

Finding Essence in a VUCA-Plus World III: Trust and Polarity Management

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In this essay I offer a somewhat detailed description of Essence as this key feature of any system relates to the management of tensions which inevitably exist within Essence--and provide Essence with "Vibrance." I describe the nature of a lens through which one can view Essence. In providing this more detailed description, I attend to one of the most important forms of Essence. This is the Essence of Trust. I believe that Trust represents one of the most important Lens of Essence that we engage during our life.

Trust represents the Essence of our engagement in the world. As is the case with most (perhaps all) forms of Essence, Trust comes in several, often contradictory forms. One of these forms resides in a strong desire on our part to find *Home*. We look to Trust as a critical outcome of this search for Home. The second form is to be found in the midst of our desire to engage in a *Quest*. We wish to establish Trust prior to engaging a Quest.

I propose that the vibrance of Trust is created in part by the dynamic interplay between these contradictory forms. We direct the Lens of Trust to the matter of both Home and Quest. It is also important to note that Trust is both a desired outcome of many engagements with the world (Home) and a pre-requisite for successful engagement of many other initiatives in the world (Quest). Many (perhaps most or all) Essences within a system serve both of these functions. Freedom, as an Essence, for instance, can be a desired outcome as well as a pre-condition for important initiatives. Similarly, Health, as an Essence, is a desired outcome and a critical pre-condition for our successful accomplishment of many tasks.

Three Facets in the Lens of Trust

Facets in the Lens of Trust are each directed toward one of three aspects of Trust: competence, intention, perspective (Bergquist, Between and Meuhl, 1995). We "trust" someone because we believe they are competent and can "handle" our relationship with them. We also "trust" someone because we believe they are "on our side" and wish us well. Their intentions are "pure" and consistent. There is a third facet of trust. We trust another person because they share a similar set of perspectives and values with us. We tend to understand one another and clearly comprehend what they have to say and how they "speak" in a nonverbal manner.

I often illustrate these three facets by offering an example taken from the world of interpersonal training. During the last decades of the 20th Century, I often made use of a training exercise called the "Trust Fall." One member of a workshop stands on a bench or deck and, facing backwards, falls back to be caught by other workshop participants. While this is called a "Trust Fall," I would suggest that there

are three quite different scenarios that could be played out when the Trust Fall occurs. One scenario begins with the request that the falling workshop participant bring their elderly but loving mother to the workshop. She stands below the bench or platform so that she can catch her son or daughter when they fall. This woman has deep, loving concerns regarding the welfare of her offspring; however, she is not competent to catch her son or daughter and is likely to be squished by this falling adult. Both mother and child are hurt. Trust in *Competence* is critical here.

I offer a second scenario. The person who is to fall begins to insult other members of the workshop. They are accused of being insensitive, stupid or perhaps a bit “ugly.” They don’t particularly like the person falling off the bench or platform. They let this very annoying person simply fall to the ground: “it serves them well!” These workshop participants are competent (they can readily catch the falling person); they just don’t have the welfare of this person at the front of their mind or heart. Trust regarding *Intentions* plays a critical role in this scenario.

Finally, there is a scenario involving the participation of people from several different countries in the workshop. They speak different languages and don’t know much about the culture of the person who is about to fall off the bench or platform. They wonder about this “strange custom” of people falling backwards off a bench or platform. The person falls back and hits the ground. They are helped up by other workshop participants who ask (through a translator): “do you want to fall again?” The “foreign” workshop participants are competent and are committed to the welfare of all participants in the workshop (after all this is a “global good will” workshop). They just don’t comprehend what is happening. A third facet of Trust is critical here. This is trust regarding the presence of a *Shared Perspective*.

While there are these three different facets of trust (competence, intentions, perspective), there are also certain fundamental polarizing tensions that exist in the establishment and maintenance of Trust.

The Dynamics of Trust: S² (Home) versus O² (Quest)

I propose that tension provides the source of vibrance for the Essence of Trust. The intense illumination and energy emitting from the Lens of Trust is produced by the pull between Home and Quest. Tension is inherent in (1) the basis of Trust within a safe and secure setting (“home”) and (2) the engagement of Trust when in search of opportunity and when open to new experiences (“quest”). It is in the tension between the two S’s (safety and security) and the two O’s (opportunity and openness) that we find the vibrant presence of Trust. I further propose that the vibrant dynamics of Trust are best portrayed as polarity. The most detailed and compelling portrait of polarities is provided by Barry Johnson in two books: *Polarity Management: Identifying and Managing Unsolvable Problems* (1992/1996) and a more recent volume called *And: Making a Difference by Leveraging Polarity, Paradox or Dilemma* (2020).

Differences *between* S² (Home) and O² (Quest)

As a vulnerable species who was slower and weaker than most other animals living on the African savannah (our birthplace), we are inevitably seeking to find and maintain an environment that is secure and safe. We long for nurturance as a species with high levels of a bonding peptide hormone called oxytocin. I am reminded of the comforting melody to be found in the second movement (Largo) of Dvorak's *New World Symphony* or the reassuring passages to be found in Copland's composition written to accompany Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*. We seek out and help to build settings in which there is order and continuity. We are historians who live in our past and are the architects of nests and gatherings of warmth and comfort. As repeated at the start of *Cheers* (a popular TV show), we wish to dwell in a place where "everybody knows my name."

By contrast, as inquisitive human beings, we wish to wander off and tinker with new gadgets. We are often addicted to our own adrenaline as we take on new challenges and climb a tall mountain. We grow uneasy with the same old things happening every day and yearn for the journey to a new place and encounters with people who differ in some ways from us and other people who look and sound like us. We are explorers and inventors. The music by John Williams that introduces *Star Wars* or the composition by Michael Torke called *Javelin* calls us to this quest. We are architects of research labs and gatherings where new ideas are shared. As declared at the start of each *Star Trek* episode (a popular TV show), our mission is to "explore strange new worlds; to seek out new life and new civilizations; to boldly go where no one has gone before!"

One can view the view the distinction between S^2 (Home) and O^2 (Quest) from several different vantage points.

Chart One: Vantage Points

	S^2 (HOME)	O^2 (QUEST)
Values	Security Safety	Opportunity Openness
Compelling Image	Home	Quest
Perspective	Near (Proximal)/Present Far (Distal)/Past (History)	Far (Distal)/Future (Planning)
Orientation	Inward	Outward
Learning Process	Assimilation (Absorbing new information into current framework)	Accommodation (Modifying current framework based on new information)
Direction of Thought	Convergent (bringing thoughts together)	Divergent (moving thoughts apart)
System Status	Static/Strong	Dynamic/Flexible
Trust	Desired Outcome	Pre-Condition

Several important points can be made based on the distinctions offered in this chart. First, there is a strong pull inward (home) as well as a process of assimilation and convergence that operates in the world of security and safety (S^2). The Lens is focused on what matters here and now. Furthermore, Trust is a desired outcome in the search for security and safety. We want to find a setting in which we can

Trust the availability of resources to protect us from a hostile environment as well as the people with whom we interact.

By contrast, the world of opportunity and openness (O^2) is outward looking (quest). It is geared toward the future rather than past or present. The lens is pointed outward—beyond the current horizon. When seeking opportunity and openness we engage in accommodation and divergence. All of this risk taking and adjustment to a changing and challenging environment requires that we have already established trust in our own ability to engage a quest and in the resources and interpersonal support system we will need throughout this journey.

Differences *within* S^2 (Home) and O^2 (Quest)

Tension also exists *within* the worlds of S^2 (Home) and O^2 (Quest). The vibrance of Essence is created by many tensions—including tensions that exist within polarities. Specifically, security and safety, the two major values associated with S^2 (Home), differ from one another in that security tends to be a foundational condition with regard to viable human life. It resides at the base of Abraham Maslow's (2014) hierarchy of needs. We must find security in the presence of adequate shelter, food and water. Safety, on the other hand, is a somewhat more "advanced" and nuanced need for human beings. At one level, safety involves not just shelter but also protection from beasts and foes that would do us harm. At another level, safety involves the condition of trust that we wish to find in our relationship with other people. While safety at the first level is rather easy to identify (are we sufficiently fortified?), safety at the second level is more psychological in nature. We have to "feel" safe when interacting with specific people.

Turning to O^2 (Quest), we similarly find that opportunity is more tangible than is openness—though both conditions are much more psychological than is security. On the one hand, opportunity concerns our predictions about and planning for the future, while openness (like safety) is based on our sense of trust regarding specific relationships with other people. In both cases, O^2 (Quest) is often a self-fulfilling, tightly interactional process. We are likely to find opportunity when we anticipate that it is available and when we take actions to ensure its presence. Similarly, we are likely to find openness in our relationships with other people when we anticipate that this openness is reciprocated and when we take actions that ensures (or at least increases the possibility of) this reciprocity.

S^2 (Home), O^2 (Quest) and the Three Facets of Trust

These distinctions between the fundamental S^2 (Home) and O^2 (Quest) values are important—not only because they create the vibrance of Essence but also because they play an important role in establishing importance and viability regarding the three facets of trust that I have identified. When we are trying to find security, the matter of competence is particularly important. We want to find a skillful carpenter to build our home and a stable supply of food and water at our supermarket. We are less concerned about the intentions of our carpenter or producers of our food. They might be interested only in earning a buck. And they certainly can come from different cultures and might not be "fluent" in our culture.

Safety is another matter. Intentions are very important. Are we interacting with a friend or with an enemy. Competence is also important, for we worry more about an enemy that is competent than an enemy that is incompetent. The latter enemy can be the source of jokes and caricature. The former enemy (powerful and skillful) is not the subject of humor. A shared perspective can also be important when seeking out safety. Given that safety can be a psychological phenomenon, we want to be sure that

our “friend” really understands and appreciates our situation (and we need to appreciate their situation as well).

The matter of opportunity and openness similarly requires a careful inspection for they play an important role in determining the importance and establishment of our three facets of trust. Opportunity is primarily reliant on our internal sense of competence. We are not so much worried about other people catching up, we are more concerned about the matter of stepping up on the platform in the first place. Does it really further our interest to fall back from the platform into the arms of some people whom we don’t really know very well. Isn’t there a better use of our time? Aren’t there better places where we might take a risk?

Our own personal intentions take precedence over the intentions of other people—though we know that we will need their assistance if we are to take full advantage of our opportunities. The matter of perspective also tends to be an internal matter. We embrace our own personal perspective regarding purpose and the nature of success in our life. The perspectives taken by people who offer us an opportunity obviously are important—but their perspectives usually are not critical. Our understanding of the way in which they are viewing the world helps us identify tactics and strategies, but usually does not determine our own aspirations and goals.

It is quite another matter when it comes to our search for openness. It is important to take all three facets of trust into account when opening up to other people and when taking a risk (such as falling off the platform). Are they competent enough to “handle” our disclosure of personal information and viewpoints? Do they have our interests at heart? Do they even understand why and how we are being open (and is openness valued in their own culture?) When we increase our real openness with other people (rather than faking openness) then we are truly falling backwards off a platform. When we take a risk in offering a new idea during a committee meeting or when we provide honest feedback to a colleague during a coffee break, then we are required to discern the status of all three forms of trust.

Fear, Loss and Regrets

When engaging in polarity management, we must focus not just on the “upside” of each polarity, but also on its “downside.” Barry Johnson (1992/1996) specifically encourages us to identify the fears associated with each polarity. As I have already noted, we can further differentiate between fears associated with loss, and fears associated with regret. I would suggest that we listen to the behavioral economists and identify these regrets—for they may play as important a role as the fear of loss in driving the shifting forces of a polarity.

S² Loss

When considering the downside of S² (Home) we can first identify several primary fears regarding loss. First, there is a fear that a focus on security and safety will lead to rigidity and stagnation. We fear the loss of *Vitality*. Having secured our home, we never leave it. We remain close to accustomed food and water—no need to try something “exotic” when our palate has been satisfied with the regular old “ham and eggs” or “burger and shake.” Our worst nightmare changes. It is not that we are insecure or unsafe, it is that we have settled into a “humdrum” life. We are now that “boring” person that we joked about when young. And we have become bored with our life and with the person we have become. “By Jove, I now resemble my father/mother!!!”

When “stuck” in S^2 (Home) we find ourselves living a life of routine and complete predictability. I am reminded of an evening of minimalist music played by an orchestra in my region. While I appreciated the willingness of this orchestra’s conductor to try out new music and found the slow building of the tempo and emotional intensity of the music to be compelling, I also found that I was waiting impatiently for the composition to come to an end. Repetition can drain one’s patience.

O² Loss

On the O^2 (Quest) side of the ledger comes the fear that we lose our sense of well-being. We are overwhelmed. Our anxiety is no longer contained. We fear the loss of *Integrity*. I make use of this term as it relates first and foremost to the notion of structural integrity. We fear that we will “fall apart.” The second use of the term “integrity” is also relevant. We lose integrity as it relates to character and honesty. When things are anxiety-provoking then we cease looking at our compass of values and direction. Instead, we become opportunists who seek out any opportunity even if it means sacrificing some core values (moral essence). We open our heart and soul to another person and find that the floodgates of negative emotions have opened on the part of the other person (defensiveness, anger, disappointment, rejection). Our own internal floodgates have also been opened. We feel embarrassed, disappointed, and/or angry. Our emotional and interpersonal intelligence are challenged. We don’t know what to do next.

The accompanying nightmare centers on a swirling, chaotic world over which we have no control. We envision ourselves as strangers who are living in a strange land. I am reminded of Mussorgsky’s musical composition called “Night on Bald Mountain” when all of the demonic forces “come out to play.” We long for the awakening of morning and to the tolling of church bells that bring Mussorgsky’s terrifying score to a close. We fear becoming that “crazy lady/gentleman” that lived down the street when we were young. “My God, I might be driven to insanity like that neighbor I feared.”

S² Regrets

I have identified some of the fears that attend to our residency in either the S^2 (security and safety) or O^2 (opportunity and openness) polarity. What about the regrets? When we have lingered in S^2 (Home) too long, then we regret not having taken a bit of a risk. Much like Jimmy Steward in *A Wonderful Life*, we look at the posters of distant lands and wonder why we never took that trip. We look at the travel posters on our own wall--or more often watch the inviting ads on our TV set or on the Internet that feature the stay at a beach front or mountain side hotel. We wonder what it would be like to book passage on a large ocean liner that is sailing the Caribbean seas. Then there are the job postings that pop up on our computer or are identified by our close friend (who worries about our stagnation). We regret always saying “No” when someone offers us a chance to do something different. We wonder why we always see only the hard side of any new venture. Filled with Regret, we often begin to both envy and hate those people who have taken the journey outward from home.

O² Regrets

At the other end of the polarity (O^2 /Quest), we find the regret that come with living in the midst of challenge and uncertainty. We walk by a home on our way back to the hotel. We view the fireplace

ablaze in this home’s living room. We imagine the life of this home’s family. We wonder why there is no fireplace in our near future. We sit in a city park for several minutes in order to observe children playing on some nearby swings. We reflect on the last time we spent time with our own children in a playground. They have now grown older and no longer spend much time at the park.

In the back of my head comes Harry Chapin’s song (*Cats in the Cradle*) concerning the father who never spends time with his son—and finds that his son is becoming “just like his father.” This song is filled with regret and the message contained in its lyrics pulls at our fatherly (or motherly) heartstrings. Why did I take this consulting assignment or agree to do a fair amount of work “out-of-town.” Here I am in an Asian (or European) city and am a long, long way from home. Filled with regret, we often begin to both envy and hate those people who live in the home with the fireplace or those who are playing with their children.

Chart Two: Fear, Loss and Regret

	S² (HOME)	O² (QUEST)
Fear	Boredom Rigidity Stagnation	Anxiety Sense of Overwhelm Lack of containment
Loss	Vitality	Integrity
Regret	Never leaving home Never taking a risk	Never being satisfied Never caring enough for what is really important

At the heart of the matter regarding the themes found in Chart Two is the psychological basis to be found in each of these themes. While there are both internal and external factors to consider when framing the positive features related to Trust, the negative features tend to reside in our heart and head. Fear, Loss and Regret play out inside us in response to conditions that often present themselves from outside us.

Polarity Parameters

Having identified the key actors in this drama of polarized trust, I am now ready to introduce three of the key parameters that operate in all polarities. Two of these are emphasized by Barry Johnson (1992/1996). The third parameter is one that I would introduce in the preparation of a polarity-based analysis.

Both/And Rather Than Either/Or

Many of those involved in reflecting on the nature of Trust, tend to focus on only one of the two polarities. They can be “homers” who wax poetic and nostalgic about the establishment of Trust in a home. We should remember what it is like to be wanted and to care for others. We should “try to

remember” those precious moments – “and follow, follow, follow . . .” Instead, those who focus on Trust can be “questers.” They encourage us to get up off our couch and embark on a journey. We should follow our bliss or reply on the “force” to guide and propel us through extraordinary ventures into the unknown. The tension between these polarities is great. As I have noted, the embrace of both polarities yields the vibrance to be found in the Essence of Trust (as well as other forms of Essence).

We will frame our analysis around these two polar-opposite stances and begin by identifying some of the benefits and disadvantages associated with each of these images of Trust. These benefits and disadvantages lead us away from the horizontal dimension of a polarity to a vertical dimension.

Both Positive and Negative Valence Rather Than Only Positive or Negative Valence

There is a strong tendency for all of us (especially under conditions of stress) to focus only on the positive side of the ledger—and usually on the positive aspects of only one option (polarity). We might turn to the negative side of the opposing option but are unlikely to give much consideration to the negative side of our favored option. We over-praise, over-sell and over-commit to our favored option. This often leads to surprise, disappointment and abandonment of our favored option once it is actually enacted—see my own essay on the Change Curve (Bergquist, 2014).

Barry Johnson is pushing us to look both left and right when not only crossing a busy intersection but also when seeking to manage a specific polarity. It seems that there are “goodies” to be discovered on both sides of a polarity. Many years ago, the architects of Synectics and spectrum analysis (Gordon, 1961) proposed that there are good ideas buried in any proposal being made in a Synectics group. I suspect that Johnson would offer a similar proposal regarding both sides of a polarity.

Furthermore, any idea that is at all specific will have its own downside. Not even “apple pie” is all good. We may find bits of an apple’s core in our “apple pie” and our pie is inclined to rot a bit when sitting out for too long a period of time. Statements regarding those things or events that are all good often end up being nothing more than tautologies. They reside only a short distance from: “Goodness is a good thing!” Or “Great ideas are inevitably great!” We don’t have to be eternal pessimists or grumbling curmudgeons to recognize that there are always concerning matters to be addressed when considering any idea. This perspective relates to what behavior scientists have described as the premortem assessment of what might go wrong in the implementation of any initiative (Kahneman, 2011; Bergquist, 2014).

Both Positive and Negative Forces versus Only Positive or Negative Forces

It is in the balanced and sustained consideration of not only polar-opposite priorities and perspectives but also the positive and negative aspects of each polar position that we are best able to appreciate and eventually manage a challenging polarity – such as we find with S^2 (Home) and O^2 (Quest). While Johnson offers excellent advice (and provides many case examples) in both of his books (Johnson, 1992/1996; Johnson, 2020) regarding the steps to be taken in conducting a polarity analysis, I would suggest that the positive and negative parameter might be supplemented by a process of force field

analysis that Kurt Lewin (2010) suggested many years ago. The total field of forces identified by Lewin provides what I have identified as the vibrance of Essence that exists in this field.

Engaging Goodwin Watson's S-P-A model: For Lewin, specific factors (forces) either assist or block the successful achievement of specific goals within this system (field). I borrow from Goodwin Watson (Watson and Johnson, 1972) in suggesting that these factors might be structural (S) in nature. They might also involve processes (P) and/or attitudes (A) that are operating in this system. We can conduct a force field analysis at the start of any polarity analysis by first identifying a specific outcome we hope to achieve. This outcome can help to guide our selection of a lens and the direction to which we turn this lens.

With regard to the analysis I am conducting in this essay, there are two sets of desired outcomes. One set (S^2 /Home) includes security and safety. The second set (O^2 /Quest) includes opportunity and openness. We begin with the lens of S^2 (Home) and identify the structures, processes and attitudes (SPA) that will facilitate the achievement of the S^2 goals (security and safety) within this system (organization). These factors (forces) hold a positive *Valence* with regard to S^2 (Home). This list might include such forces as a system's long history of stability (attitude), close working relationships among members of this organization (process) and operation of the organization within a long-established institution (structure).

We then turn to the negative side of the force field ledger. Our lens is turned in this direction. These forces hold a negative *Valence* regarding achievement of desired S^2 (Home) outcomes. This negative *Valence* list might include a prevalent desire of members of this organization to try something new (attitude), the emergence of a new generation of members who prefer to relate to one another in a quite different manner (process) and the existence of "cracks" (such as growing financial debts) in the institution within which the organization is operating (structure). The list might also include the forementioned fears (boredom, rigidity, stagnation) and concerns about the loss of vitality. Regrets might surface concerning the failure to ever leave home or take a risk.

A similar force field analysis can be conducted with O^2 (Quest). Once again, we turn our lens in two directions—first identifying the positive forces and then the negative forces that are to be found in the organization's structures, processes and attitudes. The positive forces might include expanded ownership of the organization (structural), hiring of young people with ample technological skills (process) and a prevalent spirit of entrepreneurship in the community where this organization resides (attitude). The negative forces might include lack of consistent financial support for innovation (structural), lack of support and coordination between units of the organization (process) and lingering fear regarding the broader economy in which the organization operates (attitude). The primary O^2 (Quest) fears (anxiety, overwhelm, lack of containment) might be included on the list along with the feared loss of integrity and potential regrets regarding elusive satisfaction, lack of caring for others and failure to discover what is really important.

Strength and Clarity: I would suggest that two other assessments should also be made regarding each of the forces that have been identified. The first assessment concerns the strength of each force as it helps or hurts accomplishment of the desired outcomes. The strength will vary depending on the specific outcome being considered. This assessment is particularly important in the case of polarities. There is an inclination to overestimate the strength of a particular negative force regarding one polarity when beginning to swing to the opposite polarity. We have a strong desire to rationalize the swing. As a result, the enemies of the first polarity grow stronger and we find even more reasons to escape this troubled and besieged polarity.

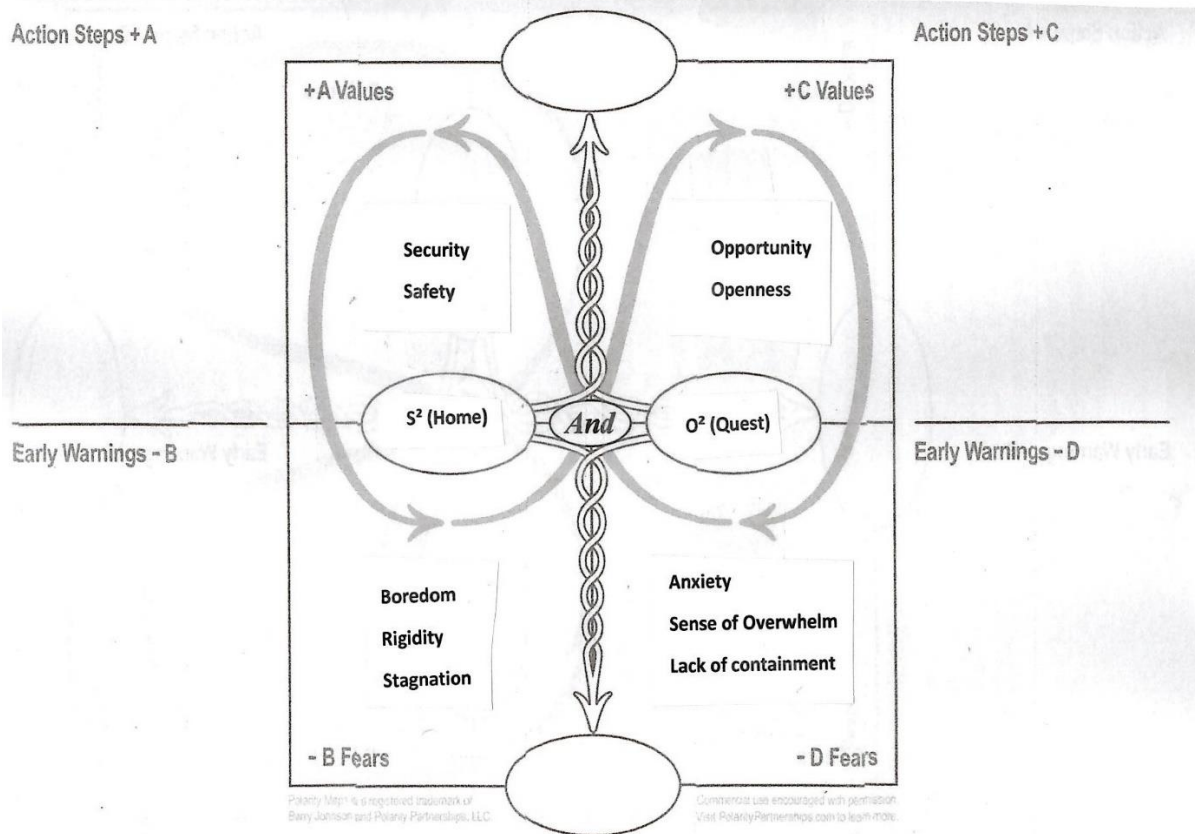
The second assessment concerns our own confidence with regard to the potential impact of each force on the desired outcomes. Are we sure this force will have a positive (negative) impact? How do we know that this force is particularly strong (or weak)? Do we need to do some more research on this force in order to be better informed regarding its valence and/or strength? Once again, this assessment is of particular value when we are facing polarities. Our emotions are likely to be a bit higher when the push and pull of polarities are prevalent. It is critical that we slow down, double check our findings, and critically examine the assumptions and biases we bring to our force field assessment.

With the completion of these force field analyses, we are in an excellent position to begin our polarity-based analysis.

Graphic Representation of the Trust Polarity

The parameters have been introduced and the players introduced. It is now time to present a graphic that incorporates these parameters and players. Here is this graphic representation.

Polarity Diagram One



Personal and Interpersonal Polarity Dynamics

I have offered a broad portrait of the way in which polarities play out in our life and society and have just presented a graphic portrayal of the swing between the world of S² (Home) and O² (Quest). I will now provide several more concrete portraits of several S² (Home) and O² (Quest) related dynamics. I examine the lenses that two hypothetical actors bring to their search for the Essence of Trust.

Susan

Our first person to face polarities lives in a nice suburb community on the outskirts of Cleveland Ohio. Susan dwells in a daily life of routine. She also lives in something of an informational silo. Her selection of news shows to watch and Internal messages to download is quite limited. She is highly selective in her admission of information about the world that is in any way “disturbing.” Kevin Weitz and I (Weitz and

Bergquist, 2024) have devoted an entire book to the description of “bubbles of belief” such as can be found surrounding Susan.

The lens that Susan brings to her world is rather “old-fashioned.” Life for Susan in the suburban is not unlike that lived during the 19th and early 20th Century by a majority of Americans. The life of these rural Americans consisted mostly of farming while Susan’s life consists of working as a receptionist in an office building near her home. Yet, there were many ways in which Susan’s daily life resembles that of the farm family. Susan has many friends in her neighborhood and has been engaged to a loving man whom she has known for more than ten years. He was introduced to her by one of her friends. Susan is enamored with the history of her local community and is religious about attending the county fair each year. The song “Country roads take me home” is one of her favorites, even though she rarely sees a country road and is already firmly ensconced in her home. Trust prevails everywhere in her life. Susan trusts the intentions of her boyfriend and her neighbors, finds that her boyfriend is competent in fixing broken appliances in her home, and feels confident that all members of her community perceive, think and feel much like she does. It would seem that Susan’s entire community lives in a shared bubble of belief.

Susan may be living in a world of distorted Serenity. This is a destination that I have described in a previous essay in this series (Bergquist, 2024a). She seems to be frozen in place and feels ill-equipped to address the challenges of a VUCA-Plus world. For Susan, the “shelter” is critical. She needs a seemingly unchanging community, unchanging relationships with her boyfriend, and an unchanging job as receptionist. Still, something is stirring in Susan. She loves her boyfriend—yet they are still not married. Susan is pretty much satisfied with her job as a receptionist but wonders if there is something more that she as a woman can do.

A couple of weeks ago, Susan stumbled on a program where Mika Brzezinski and a couple of other women were talking about an upcoming international conference where women were speaking about “knowing their value” as competent, ambitious human beings. Susan wondered about her own “value.” Were her abilities being fully realized in her daily routine for many years as a receptionist. Shouldn’t she have been given a chance to do something more challenging at her office? Was her competence as a receptionist making her “indispensable” – and therefore preventing her from being offered a new, higher-paying and more-prestigious job? A bit of frustration was welling up in Susan. Should she look elsewhere for a job? Could she really “trust” the intentions of her boss? Was he actually interested in her welfare?

For Susan, there were emerging emotions of regret. While she feared moving on to another job or even leaving her boyfriend and perhaps her community, she also wondered if she had settled for too little in her life. Maybe she never really valued her own “worth” as an employee—or even as a potential spouse. Susan imagined spending the rest of her life in the same town, same boyfriend (or perhaps wife) and same job. She was suddenly pulled toward getting out of her routine. Susan loves old movie musicals—and especially *Hello Dolly* (starring Barbra Streisand). There is an extended scene filled with both song and dance in which Dolly Levy declared that she is “coming back!” after spending many years hiding out.

Susan is suddenly replaying this scene on her old DVD player. Unlike Dolly, Susan never left a vibrant life; however, she might join Dolly in finding a new life (perhaps with a new beau, new job and new community). Does she have enough Trust in her own competence, and can she Trust her own enduring intentions (to remake herself)? Will this mean that she begins to see the world through a new set of lenses. Will the Essence of Trust now include a journey as well as (or instead of) a home?

Rick

Our second case study concerns a man who lives in New York City. He brings a quite different lens to his life than is the case with Susan. Rick moved from mid-sized in Vermont to take a position at an advertising firm in the “Big Apple” (building on his work as advertising director of a mid-size newspaper published in his Vermont community. He lives an “exciting” life of challenge and creativity. A special evening at a Broadway play (often a Stephen Sondheim musical) is preceded by dinner with a colleague at a “fabulous” New York restaurant. This is followed by post-theater espresso at an off-Broadway bistro—and maybe a latke or slice of cheesecake.

Rick lives for the future and holds a compelling personal vision of the future (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024). He also is in the business of selling visions to the recipients of his advertisements. Rick is literally “hooked” on all of the excitement and challenge in his work life. We now know that “workaholics” like Rick may be addicted to their own adrenaline. Rick might be dependent on his multiple doses of highly caffeinated coffee each day. However, he is certainly dependent on high-voltage, deadline-driven work demands. Days away from work are actually unpleasant for Rick. He is withdrawing from his adrenaline-laced work. As a result, Rick often returns to his office on weekends or works at home on his computer.

Addiction might also be found in Rick’s urban-based interpersonal relationships. They are high-voltage and often challenging—just like his job at the ad agency. Many of the people Rick meets are engaged for only a few minutes. The interactions typically are “transactional” in nature. They are intended for completion of a task rather than for satisfaction of any interpersonal need. When he takes a few minutes to reflect on what is occurring in his interpersonal life, Rick allows one of his favorite Sondheim songs to swirl around his brain: “another 100 people just got off the train.” Rick images that each of the people has a wonderful story to tell! He recalls a World War I song: “How ya gonna keep ‘em down on the farm after they’ve seen Paree!” For Rick, it is “the Big Apple” not Paree (Paris).

Rick has a few friends in New York City. They are mostly associated with his advertising firm. A typical early evening is spent with his ad-men friends at a bar near his place of work. While Rick is not a heavy drinker, he does like to get just a bit high with his friends. At the present time, Rick is not dating anyone. As a handsome, accomplished and energetic Gay man, Rick has no trouble finding men to date. However, he doesn’t find most of his dates to be very pleasurable and he is hesitant to get too involved physically and emotionally given the lingering fears of sexually transmitted diseases. Even with his hesitation about getting involved with one other person, Rick trusts the journey he is on while living and working in New York City. He holds a Lens that reveals deeply felt emotions of Trust in his own ability to live in this vibrant city (competence), in the sincerity of his own commitment to work in the field of

advertising (the facet of intentions) and in the sharing of perspectives and values with most of the people he meets (ever so briefly) and with whom he works (the facet of shared perspective).

The story doesn't end here regarding the head and heart of our protagonist. In the midst of his powerful experience of Trust, Rick finds the troubling presence of another set of perspectives and values (another Lens). At times, Rick thinks about moving back to Vermont. While there are not a large number of Gay men in his community—and there are still strong negative vibes in his community about Gay relationships—Rick believes that those Gay men who do live in his Vermont community might have more in common with him than those large number of Gay men living in New York City. There is also a lingering uneasiness about the work he is doing. Sometimes, Rick is not finding much gratification in producing and selling ads to clients with products about which he doesn't really care. He misses the more “honest” work of financially supporting his local newspaper through his work as advertising director. Even though his Vermont newspaper is now struggling to stay alive, Rick sometimes thinks that he could somehow help this newspaper survive (using some of the ideas regarding technology that he has acquired in New York City). An alternative vision of the future has emerged: he envisions becoming a small-town savior rather than a successful urban entrepreneur.

As I have already mentioned, one of the things that Rick loves about living in New York City is attending theater. He enjoys not only a Sondheim musical on Broadway, but also the *Avant guard* plays that he often attends alone. Rick loves to find a new play at an off-Broadway theater that is edgy and perhaps even controversial. Recently, he attended a play that offered an alternative version of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Instead of waiting for Godot (God) to show up, the two protagonists (ad executives) are waiting for the new client and for the big dollars that come with this client. Called *Waiting for Avidus* (Avidus being the Latin word for greed), this play represented a pull for superficial success at the expense of ethics, and an insatiable desire for more money. This play and the theme of greed stayed with Rick for several weeks. He felt that he had no one to talk to about his reactions to Avidus. Something was stirring within him.

While Rick loves the “nontraditional” musicals written by Steven Sondheim, he also admits to a love of old musicals that are to be found “on the Great White Way” (Broadway). He recently attended a revival of Leonard Bernstein's *Wonderful Town*. He left the theater with one of the songs lingering in his brain (and heart). It was “Why, oh, Why, oh, did I ever leave Ohio!” Perhaps the tune, “Ohio.” lingered because of its similarity to a favorite theme in one of Brahms's symphonies. However, “Ohio” might instead be stuck in Rick's brain because Comden and Green's lyrics to this song are resonating with a slowly emerging desire to return home. He replaces “Ohio” with “Vermont” and finds himself at times regretting his decision to leave home (“why, oh, why, oh). At times, Sondheim's “another 100 people getting off the train” can lead Rick to feel exhausted rather than exhilarated. This song (like *Waiting for Avidus*) can portray the dehumanizing impact of urban life. Rick is pulled by the emotion of regret regarding his decision to leave Vermont. Rick slowly begins to consider a return to Vermont—even if this means the loss of wonderful opportunities afforded by the “Big Apple.” Will the Essence of Trust now include a return to his hometown as well as (or instead of) his ongoing journey of discovery in New York City?

Societal Polarity Dynamics

I have focused primarily on dynamics associated with the operation of Trust alongside S^2 (Home) and O^2 (Quest) in our personal and interpersonal lives. These dynamics also seem to operate in the much broader political and international spheres. While each era in the life of world affairs is distinctive, there are certain familiar cycles that take place. As Mark Twain indicated, “history never repeats itself, but it does often rhyme”. During the past century we saw the establishment of order and some tranquility in early 20th Century Germany (under the autocratic rule of Chancellor Bismarck); a similar setting was established during the 1930s (under the despotic rule of Adolph Hitler). Security and Safety were established at the expense of freedom and individual expression.

We find something quite different operating in early 1920s Germany with its *Avante Guard* expressionism in the arts (portrayed in the writing of Christopher Isherwood and later on Broadway in the musical *Cabaret*). Following World War II, we see a “new” Germany that is filled eventually with optimism and the reconciliation of East and West Germany (“the wall is torn down!”) O^2 (Quest) is alive and well. Today, there might be a swing back toward S^2 (Home) —especially with the challenge of immigration. Similar, though perhaps less dramatic, polarity-based swings seem to have taken place in many other parts of the world during the 20th Century and are taking place right now (often in disturbing fashion).

In the United States, we see establishment of safe and secure environments prior to World War I—at least for those with power and wealth. We saw a more equalitarian establishment of safe and secure settings after World War II in the establishment of the American suburbs and a “clean” culture saturated with the perfect family (*Ozzie and Harriet*, *Leave It to Beaver*) and nostalgia (*Gun Smoke* and Disney’s main street). At the other end of the 20th Century swing was the freedom and frivolity of the mid-1920s (the flapper era) as well as the idealism and anarchy of the mid-1970s (the “hippie era”). We swung back and forth, replicating Johnson’s polarity dynamics, and may now be engaged in another mid-21st Century swing. As I noted in an earlier essay in this series (Bergquist, 2024b) the swing might often be preceded by a rapid oscillation (dither). This dither might be found in the present-day trembling of our society between two quite different future societies.

A Polarity Analysis

With this preliminary framing and charting completed and with both personal and historical polarities having been presented, we will shift our attention to what happens when we try to *maximize* the benefits of either polarity. Our force field analysis provided valuable insights and guidance in the identification of the upside and downside of each polarity.

S^2 (Home) Upside

In the case of sustaining a commitment to S^2 (Home), the maximization of security and safety would enable both Susan and Rick to live a comfortable life. All three facets of Trust would be achieved in their

life. They would both be fully aware of and making use of their own competencies, as well as being able to rely on the competencies of their friends and neighbors. Trust would have been firmly established. Susan knows she can continue to do a good job as a receptionist. Rick knows (or at least believes) that he could be successful in transitioning from a high-pressure job in New York City to a lower pressured job in his hometown. Rick could become a “big frog in a small pond.” Both Rick and Susan really “know” the people living in their small town (be it a suburb near Cleveland or a village in Vermont). “Everybody knows your name” and you know all of their names and quite a bit about their personal history. In such a secure setting you can Trust everyone’s intentions and know that they all “speak the same language” as you and come with a history that is similar to your own when they are interacting with you.

From a broader historical perspective, we find a similar level of comfort and Trust in a society where S^2 (Home) reigns supreme. There is one dominant narrative that everyone in this society accepts as “gospel”. Nothing much changes and there appears to be no need for major reform. This condition of security and safety produces a widely shared assumption that there are people in our society who are competent (technically and socially). They can solve whatever problems arise. There are also leaders who are not only competent, but also dedicated to the welfare of our society. A Dwight Eisenhower can serve as father-figure to an entire nation. A John Foster Dulles can identify the enemy (Soviet Union) and find sufficient resources to meet the threats posed by this enemy. Everyone speaks the same language (English) and have been socialized into a particular way of being in the world (“the American Way”).

S^2 (Home) Downside

Barry Johnson suggests that we pause at this point—and quit extolling the virtues and benefits of a life lived with serene security and safety. What happens if S^2 (Home) reigns supreme? First, it means that not much learning is taking place. Our children never quite mature and are vulnerable to any disruption in the “regular order of things.” Second, life in a silo leaves one with little opportunity to experience and taste all that our vibrant world has to offer. We see only the sidewalls of the Silo and can glimpse upward to only that small portion of the sky that shines down from the top of the Silo. Third, we must distort reality in order to live in a world that is saturated with VUCA-Plus challenges. As I have noted in my previous essay (Bergquist, 2024a), a world of Serenity is only found if we are willing to descend down a rabbit hole to a wonderland of lies, conspiracies and “alternative realities.”

With regard to the lives led by Susan and Rick, we find similar difficulties. A world of S^2 (Home) requires Susan to remain in her current job and foreclose any new learning or growth. She remains in a relationship that is not truly fulfilling and never meets anyone new who might be of “interest” to her—coming from a different background and perhaps even speaking a different language. Rick might find that a move back to Vermont and residing once again in a world that provides more security and safety than New York City, is purchased at the expense of growth-enhancing career challenges and the excitement of interacting with some of the 100 people who just got off the train. Rick might also find that he must abandon a more open expression and enactment of his distinctive lifestyles when returning to his hometown. Security and safety come at the expense of displaying an authentic self. In reaction to this downside of S^2 (Home), we turn to the other end of the polarity.

O² (Quest) Upside

We extoll the benefits of opportunity and openness that are found in an O² world of Quest. We find an emphasis on innovation and adventure at this other end of the polarity. An O² Quest produces an opportunity for growth and an openness to new experiences. We journey outward and upward, finding new paths and gaining new insights about the dynamic world in which we live. Susan envisions a life in which she is not just challenged to uncover her own competencies, but also is provided with wonderful experiences that she cannot find in her suburb community. Susan imagines journeying to a major city—such as Chicago. She could find a job that is both different from and more fulfilling than being a receptionist. What about Rick? Unlike Susan, Rick is actually living an O² life of Quest. He is thriving in the vibrant world of New York City advertising and in the rich cultural life he finds in this cosmopolitan environment. He can live in an environment that enables him to explore the full meaning of his own lifestyle preferences. Susan would be able to try out different lifestyle preferences in her own life if she embarked on an O² Quest.

Historically, we have found times during the past century when American society (and many other societies throughout the world) has produced mini renaissances—with free expression of ideas and diverse images of a desired future. O² (Quest) provides opportunities for minority perspectives to be entertained, as well as openness to new cultural forms (in the arts and media). O² provides the “oxygen” that refreshes and energizes a society. Borders are opened and “newcomers” are welcomed, as are the changes that these immigrants bring to the existing society.

It is important to reiterate that Trust plays a quite different role at this end of the polarity. Trust is no longer the desired outcome. Trust is now a prerequisite to one’s successful engagement of a Quest. If we can’t Trust our own competencies or the competencies someone who is providing us with support, then we shouldn’t embark on the journey. If we are not clear and certain about the reasons why we are taking on the Quest, then maybe we should not choose this option. If this means journeying to a “strange new world” where our fundamental perspectives and practices are being challenged or readily misunderstood, then maybe we should stay put. In each case, we need to first establish Trust before taking out our roadmap and warming up the engine. If Trust has not been established, then it becomes an impediment (a negative force) and belongs on the downside of Johnson’s polarity map.

O² (Quest) Downside

Is the journey outward into an exciting new world all good? Can we find “heaven” in a world that is saturated with O² (Quest)? I am reminded of an Emergency Ward physician who I interviewed many years ago. He indicated that the Emergency Ward was “heaven” for him. It is a world filled with challenges, life-and-death decisions and new learning (about surgical procedures) around every corner. What about today? Would this doctor still consider his emergency ward to be heaven after many years of facing these life-and-death challenges? A world saturated with O² can kill us. We need some other gases in the air we breathe. We also need escape from a world filled with O² challenges—which are particularly prevalent when VUCA-Plus is prevalent. Opportunities are fine—but sometimes we need to relax into something that we already know well and can readily engage. Openness is desirable—but we

don't want to be flooded with experiences or people who require our constant adjustment and adaptation.

Rick is certainly aware of the O^2 downsides. He is often exhausted after a day of work and an evening of boisterous interactions with his work companions. He sometimes declares (to himself) that he has had enough of the "learning" and scrambling to fully appreciate the product or service being offered by his client. "How about working with something that is 'old news' and someone who is actually a bit boring!" Susan is not aware of the downsides. However, we can imagine a moment when Susan left her "old" job and "old" boyfriend. She pauses for a moment, tears come to her eyes, and she longs for the "old days." Searching for a new job in a new (much larger) community will present Susan with many of these O^2 moment of regret and deep sorrow.

Similarly, we find collective moments in a society when the era of innovation and exploration gives way (for at least a brief period of time) to restive support for the way "we used to do things." A conservative political party suddenly gains traction in the polls that are being conducted. Legislation is being prepared that restricts immigration or bans certain kind of Internet material. Attendance increases at theme parks which feature replications of old seaport villages or western towns. Reruns of old TV shows are to be found in abundance on Cable TV. These shows feature traditional families—and are replete with comedy rather than tragedy.

Polarity Dynamic

What is the outcome of this pull between S^2 (Home) and O^2 (Quest)? Barry Johnson would predict that Susan, Rick and society are moving from a positive perspective regarding and accompanying prioritization of one polarity to a negative perspective and caution regarding this polarity. From there a shift takes place to the other polarity and then to a growing concern about that second priority. Back to the first priority and then on and on from positive to negative to positive to negative to positive (once again). As portrayed in *Polarity Diagram One*, this swinging pattern produces a Figure 8 design. For Susan, the swing would begin with the positive of S^2 (Home), while for Rick it would begin with the positive of O^2 (Quest). We can begin at either pole when describing the polarity dynamic operating in most societies.

Dithering

I suggest that a polarity-driven swinging back and forth through Figure 8 can take place in several different ways. At the most elementary level, the swing can be portrayed as the forementioned *Dithering* process. There is a rapid swinging back and forth between the polarities. This dithering often occurs as a series of thoughts or feelings. Susan ponders the move to a big city, then recalls that she has a community bakeoff to attend, then feels annoyed that she has to go to this event. She wonders if there would be these "obligations" if she "got lost" in an urban setting. She then notes that it might be lonely in the city. Susan then gets ready for the bakeoff.

Rick similarly dithers for a moment while scurrying through a busy workday. A moment flashback about that scene about returning to Ohio, then an interesting idea about the visual setup for the new advertising campaign, then stepping into the elevator, then recalling a line from *Waiting for Avidus* that makes Rick squirm a bit about his job, then making a mental note to set up that dinner reservation for dinner tomorrow night (“I do love city life”), then stepping out of the elevator.

Dithering also enables us to engage briefly in a fantasy about the other side of the polarity and then return to reality. Susan pauses during a brief break in her receptionist routine to daydream about life in a Paris *pied-à-terre*. Rick skims a copy of the *Farmer’s Almanac* that he purchased last week. He lingers on the weather forecasts and wonders if Vermont farmers actually rely on these forecasts.

Many members of a society start binge-watching a 6-part documentary on small town America (S²). Media research finds that they soon abandon this series. Some of these viewers actually click on their remote and start watching a 4-part series on the latest nanotechnologies (O²). They don’t stay on this documentary for a very long period of time. Other folks flip back and forth between the section of their magazine that features homes located in the woods of New Hampshire and the section that features the latest shows on Broadway.

Flailing

I would distinguish between Dithering and Flailing—which is a much more dramatic swing that involves enacted decisions rather than just shifting thoughts, feelings or fantasies. This *Flailing* may lead to precipitous decisions regarding where to live, what job to do, and even who to love. Susan could actually decide to “take this job and shove it!” She could also “kiss off” her boyfriend. And then hop on a bus to Chicago where she hopes to find an apartment and job. Susan “trusts” that the world (or some divinity) will be “kind” to her and open new doors for her. Instead, she takes a more “reasonable” step. Susan drives her car to a friend’s home in Atlanta, where there is the prospect of a job involving public relations. This would be an advance over her receptionist job but would still be making use of the people-skills she learned while being a receptionist. Then the flailing takes place. Susan realized that she made a “big mistake.” She returns from Chicago or Atlanta and asks her boss (and boyfriend) to take her back: “it was a mid-life crisis.”

Rick does some similar flailing about—though not quite as dramatic. He uses his two-week vacation in August to drive back to his hometown in Vermont. After visiting with his relatives and old friends, Rick decides that this is not a good time to move back home. His Vermont town is “not yet ready for him” and the editor of his local newspaper isn’t in the mood for more “edgy” reporting. Rick returns to New York City—but he is not through with flailing about. Perhaps, it is not a return to his old town that makes sense. What if he was to move to a large community in Vermont (such as Manchester)? Rick contacts the *Manchester Journal*. There are no jobs at this newspaper at the present time. Rick begins to panic. He contacts the *New Hampshire Union Leader*. Nothing is available. Perhaps he should stay in New York City. However, his failure to find a potential newspaper position in New England only whetted his

appetite. We human beings often most desire that which we can't have. Sigmund Freud offered us some insights in this regard.

Collective flailing has also been engaged many times by societies throughout history. We have the short-term adoration of specific people and cultural artifacts (clothing styles, TV programs, colloquialisms, etc.). Flailing is pronounced when members of a society have lost their anchor (stable values), their revered leaders, and their collective vision of the future (Polak, 1972; Bergquist, 2024c). We see dramatic examples of collective flailing in the turbulent numbers offered by reputable polling organizations and in the temporary celebrity-status of some previously unknown movie actor or sports figure. Many years ago, the noted artist, Andy Warhol, provided us with a clear (yet profoundly cynical) perspective on the temporary status of celebrityhood: "in the future everyone will be world famous for fifteen minutes." We shift back and forth as a society between a search for stability (S^2 : security and safety) and a search for that which is new and exciting (O^2 : opportunity and openness). The flailing that takes place in dramatic movement between these preferences is often de-stabilizing and destructive.

Conclusions: The Matter of Trust

Fundamentally, preferences and priorities are founded on the basic assumption made by Susan or Rick – or an entire society—regarding the way in which Trust is viewed and established. Do we establish Trust in preparation for an O^2 (Quest)? I would suspect that Susan isn't going to move out of S^2 (Home) and is likely to ignore or discount the negative side of S^2 (Home) until she can Trust that the move to opportunity and openness are supported by sufficient Trust in her own competence, in the intentions of people on whom she will rely when starting the Quest, and in the similarity of perspectives and values of the community (as well as new friends and organization) to which she is journeying.

Similarly, Rick is not likely to leave New York City and a world of O^2 (Quest) until he is assured (Trust) that his hometown will be welcoming him back and that his distinctive lifestyle and partner preferences will be respected. He will also be testing his own intentions regarding the move back home. Can he Trust his new dreams and aspirations? Why is he going to leave the great opportunities that await him in the "Big Apple." Is he just fantasizing about finding a rewarding job as a reporter in his local newspaper? Trust must also be present when a society becomes quest-driven (O^2) When Trust is lacking, members of a society are likely to turn back from an open-minded relativistic frame (O^2) to a frame of dualism (right/wrong, black/white) (S^2) (Perry, 1970; Bergquist, 2024c).

When we turn to S^2 (Home), then we find that Trust is viewed from a different perspective. As I have already noted, Trust now becomes a desired outcome rather than a prerequisite. A failure to achieve Trust through ensuring security and safety will lead members of a society away from (S^2) to a cynical frame of multiplicity (Perry, 1970). Truth and the description of reality is now based on what will give us an advantage. An alternative reality is actually a convenient reality. Having been thrown out of Eden (S^2) by the betrayal of a respected, trusted leader or by the corruption of once trust-worthy sources of information, members of a society assume that nothing can be believed and that the "golden rule" should be altered to "those with the gold will rule." As Andy Warhol noted, fame and fortune are up for

grabs. Without a collective sense of Trust, the polarities freeze in place and nothing good or constructive will take place. The message is clear. If emphasis is placed on security and safety then Trust must be achieved. The challenge is also now clear. How do we build a secure and safe platform of Trust where competency is demonstrated, appropriate intentions are secured, and shared comprehension is achieved. We turn to this matter in our next (and final) essay on the Essence of Trust.

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