
Build Your Inspired Authentic Leadership Style

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Introduction

In the modern era of volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (often called VUCA), we need inspired, authentic leaders who can solve problems and leverage polarities. We have limited ourselves thus far by equating leadership with masculinity and, by extension, being male. In reality no sex or gender is inherently better at leadership. What *is* required for inspired leadership is the internal integration of Feminine *And* Masculine which is held by all genders.¹

Polarity Thinking is an excellent lens through which to plan integration. The Greater Purpose Statement (GPS) is “Authentic and Inspired Leadership” and the deeper fear perhaps “Failed, Dangerous Leadership.” Most generic leadership trainings focus only on masculine traits to achieve that goal and ignore feminine traits that support excellent leadership. Trainings also ignore the unique strengths of each person for a genuinely authentic style.² The purpose here is to encourage integration of the Feminine *And* Masculine including each person’s uniqueness for the kind of great leadership we so desperately need.

Historical Context

Feminine *And* Masculine need to be more fully understood. While acknowledging that femininity and masculinity are social constructs, we also find that, historically, the traits have been universally understood in certain ways. Most religions include stories that describe the sacred feminine and the sacred masculine which are not linked to biological femaleness and maleness. Most ancient cultures celebrate them separately, and some celebrate them together. These intuitive and broader definitions are the ones to which this chapter refers. It cannot be emphasized enough that all of us have both sets of traits and, when combined with each person’s personality and background, produce a truly authentic style with unique strengths.

Current Context of Feminine *And* Masculine: Unconscious Bias

For at least two thousand years, Masculinity has been identified as the dominant energy of leadership and has been linked to men themselves. Most religions rely

¹ See Jim Collins, *From Good to Great*, in which he describes Level 5 Leadership. The poles integrated for great leadership are Yin and Yang.

² The systemic issues that support or force leaders to act in certain ways are not addressed in this chapter. See “Masculine and Feminine for Health, Wealth, and Happiness,” Section 1, Chapter 4 of *AND Making a Difference by Leveraging Polarity, Paradox, and Dilemma, Volume 2*. HRD Press: 2020.

on males as the conduit of the divine. Most presidents and monarchs have been men. Most CEOs of Fortune 500 companies have been men. We have a default view that masculine traits *are* leadership traits. Often, successful women mimic male traits since they are seen as weak when using feminine traits, a situation that further perpetuates the expectations of masculine-energy leadership. Men and women are equally hamstrung by this point of view.

Leadership activities are also gendered. For example, it is expected that men will focus on task; and women, on relationships. Men are expected to be straightforward; and women, diplomatic. Even though individual leaders may defy these expectations – you may know men who prefer diplomacy or women who are direct—as a group, men are expected to be direct and women to be diplomatic.

Societal views of other leadership polarities illuminate the confusion of leadership and masculinity. Feminine traits are on the left side, and traditional Masculine traits, on the right:

Figure 1

Feminine	And	Masculine
Learner	And	Expert
Diplomacy	And	Candor
Humility	And	Confidence
Other	And	Self
Relationship	And	Task
Empowerment	And	Control
Reflective Decision-making	And	Quick Decision-making
Feeling	And	Thinking
Collaboration	And	Individual Action
Participative	And	Directive
Support	And	Challenge

When individuals look at leadership polarities intellectually, they often say that both poles are valuable. But internal resistance increases when it becomes obvious a pole is ‘gendered.’ Leaders want to be all of these traits but will choose Expert, Candor, Confidence, Self, Task, Control, Quick Decision Making, Thinking, Individual Action and being Directive, aligning with cultural expectations and unconscious bias.

To compound the unconscious bias, girls and women are socialized to have feminine traits; boys and men, masculine traits. Furthermore, boys and men who exhibit the feminine traits are punished (emotive becomes sissy), and girls and women who exhibit masculine traits are excluded and/or assigned the downside of the masculine (confident becomes bossy). Brené Brown’s book *Daring Greatly* outlined ample research about how, for men, it is less of a put-down to be called an asshole than it is to be called “pussy”. When women stand their ground, they are immediately labeled a bitch. If they are collaborative, taking in multiple points of view, they are weak. In both cases, women are perceived in the downside of both poles. There is no way for women to be seen in the upside of either pole without interrupting the unconscious bias.

We know from Polarity dynamics that by choosing only one pole, the downside of that pole is the inevitable outcome. So, by choosing only masculine as the leadership pole, the inevitable result is aggressive, domineering, and bullying

behaviors that are over-tolerated by organizations and society. In addition, we not only lose the positive values of the masculine – driven, goal-oriented, individual contribution – but also lose the upside of the feminine – thoughtful, reflective, collaborative. A vicious downward cycle is created. An over-tolerated masculine pole, aggressive bullying, interacts with the downsides of the feminine, hesitant and ambiguous. The cycle means that a person or a system will whip back and forth between aggression and hesitancy.

Even when we know the outcome of over-focusing on one pole, the unconscious bias toward leadership and masculinity is so strong that organizations will consistently and reiteratively tolerate and excuse destructive behaviors because leaders are so fearful of being seen as indecisive doormats.

Choosing to integrate both poles is essential to get back the upsides of the poles. If a leader chooses one side, as polarity theory would predict, that will lead into the downside of *both* poles. Ultimately that leader will follow a vicious cycle until the result is the deeper fear “Failed, Dangerous Leadership”.

Polarity Thinking Provides the Answers

To create healthy systems, polarity theory plots the path of change.³ When in the downside of one pole, the correction is to the upside of the other pole, in this case the Feminine. When the Feminine is incorporated and the Masculine, honored, we have the opportunity to gain the benefits of both poles.

Application: Two Exercises

Two exercises can assist you in building your authentic, inspired leadership style that reflects the upsides of Feminine *And* Masculine and leadership qualities associated with each.

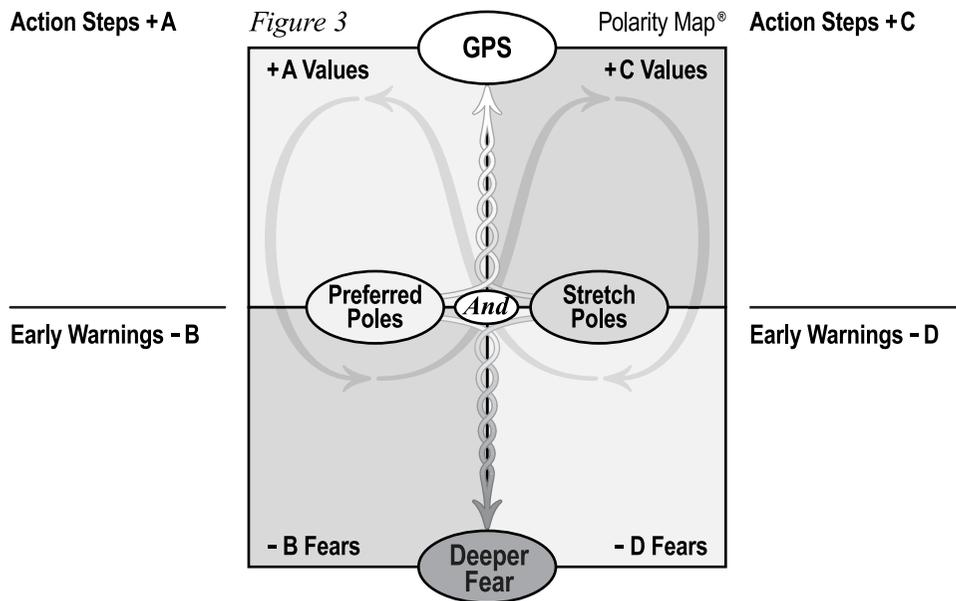
Exercise 1 is a ‘values sort’ where you choose poles you tend to prefer and, by definition, ones on which you may need work. Again, notice that all the leadership polarities align under Feminine *And* Masculine.

First, in *Figure 2*, check the pole you prefer in each polarity pair.

Figure 2

Feminine	Masculine
<input type="checkbox"/> Learner	Expert <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Diplomacy	Candor <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Humility	Confidence <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Other	Self <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Relationship	Task <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Empowerment	Control <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Reflective Decision-making	Quick Decision-making <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Feeling	Thinking <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Collaboration	Individual Action <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Participative	Directive <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Support	Challenge <input type="checkbox"/>

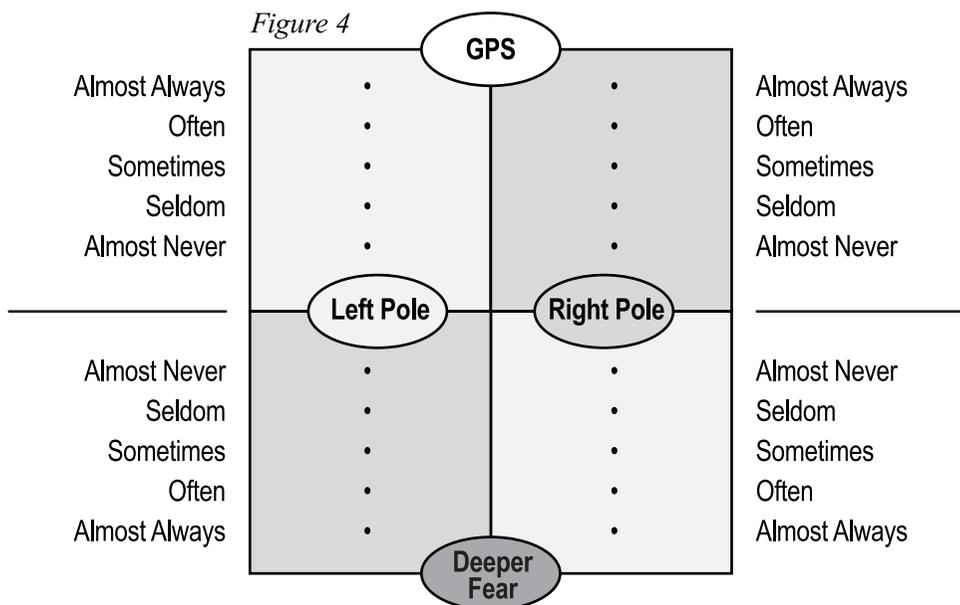
³ Research indicates that organizations that leverage polarities do better than ones that do not. See: Johnson, Barry. *And: Making a Difference by Leveraging Polarity, Paradox or Dilemma. Volume One: Foundations*. HRD Press, 2020.



Reminder: every person has all of these. *Push to identify your preferred leadership tendencies, not aspirations.*

Next, use *Figure 3* above and the instructions below to build your leadership map:

1. Write all your preferred pole names from *Figure 2* in the upper left (+A Values).
2. Write your less preferred pole names from *Figure 2* in the upper right (+C Values).
3. In the lower left (-B Fears) and lower right (-D Fears), write what becomes of the chosen qualities when each is overdone: e.g.: “Expert” (+A Value) becomes “Arrogant” (-B Fear), “Learner” (+C Value) becomes “Clueless” (-D Fear).



4. **Assess** how well you are managing this polarity. (Assessment Map *Figure 4*)

In *Figure 4*, circle the dot that corresponds to *Almost Never*, *Seldom*, *Sometimes*, *Often* or *Almost Always* as you ask yourself, cumulatively, how often am I...

- getting the benefit of the upside of the Left pole: *Figure 3 (+A Values)*?
- getting the benefit of the upside of the Right pole: *Figure 3 (+C Values)*?
- experiencing the downside of the Left pole: *Figure 3 (-B Fears)*?
- experiencing the downside of the Right pole: *Figure 3 (-D Fears)*?

In addition to assessing the cumulative nature of each quadrant, you can also ask yourself about the individual polarities, using the average to determine your experience in each quadrant.

Example: Let's use the polarity *Confidence And Humility* from *Figure 2*:

- How often do I experience the benefits of the upside of Confidence? How often do I feel confident? How often do I feel self-assured and notice my expertise? (Select your corresponding dot)
- How often do I experience the downside of Confidence? How often do people tell me I am arrogant? (Select your dot)
- How often do I experience the upside of Humility? How often do I ask people questions? How often do I notice I leave space for people to work at their own pace? (Select your dot)

- How often do I experience the downside of Humility? How often do I feel like a doormat? How often do I notice I am holding back my voice when I know I should be speaking my mind? (Select your dot)

Having selected your corresponding dots (Almost Always, Often, Sometimes, Seldom, or Almost Never) on the Assessment Map for each quadrant, now draw your infinity loop connecting those dots.

Assessing and drawing your infinity loop is incredibly important. It helps you see where you are getting the benefits, where you have room to grow and stretch and where you may need to flag your behavior to get less of the downsides.

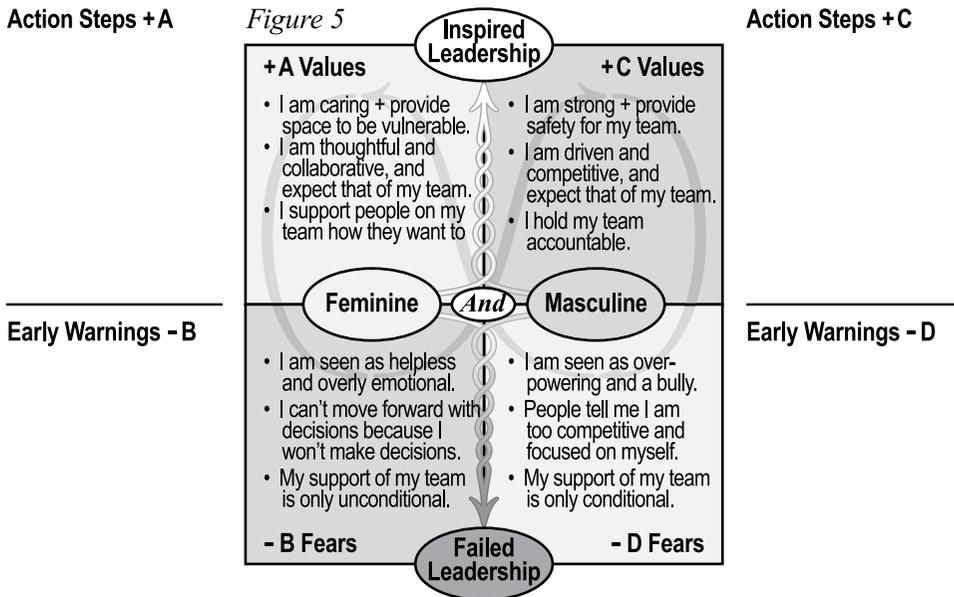
5. Moving back to *Figure 3*, fill in a GPS. It might be “Inspired Leadership” or it might be something that embodies your vision of your best leader self like “Leading the Parade.”
6. Fill in the deeper fear. It might be “Failed Leadership” or “Ridiculed or Berated When I Call Myself a Leader”. This is a powerful fear or difficult outcome, something scary and worth avoiding.
7. Develop Action Steps to maintain the benefit from your preferred poles. It is likely to include things you are already doing.
8. Develop Action Steps to nudge yourself to step into the poles that are your less preferred ones. These can be little nudges. They do not have to be drastic changes. E.g.: take a goal then half it, then half it again and that is likely the first step/nudge you need.
9. Develop Early Warnings for your preferred poles. These should be things you are *willing to have happen*, not just things you have become accustomed to tolerating. They need to be *early* warnings, not *too late* warnings.
10. Develop Early Warnings for your less preferred poles. These can be *later than you'd like*. Chances are that you rush back to your preferred poles at the first sign you are getting any downside of your less preferred poles. Give yourself a little time and space to try on these new attributes. It will be a little awkward at first. That's ok. It is worth it.
11. Take Action by supporting other people's individual expressions of leadership. Your authentic leadership is not theirs, and theirs is not yours. Support your network.

Now you have a fully mapped polarity that can guide your personal leadership development and integrates the values of a truly inspirational leader. *Note: This process can be used to map, assess and operationalize any polarity.*

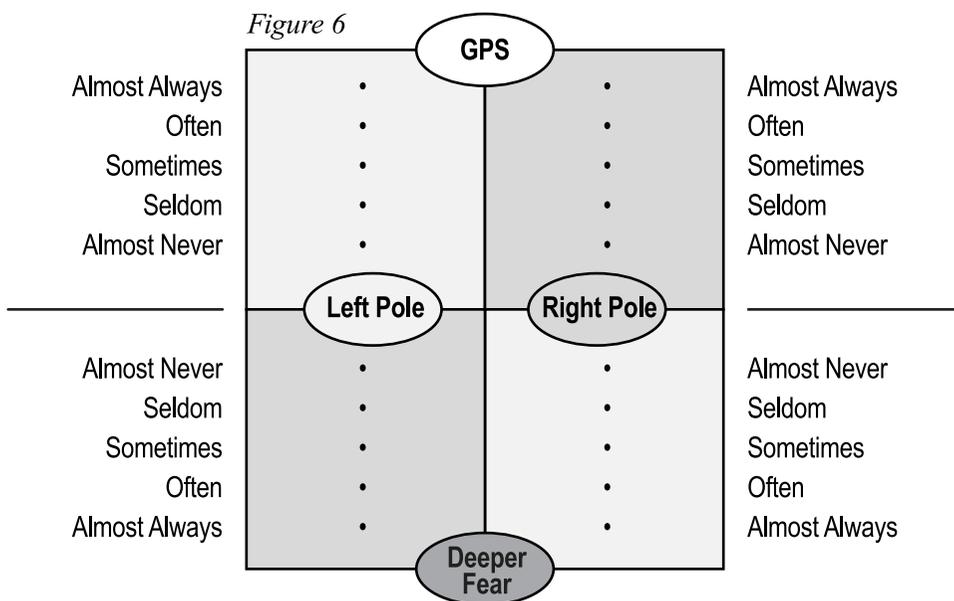
Exercise 2 is a map with aspects of leadership written in sentences that you can use to assess yourself, develop action steps to enhance the upsides of both poles, and specify early warnings to alert you to an over-focus on one pole.

In this exercise, respond to a partially populated Polarity Map[®]: the poles, GPS,

Deeper Fear and inner quadrants. If there are words that don't resonate with you, feel free to change them but keep the spirit of the quadrant intact.



Assess how often you experience the cumulative nature of each quadrant. Mark your dots on the following *Figure 6* Assessment Map, then connect your dots to see how well you are currently balancing the *Figure 5* Feminine And Masculine polarity. *Detailed instructions included in previous Exercise 1, step 4.*



Leverage the Feminine *And* Masculine polarity by using steps 7-10 from Exercise 1 to develop your Action Steps and Early Warnings.

Take Action by supporting other people's individual expressions of leadership.

Conclusion

When only masculine traits are valued on a global scale, we see the ultimate slide into toxic masculinity and war. Furthermore, we devalue those who embody the non-preferred pole. Women are devalued and become the objects of projection. Their physical presence is seen as superfluous, and their points of view are rejected. Men who present as feminine are ridiculed. Gay men are the object of hatred and violence. Gay women, who are not the object of male gaze, are dismissed. Trans-men and trans-women are subjected to discrimination and hate crimes. All fear for their lives in many situations knowing that toxic masculinity is over-tolerated and men's perspectives will always be believed.

Seeing Feminine *And* Masculine as a polarity helps give the world a path toward equality that spans race, location, leadership and communities. Integrating Feminine *And* Masculine traits is a critical component for improving the globe. In addition to creating more tolerance and equity, their integration provides an opportunity to have more sustainable solutions. Choosing to value Feminine *And* Masculine leadership traits is an act each of us can do in order to create the ripple effect of equality throughout our families, businesses, communities, and world. Not only that, it is also good business and ensures the efficient and effective full use of the talents of all.

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