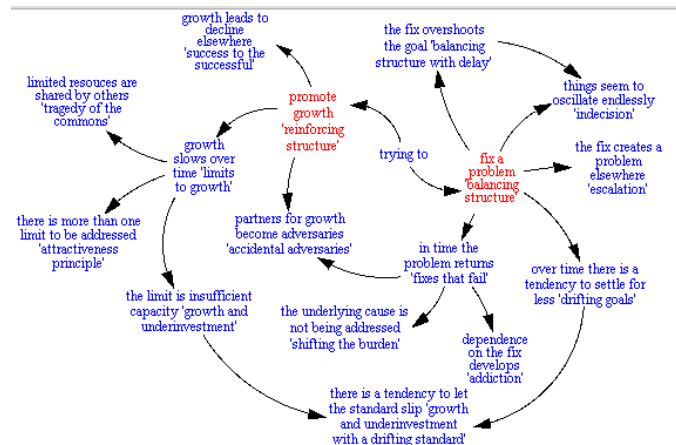
Inherent Democratic Tensions

- Freedom and Equality (and between equality and equity)
- Our Freedom and Freedom of Future generations
- Freedom and Security
- Justice is a tension within itself (justice as the ideal between too much and too little credit or punishment)

Some others

- Short term and long term
- Individual rights and community good
- Unity and diversity
- Cooperation and competition
- Structure and agency (or opportunity and individual responsibility)
- Flexibility/Innovation and Consistency/Tradition
- Best use of resources (money, time, people)

Wicked problems inherently involve **competing underlying values**, paradoxes, and tradeoffs that **cannot be resolved** by science. They call for ongoing high quality **communication**, **creativity**, and broad **collaborative action** to manage well.



What We Are Learning from Brain Science

The Problematic

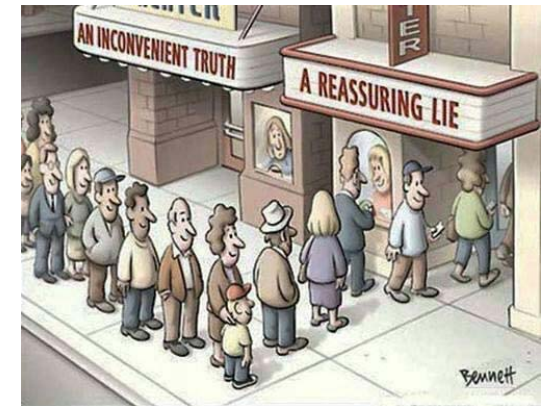
We crave certainty and consistency

We are suckers for the good v. evil narrative

We strongly prefer to gather with the like minded

We filter & cherry pick evidence to support our views

We avoid values dilemmas, tensions, and tough choices



Addressing Key Tensions

Freedom

Security

Freedom



Anti-freedom

Security



Anti-security

Polarized:

**“I am for security,
you are anti-security (i.e. pro-terrorism)”**

vs.

**“I am for freedom,
you are anti-freedom (i.e. pro-long lines)”**

All Freedom
No Security

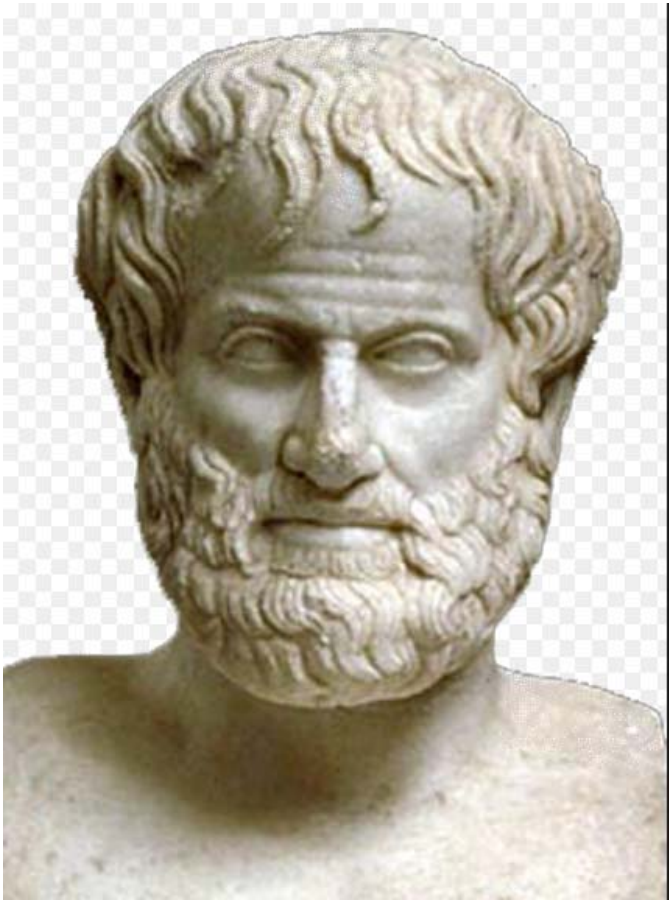
Freedom
>
Security

Balance
Security
and
Freedom

Security
>
Freedom

All Security
No Freedom





Aristotle's Theory of Virtues

Aristotle defined a virtue as
“a mean between two vices,
that which depends on
excess and that which
depends on defect...virtue
both finds and chooses that
which is intermediate”

Aristotle's Virtues

Cowardice ← -----Courage----- → Recklessness

Lack of ambition ← -----(Ideal ambition) ----- → Excess of ambition

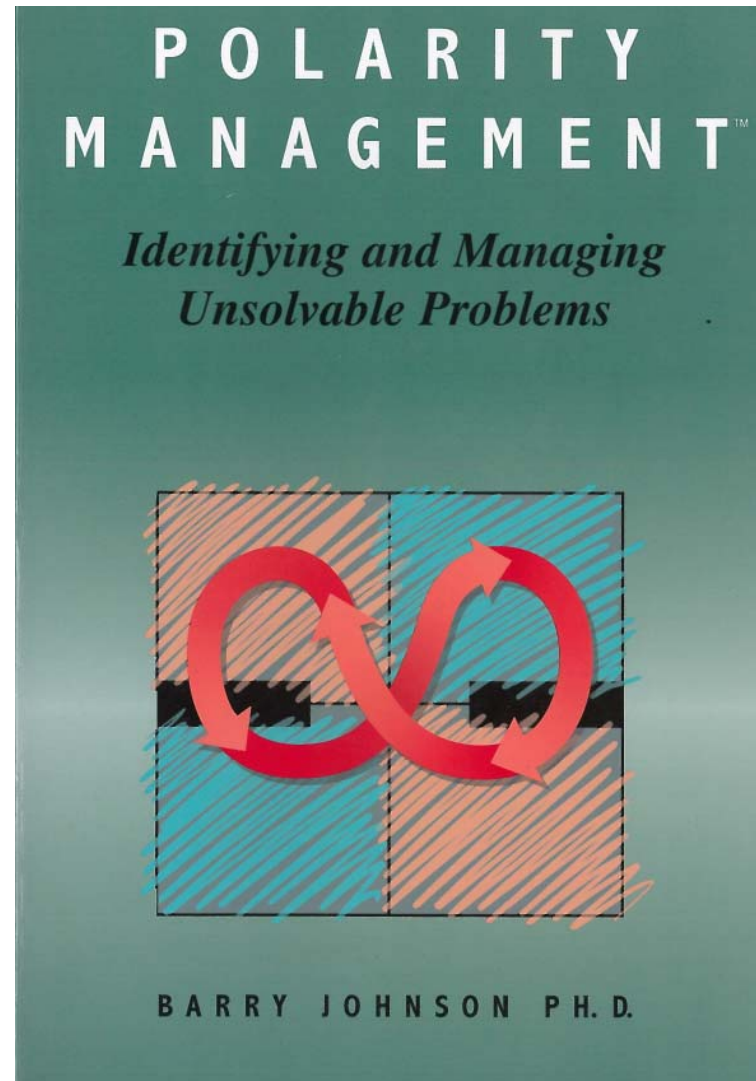
Apathy ← -----Gentleness----- → Short temper

Grouchiness ← -----Friendliness----- → Flattery

Self-depreciation ← -----Truthfulness----- → Boastfulness

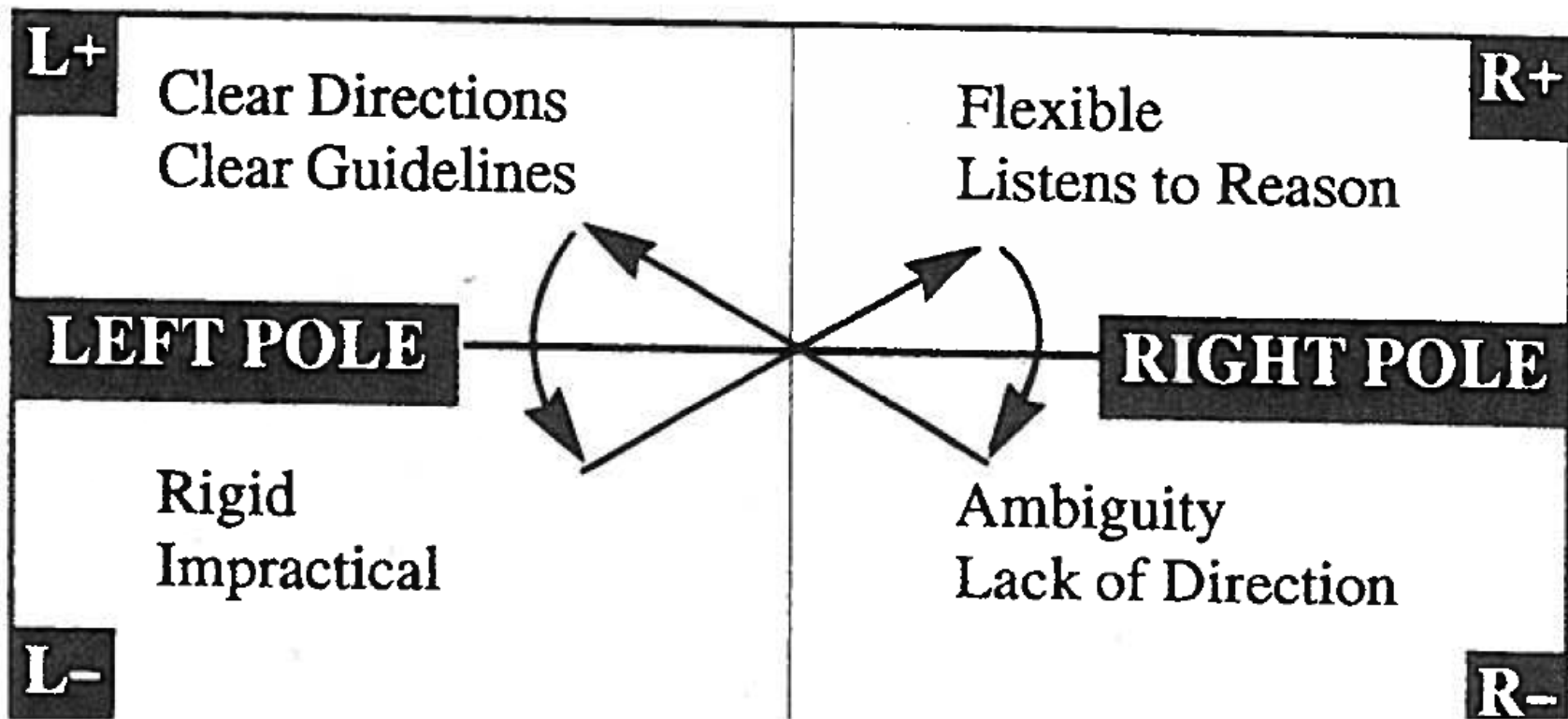
Injustice ← -----Justice----- → Injustice	
(gives more and receives less	(gives less and
than one's due)	receives more than one's due)

Polarity Management



Polarity Management

Barry Johnson



Polarity Management

The Case for Consistency	The Case for Flexibility
Dependable, Clarity, Allowing comparisons, Tradition, Principled, Fair, Just, Reliable, Steady, Standards, Measurability	Innovation, Adaption, Individuality, Creativity, Outside the Box thinking, Pragmatic, Thinking on your feet

The Case for Consistency	The Case for Flexibility
Dependable, Clarity, Allowing comparisons, Tradition, Principled, Fair, Just, Reliable, Steady, Standards, Measurability	Innovation, Adaption, Individuality, Creativity, Outside the Box thinking, Pragmatic, Thinking on your feet
When Consistency dominates Flexibility ...	When Flexibility dominates Consistency ...
Dogmatic, Stubborn, Unaccommodating, Stiff, Simplistic, Stuck in the past, Uninspired, Rigid, Soul-sucking, Obstinate	Wishy-washy, Ambiguous, Inconsistent, Erratic, Untrustworthy, Irregular, Unreliable

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Polarity Management Worksheet

The Case for _____

The Case for _____

When _____ dominates _____

When _____ dominates _____

Polarity Management Worksheet

The Case for Activism/Protest

The Case for Civility/Dialogue

**When activism/protest
dominates too much**

**When civility/dialogue
dominates too much**

Steps in the Basic Exercise

- Polarity or tension is identified and named
- In groups, brainstorm the positives for each end of the polarity one at a time, making the best possible case
- Groups then complete the out of balance problematic alternatives
- Groups can then potentially combine or compare their work
- Conversation can then focus on responding to the tension

Responding to Key Tensions

- Recognize tension, still **prefer** one side while accepting the tradeoffs. That preference may be purposefully short-term, with a corresponding focus on nimbleness
- Recognize tension, seek **balance** (which may mean moving in one direction or the other, seeking compromise)
- Recognize tension, seek to **transcend or integrate** tension through innovation (seeking win-win)
- Recognize tension, allow **different groups** to seek **alternative ends**
- **Disagree** with tension

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Some others

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- Individual rights and community good
- Unity/common ground and diversity
- Cooperation and competition
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- Best use of resources (money, time, people)

PM and CPD processes

- Superintendent search (strong leader and collaborator)

The Case for Strong Leader

Gets things done, makes tough choices, moves organization forward quickly

When Strong leaders dominate too much...

Act as dictators, alienate others, hasty decisions often flawed, too reliant on narrow voices and perspectives

The Case for Leader who listens to all voices

Gives respect to people at all levels, thoughtful, inclusive, careful judgment, brings people together

When Listeners dominate too much...

Wishy-washy, unable to make tough decisions, paralysis by analysis, too focused on relationships over action

PM and CPD processes

- Superintendent search (strong leader and collaborator)
- Local food cluster (top down and bottom up)
- Neighborhood associations (formal and informal)
- Local church on gay rights issue (truth and grace)
- Elementary school – flexibility and consistency

David Zarefsky, Ph.D.

Former Dean of Northwestern School of Communication

Rhetoric's responsibilities have been enlarged in our time. We face such complex predicaments that we need all the rhetorical resources we can get. Our tasks include reconciling unity and diversity, individualism and community, nationalism and global citizenship, liberty and equality, quality and quantity, faith and doubt, the present and the future. *None of these pairs consists of opposites in the logical sense; they are not in principle irreconcilable. But they are inherent tensions and often seem to work at cross purposes. Articulating how they can work together, how we can get the best of both, or how we can transcend the tension, is the task of a responsible rhetoric.*" (19-20)

In the end...

- Move from a simple EITHER-OR
- Past a more complicated but still rather simply BOTH-AND
- And struggle with the realities of BOTH-AND-BUT HOW?