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Dynamic Leadership:

An Expansion of Self
Determination Theory
to offer a new, dynamic
approach to assess
leadership

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Case Study

Leader (Coachee): I just don't want to make the same mistakes of my predecessor. I was on the receiving end of his leadership, and now that I'm leading the same group I know everyone is looking to me to run things differently around here.

Coach: What do you feel is the best way to run this team?

Leader: It's not that I'm intentionally trying to run things differently, but I genuinely have a different style of leadership. I see myself as an inclusive leader; whereas, my predecessor was much more abrasive and did things his way. I respect the people on the team. I practically grew up here, and I know how capable the team is. I want to solicit their ideas and build this team together.

Coach: So, how is that going so far?

Leader: I thought it was going well, but I've been in this leadership position now for almost a year and I feel like we're not making any progress. I feel like we're spinning our wheels. I can tell people are getting frustrated, and I'm getting frustrated too. I'm just not sure how to move forward. The team seemed really motivated at first and now there's a lot more silence in the team meetings. They're not as willing to share their ideas, and I'm not sure why. I feel like I have a good relationship with everyone, but it seems like they're not being totally forthcoming with me. I'd like for you to do a 360 assessment with my team and colleagues so hopefully I can get to the heart of what's going on.

After conducting the leadership assessment, it was clear that the Leader was overcompensating for her predecessor's leadership behaviors. This Leader was now being so inclusive and soliciting input from everyone that it was becoming a barrier to her success. Instead of the team feeling valued for their opinions, the team was feeling like they've argued the same points for months and haven't made any real decisions to move the team forward. They were wanting their Leader to lean in and make some executive decisions when necessary so they could start seeing results. The Coach reviewed the open-ended comments from the assessment with the Leader.

Coach: Now that we've reviewed the comments together, what are your thoughts?

Leader: I can understand their frustration of not seeing progress, like I said before, I feel the same way. But it's just not me to take over, shut down conversations, and make decisions on behalf of the group. That's not my style. I'm not a dictator.

Coach: It sounds like you're categorizing your leadership choices into two buckets—either you continue to be inclusive and build relationships or you shut people down by making decisions for the team. Did I capture that accurately?

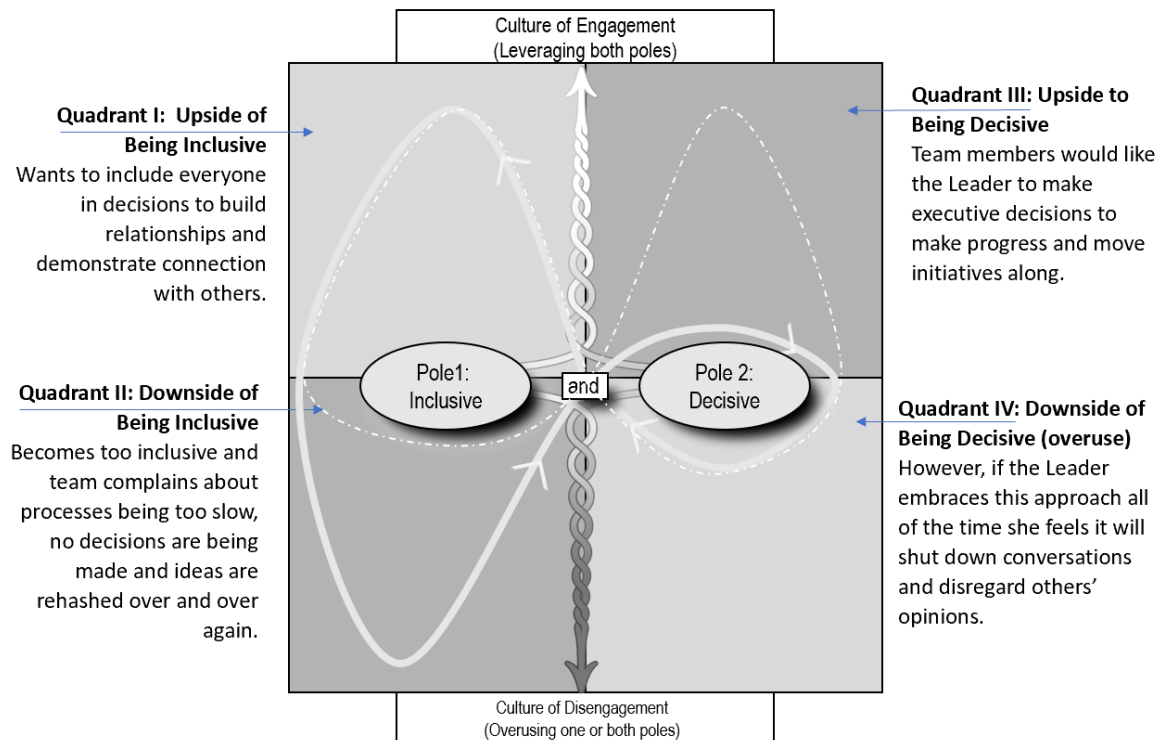
Leader: Well, yes, that's what happens when you make decisions for the team, you do shut people down. I worked too hard to build up these relationships that I'm not willing to risk that happening now.

Coach: I hear that as a strong belief of yours. When you make decisions for others, you shut down the relationship. Are you willing to brainstorm with me? What if there's a third approach? One that allows you to keep your inclusive style, AND also make decisions. Are you willing to explore that with me?

Leader: I don't see how that's possible, but sure, let's give it a try.

The coach then reveals one of the PolarityMaps™ (Figure 1) in the assessment around feeling Connected to illustrate the Leader's thought process. A PolarityMap™ is a sense-making tool created by Dr. Barry Johnson (Polarity Management, 1992), that coaches can use to help leaders see the relationships between behaviors as well as the greater system in which they are operating. In this map, the two poles are "Inclusive" and "Decisive." The solid white infinity loop indicates the average of the scores in which her colleagues rated her in four quadrants. The dotted line indicates an ideal rating that would maximize a leader's potential. The first quadrant represents how well the Leader demonstrates being Inclusive—leading to an increase in engagement. The second quadrant is how much the Leader overfocuses on being Inclusive, which has a negative effect on engagement. The third quadrant is how well the Leader demonstrates being Decisive; this also leads to an increase in engagement. And the fourth quadrant is how much the Leader overfocuses on being Decisive, resulting in a negative effect on engagement. Lastly, the spiral pointing up in the middle of the map represents one's full potential when leveraging the upsides of both poles. Similarly, the downward facing spiral leads to a vicious cycle of the downsides of one or both poles resulting in disengagement.

Figure 1
Sample PolarityMap®



The map indicates that, in Quadrant I, the Leader's raters ranked her high in this quadrant in that they feel she actively seeks out others' opinions and leads in an inclusive manner. However, in Quadrant II, her colleagues also rated her high in that she is exhibiting too much of this Inclusive style—so much so that it's now becoming a detriment to her success. This is also reflected in the comments that the team is becoming frustrated with the slow progress and lack of decisions. Quadrant III illustrates what the team members are requesting: a leader who will make some tough decisions. Not surprisingly, the leader was rated low in this area. There is an extremely low rating for Quadrant IV, which indicates that the Leader is not overusing Decisiveness. This result was consistent with the Leader's self-assessment. She avoids at all costs any actions that may be perceived as shutting down conversations and disregarding others' opinions. The Leader avoids this quadrant to such an extent that she ultimately over-uses being Inclusive.

Currently, the Leader is stuck in an "either/or" mindset in Quadrants I and IV. She is actively working to preserve her true default style of being an inclusive leader and is strongly resisting the feedback to becoming a dictator (her words) in Quadrant IV.

The Coach then uses this assessment to hone in on the two quadrants that may not be as visible to the Leader. The Coach examines Quadrant II with the Leader. This reveals that she is overusing her Inclusive style, which is now viewed as a downside or detriment to the team's success. She understands how she could be overusing her style, but still justifies that this style is the right approach and her intentions are good. She wants to include everyone in the decision-making process. Then the Coach examines Quadrant III which is the Leader's blind spot.

Coach: Let's suspend reality for a minute... let's say you were this type of leader who made decisions on behalf of the team. Without overdoing this style (Quadrant IV), what would some of those benefits be for the team?

Leader: (Long pause) I'm not sure. I guess we would see more progress, more results. We would have debates and then move on. We wouldn't get stuck in analysis paralysis.

Coach: Now, what would happen if we sprinkled some of those benefits on to your style of being Inclusive? How can you be BOTH Inclusive and Decisive? Are you willing to explore that with me?

Leader: I guess so. I'm not sure what you mean exactly, but I'll give it a try. I guess if I were going to be more Decisive, I would let everyone know this up front. I remember

how horrible I felt when I was a team member and offered up my opinions only to realize that my leader had made up his mind already. So, if I let the team know that I'm genuinely interested in their opinions but... (Coach interjected with "AND")... AND I also want us to make a decision so we can see some progress, I think they would view that as respectful. I could set a deadline that if we don't reach a decision by a certain date, then I will make a final decision and will reach that decision by considering everyone's ideas.

Coach: That sounds like a nice combination of being Inclusive and being Decisive to move things along. How else can you lead by being Inclusive AND Decisive?

Leader: I guess another way to do this is to delegate decision-making authority to the subject matter experts who really have the best understanding of certain situations. So, decisions are being made, but I'm not always the final decision maker. And, now that I think about it, we focus on technology and we're always creating new versions of software. What if we used that same approach to our decision making? So, we could say that we need version 2.0 of this decision by a certain date, but we can continue to make revisions or adjustments and revisit that decision later down the road. More of an iterative approach to decisions, as we take with our work.

The conversation continued, and the Leader and coach explored strategies that the Leader could implement to leverage both the upsides of being Inclusive and Decisive—while minimizing the downsides of each. The Coach then continued with the assessment tool to examine the other polarities around feeling Valued and the last one around feeling Empowered. These three areas, which we will review later in this article, were the three pillars that helped this Leader turn her team around.

Introducing a Dynamic View of Leadership

Through our work in Executive Coaching, we continue to notice leaders who hold on to one style and resist the feedback to change. Why? In many cases, the feedback is filtered in a way that the leader hears the feedback as a downside or deficiency rather than an upside or strength. As an example, based on the Case Study presented in this article, the Leader heard the feedback to be more decisive as a negative. Her team wanted her to leverage this skill positively (Quadrant III), but she interpreted this feedback as if the team had suggested they now wanted her to make all of the decisions, or "just tell us what to do" (which is Quadrant IV).

As consultants, coaches, and psychologists, we were curious to determine how a coach could help a leader assess their style on the continuum of leading. Take Decisiveness—too little Decisiveness and you won't get results, too much and you could shut people down. There is also a continuum for Inclusiveness. Too little Inclusiveness and people won't feel part of the team and too much, and they will feel that nothing gets resolved.

This holds true for virtually any leadership behavior, regardless of the style or approach. Furthermore, Decisiveness and Inclusiveness two are interdependent pairs. When you lean too far into Decisiveness over time, you will impact Inclusiveness and vice versa.

These two ways of leading are intertwined and are part of a larger system at play. These interdependent pairs are called Polarities, a term coined by Dr. Barry Johnson (1996), and can occur at the individual, team, organizational, and societal levels. Some common examples of Polarities are Mission and Margin, Centralized and Decentralized, Candor and Diplomacy, Mercy and Justice.

We will explain Polarities in more detail later but for now, the key point is that interdependencies exist, and this construct is helpful in understanding leadership behaviors. Common Polarities in Leadership are: Being Direct *and* Supportive, Leading from the Front *and* Leading from the Back, and Being Firm *and* Flexible. There are hundreds of other Polarities. What stood out to us was the dynamic of leadership behaviors.

Many leadership assessment tools offer laundry lists of effective and ineffective ways of leading; however, something critical is missing from such a black-and-white approach. These tools were missing the dynamic nature *between* leadership behaviors. Behaviors do not occur in a vacuum, they are embedded in a system. This system exists whether we see the system or not. When you pull on one behavior, over time, the other behavior will be impacted. Therefore, we were interested in creating a leadership assessment tool that conveys the dynamic nature of leadership behaviors. With this knowledge, we felt we could best support leaders in helping them recognize the greater system, broaden their view of effectiveness, and determine new strategies to be effective leaders.

Leading Through a Polarity Lens

This concept of leveraging the upsides and minimizing the downsides of two seemingly opposing approaches (e.g., leading with backbone and leading with heart) is called Polarity Thinking or *And*-Thinking, coined by Dr. Barry Johnson of Polarity Partnerships (2020). Polarity Thinking views some situations not as problems to be solved but as Polarities to navigate through. The poles represent two interdependent pairs, or tensions, that on the surface can appear to be at odds with one another. Leaders are aware of the tension between these two seemingly opposing choices of behaviors and feel compelled to select one side or the other.

For example, Leading with Heart would represent Pole 1 and Leading with Backbone would represent Pole 2. When viewed as a problem—such as “Should I lead with my backbone OR my heart?”—the leader then selects one of the two approaches as their default way of leading. They will then view their choice as better than the other pole. (“I

am a lead-with-the-heart-type.”) Regardless of which pole he/she selects, over time, this leader will overuse this pole to the neglect of the other pole. If the leader’s style is to choose backbone, this leader will lean into this approach strongly and will then neglect the benefits of leading with heart. Likewise, if the leader chooses to lead with heart, he/she will neglect the benefits of leading with backbone.

This mindset that situations are problems to be solved creates a dilemma that the leader falsely believes he/she has to choose one pole over the other. A leader sees the positives of his/her approach and the negatives of the other approach. Once the leader selects one pole (or approach) over the other, they create a belief that they have determined the “right” way to lead. In this mindset, the leader often sees the upsides in his/her own style and the downsides in a different style. Thinking that only one way is the “right” way to lead excludes leaders from accessing a whole set of leadership behaviors (from the other pole) that are equally as beneficial. Therefore, a leader is not leveraging his/her full potential and effectiveness.

The advantage of Polarity Thinking is that there is no “one” right way to lead, and a leader does not have to select one pole over the other; rather, a leader can select both. This mindset requires a leader to recognize the interdependency of the two poles, rather than seeing the two poles as separate and unrelated. If a leader overuses Leading with Backbone, his/her employees may feel the lack of connection and support. If a leader overuses Leading with Heart, his/her employees may feel a lack of clarity or direction. The point being that one pole impacts the other pole and, therefore, they are interdependent. Recognizing this principle of the poles being influenced by one another allows the leader to then see a bigger picture of their potential impact. The leader can then see how leaning into one behavior too much over time negatively impacts the greater system.

When leaders become more aware of this system, they can then see that both poles have upsides and downsides. With this in mind, a leader no longer views his/her way as the right way but also sees the value of the other pole as well and begins to leverage the upsides, or benefits, of both poles. Leaders learn to navigate through the tension by leveraging the upsides of both poles (using “both/and” thinking) rather than trying to “solve” for the tension by choosing one pole over the other (using “either/or” thinking).

Polarity Thinking is a great tool for coaches to help leaders think more systemically and broadly about their leadership effectiveness. Coaches can use this framework to help clients who tend to gravitate towards an “either/or” mindset (e.g., there is one right way) to shift their clients’ views to a “both/and” mindset and become more open to multiple “right” ways of leading.

Focusing on Three Psychological Needs

Effective leadership includes a wide range of leadership behaviors. Based on our work in leadership and team development, we are most interested in how effective leaders create a culture of engagement for their teams. The leaders we work with often need help in building a culture of engagement which, in turn, helps the organization be successful. Engagement can be defined as a positive state of mind in which individuals are dedicated, energized, and motivated to work.

There has been much research to connect engagement to productivity. Individuals who are more engaged are happier, more productive, and better employees (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Leiter & Baker, 2010). Even the most extraordinary leaders, however, are not able to control employee engagement for individuals. In other words, a leader cannot force someone else to feel and act engaged. Leaders can, however, create an environment that encourages others to feel engaged. Therefore, we believe that coaches have an important role to help leaders assess their effectiveness in how well they are able to create this culture of engagement.

Understanding the importance of creating a culture of engagement, we analyzed multiple ways that leaders could increase employee engagement. What we found from analyzing multiple leadership assessment tools and behaviors on the job was that there were common themes that emerged in the analysis. These themes closely resembled the **three psychological needs** (Ryan & Deci, 2017) identified in Self-Determination Theory (SDT). Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is well-respected, has generated a great deal of research and validation, and has held up across time, culture, and domains. As such, SDT is an excellent framework for us to incorporate into our approach to leadership effectiveness.

SDT is a theory of motivation, developed in the late 1980's by Richard Ryan and Edward Deci, that states individuals have three basic psychological needs, and when these needs are met, they are happier, more satisfied, and more productive. These three basic needs are described as:

- 1) The need for **relatedness**. Relatedness is the sense of being connected to others. In our research we labeled this as feeling **connected**. We found in our experience that employees wanted to feel that they belonged to something bigger than themselves. They wanted to feel included in the larger team and connected to a greater purpose or mission and when they felt this, their level of engagement increased. From the Case Study, the leader definitely believed in building strong relationships and wanting the team members to feel connected. She did this by including the whole team in the decision-making process. Everyone had a role.
- 2) The need for **competence**. Competence is the feeling of being capable. In our work with organizations, employees want to be acknowledged for their competence, skills and contributions. We labeled this category as feeling **valued**. When employees feel valued for their knowledge, this leads to more intrinsic motivation which contributes to a culture of engagement. In the Case Study, the

leader actively solicited other people's ideas and opinions. She valued their expertise.

- 3) The need for **autonomy**. Autonomy is the sense of being in control of one's life. From our experience, being micromanaged was often rated at the top of the list as behaviors detrimental to a team's health. Every time we would help new leaders acclimate into a new team and would ask the team members for advice on how to be successful, "Do not micromanage" was by far the most common answer regardless of the team or industry of that leader. We labeled this category as feeling **empowered**. When employees felt empowered and trusted to make their own decisions, they felt more engaged. In the Case Study, the leader definitely did not micro-manage and instead reached decisions by consensus.

According to SDT, these three needs can be *supported* or *thwarted* by people around these individuals, including managers and leaders. When these needs are supported people feel more satisfied and when these needs are thwarted, people feel less satisfied. When coaches help leaders support these three needs in the workplace, their employees are happier and more engaged. Engagement, then, leads to greater productivity and team effectiveness.

Until it Doesn't Work

Although the categories identified through SDT align with our analysis of what makes a leader effective, the concept of support or thwart lends itself to an "either/or" mindset and does not align with our philosophy. As described in the Case Study, this leader supported the need for relatedness, competence, and autonomy of all of her staff; however, her team was becoming more frustrated and disengaged. So, what was the problem?

We believe that SDT accounts for one side of the equation and is limited in that the model doesn't account for the interdependent pairs in each of the three psychological needs. In other words, the leader was overly supporting her team to the detriment of the team. The team was requesting that she become more decisive and more direct. Although the Leader saw this as a negative, the team actually meant the feedback in a positive way because being Decisive would actually increase engagement. But where is there room for these interdependent pairs in SDT?

This led to our research to show how to expand SDT to include a Polarity lens (a both/and mindset) and create a dynamic leadership model. These were the building blocks to then create an assessment tool in which leaders could assess themselves across a wider range of behaviors that are dynamic in nature and still aligned to the three psychological needs.

The Overlay of Polarities and SDT

To understand the overlay of Polarities and SDT, we created a generic example of one common Leadership Polarity which is Leading with Heart and Leading with Backbone. The chart below shows a visual representation of the quadrants where SDT focus areas lay and the areas which are not addressed in SDT but are visible through a Polarity lens.

Chart Title: *SDT leadership behaviors through a Polarity Lens*

I. Upside of Leading with Heart (Traditional SDT <i>supportive</i> behaviors that correlate to engagement)	III. Upside to Leading with Backbone (Not addressed by SDT)
POLE 1: Leading with Heart	POLE 2: Leading with Backbone
II. Downside to Leading with Heart (overuse) (Not addressed by SDT)	IV. Downside to Leading with Backbone (overuse) Traditional SDT <i>thwarting</i> behaviors that correlate with disengagement

Our research was to validate SDT’s supporting and thwarting behaviors (represented in Quadrants I and IV) and to identify other leadership behaviors that also impact engagement but not addressed in SDT (represented in Quadrants II and III). One of our hypotheses was that behaviors in Quadrant II would correlate with disengagement and behaviors in quadrant III would correlate with engagement, thus presenting a potential new assessment for measuring leadership effectiveness.

How We Conducted the Research

The following is for those who are interested in how we conducted the research. If you care more about the application and more of a “trust-the-process” kind of practitioner, feel free to skip to the next section.

To conduct our research, we sent out a survey to 182 working professionals across the U.S. asking them to rate 36 leadership behavioral items. These items were broken into four categories aligned to the chart above. We assigned 18 behavioral items to each pole, nine were related to the upside and nine were related to the downside. All of the items were examples of common leadership behaviors seen in the workplace and included behaviors that aligned to SDT’s psychological needs of relatedness, competence, and autonomy. The survey respondents were asked to rate each item to the extent that the leadership behaviors, if exhibited by their own managers, would increase, decrease, or have no impact on their own level of engagement.

To confirm this theory, we conducted a paired-samples t-test to compare the engagement level by using the mean of items in Quadrant I and Quadrant IV. The results show that participants' average engagement scores are higher for supportive leadership behaviors ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 0.33$) than for thwarting leadership behaviors ($M = 1.32$, $SD = 0.31$) and the difference between these two leadership behaviors are statistically significant ($t = 37.51$, $p < .001$). Thus, upside of Leading with Heart leadership behaviors are associated with higher engagement level than the downside of Leading with Backbone leadership behaviors.

To expand the SDT theory by incorporating the Polarity thinking, we focused on the positive engagement outcome of Leading with Backbone leadership behaviors (illustrated by Quadrant III: Leading with Backbone upside) as well as the negative engagement outcome of Leading with Heart leadership behaviors (illustrated by Quadrant II: Leading with Heart downside). Again, we conducted a paired-samples t-test on mean of items in Quadrant III and Quadrant II. The results show that participants' average engagement scores are higher for the upside of Leading with Backbone leadership behaviors ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 0.32$) than for the downside of Leading with Heart leadership behaviors ($M = 1.60$, $SD = 0.28$) and the difference between these two leadership behaviors is also statistically significant ($t = 35.66$, $p < .001$). Thus, upside of Leading with Backbone leadership behaviors is associated with a higher engagement level than the downside of Leading with Heart leadership behaviors.

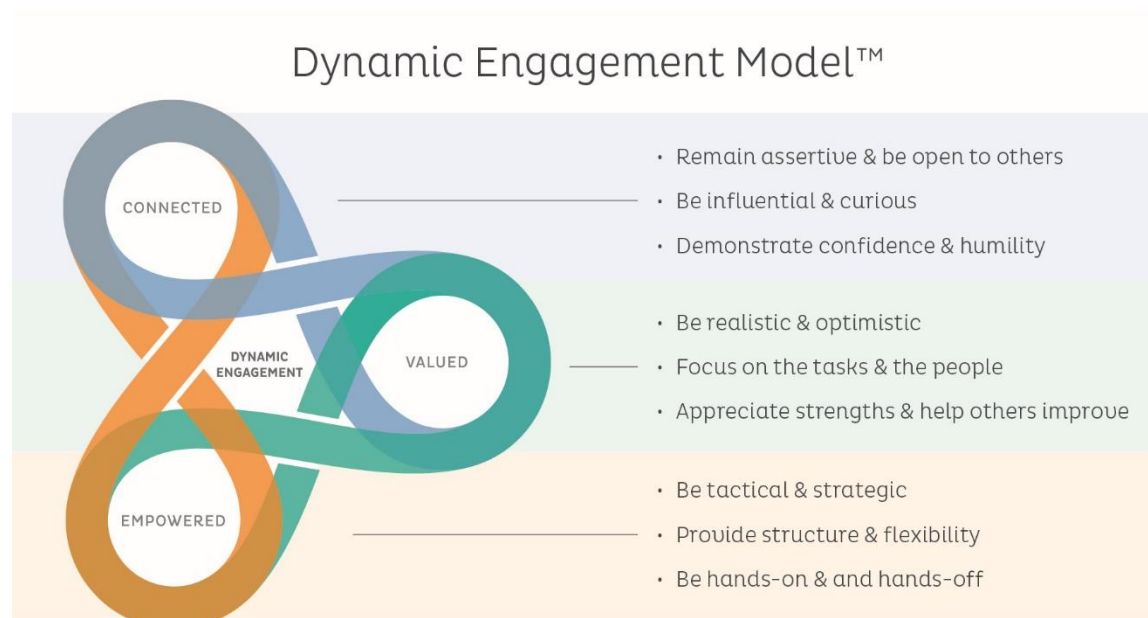
Since we assumed that both upside of Leading with Backbone and upside of Leading with Heart leadership behaviors are associated with higher levels of employee engagement, we also ran a correlation between Quadrants I and III to verify if they are highly correlated. Similarly, a correlation between Quadrants II and IV was used to verify if the downside of Leading with Heart is similar to the downside of Leading with Backbone leadership behaviors. The results of correlation showed that Quadrants I and III are positively and significantly correlated ($r = 0.78$, $p < .001$); and Quadrants II and IV are also positively and significantly correlated ($r = 0.28$, $p < .001$).

The Birth of a New Dynamic Leadership Assessment

Our research indicates that there are additional leadership skillsets that both positively and negatively impact engagement that were not previously addressed by SDT. This led us to develop a more dynamic and comprehensive model of leadership effectiveness. Figure 2 illustrates our current version of the *Dynamic Engagement Model™*. The three psychological needs are represented in the circles on the left: Connected, Valued, and Empowered. Instead of a Polarity, representing two poles, this is called a Multarity, representing three poles interacting and interdependent upon each other. Within each of the poles, we called out common polarities or tensions that leaders are often struggling to navigate through. Our assessment tool is to help leaders identify their effectiveness in leveraging the upsides of these Polarities.

Figure 2

The Dynamic Engagement Model™: Combining SDT and Polarity Thinking



Let's Revisit the Coaching Conversation

Coach: So now that you've reviewed the assessment, what are you walking away with?

Leader: I'm realizing that I was so set on not being like the previous manager and was resisting that way of being so much that I actually dismissed some really effective strategies. Seeing the bigger picture actually helped me to reframe the way I was thinking about a directive style.

Coach: In what way have you reframed that for yourself?

Leader: Before, I could only see the downsides of being decisive and directive and, in my mind, that only leads to disengagement and disrespect. Now that I can see the upsides. I'm willing to try out more of those behaviors and I see the value of making decisions to make progress.

Coach: What is now allowing you to step into these new ways of leading?

Leader: Well, it's not like I need to learn a new skill. I know *how* to be decisive. I make decisions all of the time but what allows me to do things differently now is a change in my mindset. I now see decisive as a positive rather than a negative so I'm open to trying out these behaviors. The behaviors were always there, I just couldn't see them fully. Now I feel that I can more fully step into my leadership potential and lead this team more successfully.

Coaches Wanted

Coaches play an essential role in helping leaders leverage their potential by examining the upsides of both poles and learning how to hold both rather than choosing one. Coaches also have the opportunity to guide leaders in exploring the downsides of their behaviors and gain awareness of when they start to overuse either pole. When leaders see the dynamic of how the behaviors impact each other, they become clearer about the greater system they are trying to navigate within rather than seeing the behaviors as being independent of each other. Seeing the dynamic interplay of the behaviors becomes a new lens for leaders and helps them adopt a both/and mindset. With this bigger picture lens, the leader is also more open to exploring new behaviors with his/her coach.

More To Come

We plan to conduct future research with a larger sample size to further validate and expand on this model, the Polarities, and the behavioral items aligned to the three psychological needs. The goal is to continue to refine the items and create a leadership assessment tool that includes all three psychological needs from SDT and is accessible to coaches to use with clients who are in leadership positions. Rather than receiving a leadership assessment report with a list of strengths and areas to develop, this leadership assessment tool shows the dynamic relationship *between* leadership behaviors, how overusing one pole to the neglect of the other impacts their overall effectiveness. Coaches will be able to use this assessment to help their clients view leadership more holistically, increasing their contextual awareness, and help their clients see the value of both leadership styles, thereby increasing their clients' leadership effectiveness.

Call to Action

If this model resonates with you, we'd love to hear from you. And, if you disagree or have questions about the model, we'd love to hear that, too! We are interested in what may be missing currently in leadership assessment tools that is now uncovered by this approach and what else may be important to consider. We are curious to hear how this future assessment tool may be useful to you in your work with clients. And, please contact us if you'd like to become trained in administering the assessments for the Beta Testing phase. We look forward to hearing from you.

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Laura Mendelow has a Bachelor's degree in psychology, a Master's degree in Organization Development and is a Professional Certified Coach (PCC). Mrs. Mendelow has done extensive work in the learning industry since 1994 and currently focuses on helping leaders create a culture of engagement both at work and at home. Her driving philosophy is "when you 'get' people, you get results."



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Dr. Janet Goodman is both a licensed psychologist and certified business coach (ACC). Her areas of focus as both a psychologist and business coach included stress management, relationship building, leadership development and conflict resolution. She retired in December 2019 after leading a successful private practice for 34 years.



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Dr. Paula Britton has been a faculty member in the Counseling Department at John Carroll University in Cleveland, Ohio for 28 years. She is currently a full professor and the coordinator of practicum/ internship program. She is a licensed psychologist as well as a Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor in Ohio. She has a private practice and also does training in supervision.



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Nhat Nguyen got his Bachelor's degree in International Business and another one in Psychology in Vietnam. After ten years working in the Learning and Development field, he moved to the United States to pursue higher education in Mental Health Counseling. Nhat is passionate about helping people shape their life purpose and live up to their potential in a variety of settings.



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Han Zhang works at the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, University of Wisconsin-Parkside. She received her Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction from Otterbein University and Ph.D. in Evaluation and Measurement from Kent State University. Dr. Zhang's expertise includes quantitative data analysis, research methodology, measurement instrument development, program evaluation, and educational assessment.