Your Agile Leadership Journey: Leading People, Managing Paradoxes

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Agenda for this Workshop

• What is a Paradox?
• How does a Polarity Map help us understand paradoxical situations?
• Why Leaders may care…
• What 4 Paradoxes are hidden in plain view? (Exercise)
• How do we manage these Paradoxes?
• What are ways to manage these Paradoxes? (Exercise)
• What other Paradoxes are there? (Exercise)
• Q&A/Close
What is a Paradox?

A proposition that, despite sound (or apparently sound) reasoning from acceptable premises, leads to a conclusion that seems self-contradictory.

Either answer feels appropriate…
Graphically…

One View

A Seemingly Opposite View
Each side has positive and negative aspects to it...

One View

A Seemingly Opposite View
These two dimensions create a Polarity Map.

One View

A Seemingly Opposite View

Polarity Management by Barry Johnson
Polarity Maps Make Useful Tools

- Give a simplified view into the complex nature of people working.
- Can provide insights into valid perspectives.
- Can be useful for testing the assumptions.

- Because it is a spectrum, we can say where on the map we desire to be.
- The actual location is never static.
an example
would be handy
right about now
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(sticker design by Brian Marick)
Local vs Centralized Decisions on Software License Purchases

- **Local**
  - Quicker decisions
  - More closely meets customer needs
  - Licensing costs more
  - Purchases may not interoperate with other packages purchased

- **Centralized**
  - Economies of scale in purchasing
  - Interoperability considered in each decision
  - Longer lead times
  - Uniquely important customer needs often ignored in enterprise decisions
So what?
Why leaders should care…

The Downsides –

• result from a systemic issue with the work system
• typically cause problems for people
• indicate a need for an intervention
• always happen though they could be infrequent and not very impactful
What’s not a paradox?

Obvious or complicated decisions leading to...

• No downsides to a selected choice if enacted properly in the context you have...

• Trade space that may optimize to an answer or a set of answers.

Basically, *answers that don’t seem contradictory.*
Another

an example would be handy right about now

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An example...

- What is the possible contradiction?
- Does the contradiction have an upside?
- Is there a downside to understanding customer needs?
Our 1\textsuperscript{st} Four Paradoxes

INDIVIDUALS AND INTERACTIONS  
over processes and tools

WORKING SOFTWARE  
over comprehensive documentation

CUSTOMER COLLABORATION  
over contract negotiation

RESPONDING TO CHANGE  
over following a plan
Let’s Explore Them...

Exercise Time!
What to do…

1. You will work in your table group. Open your envelope, this will reveal which of the Manifesto’s values your table will explore.

2. Draw the 2-Dimensional Polarity Map with the two ends of the spectrum equating to the two sides of the value statement.

3. Label the two ends of the spectrum and the + | - axis.

4. Fill in each quadrant – What are the possible positives for say responding to change? Following a plan? What could go wrong when you become focused on responding to change? Following a plan? Talk about examples where you can.

5. ~3 min/quadrant in any order you want; I’ll update you on time.

6. Elect a spokesperson.
Exercise Debrief

Let’s take some samples…
Who wants to start?

What did you learn?

What are some downsides to the things on the right?
(Let us know which value you had…) Give examples you may have discussed.

Now what possible downside can happen on the left?
(Let us know which value you had…) Give examples you may have discussed.

What antidotes do we find in the other side’s upside to the downsides?
Downside Signals

- When we move from a positive situation on either side of the spectrum, we receive signals.
- These signals are telling us to re-examine our context and alter some choices.
- Failing to do this can result in an uncontrolled correction the other way.
Yet another
Local vs Centralized Decisions on Software License Purchases

- **Local**
  - Quick decision made that met the customer’s UX needs and increased sales
  - Interoperability failure – we couldn’t get sales data out and put into our data warehouse

- **Centralized**
  - All future software purchases approved by a central governance board after ensuring every data element can be exported

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Local vs Centralized Decisions on Software License Purchases

Business will make all decisions so acquiring and protecting customer revenue is a priority

All future software purchases approved by a central governance board after ensuring every data element can be exported

Took 3 months to find and acquire next software package; lost longtime customer that provided $8M annually
Motion Through The Quadrants

Starting point can be anywhere

Always goes this direction!
One Aspect of Leadership is to Try and Manage Our Motion

Get us to the upside quickly

Read signals
Sounds like a paradox
The Leadership Paradox in the Management of Paradoxes
The Leadership Paradox in the Management of Paradoxes

- Don’t see signals for $\Delta$
- No proactive control of transitions
The Leadership Paradox in the Management of Paradoxes

- Can see when a $\Delta$ is needed
- Can take early steps to make transitions smooth
- Don’t see signals for $\Delta$
- No proactive control of transitions
The Leadership Paradox in the Management of Paradoxes

- Can see when a Δ is needed
- Can take early steps to make transitions smooth

- Don’t see signals for Δ
- No proactive control of transitions

Not a Paradox (this was a ‘test’)
Context Dependence

Upsides

[Diagram]

Signals, Motion, etc.

Downsides

[Outline]

are Context Sensitive!

Every org will be different.

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Back to Managing Paradoxes…
This looks better.
We may even want this.

What?!

You don’t believe me?
An example…

Working Software

Comprehensive Documentation
Managing Paradoxes

Exercise Time!
Part 1: What to do…

1. You will work in your table group. Using your Polarity Map, for the downsides, what signals tell you that you are moving there? Give examples where you can. Capture these on (pink) Post-Its. 4 min

2. Now what actions can you take to proactively move you to the upside on the opposite side of the spectrum? Capture these on (green or yellow) Post-Its. 4 min

3. Elect a spokesperson.
Exercise Debrief

Let’s take some samples…
Who wants to start?

What insights did you gain?
What did you learn about signals to look for? How can you use them? What actions can you take? (Remind us which value you had…) Give any examples you may have discussed.

~10 min
Part 2: What to do...

1. Look at the Manifesto’s principles; try and describe a paradox that may be occurring within one of them or perhaps across several. You only need to describe the two ends of the spectrum.  
   3 min

2. Elect a spokesperson.
Let’s take some samples…

Who wants to start?

What are some other paradoxes you see?

Take 2 minutes - Silently capture what you will do differently when you leave today.

What questions do you have?

~5 min
Thank You!

Keep in touch!

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