



inspiring natural potential...

UNDERSTANDING & RESOLVING TENSIONS

By Joe Cheal

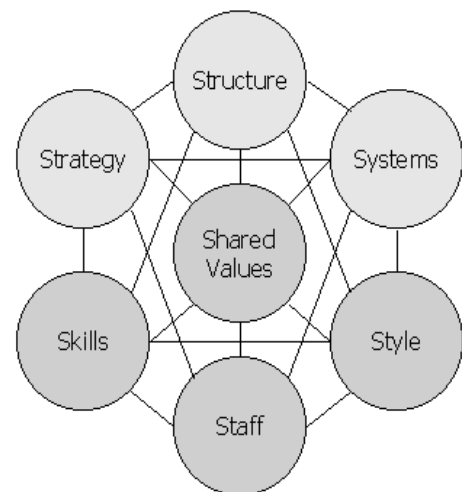
TENSIONS?

What are Tensions?

- Polarities and opposites
- Contradictory positions
- Interpersonal conflicts and departmental 'silos'
- Competing demands and conflicting priorities
- Dilemmas
- Mixed Messages

Where are Organisational Tensions? The 7S Model

- Peters and Waterman in "Search for Excellence" presented the McKinsey 7S Model. The model works by breaking an organisation or department/region down into its component parts.
- Tensions can occur in and between the components. The model is 'systemic' in that a change in one component will likely lead to changes in other components.

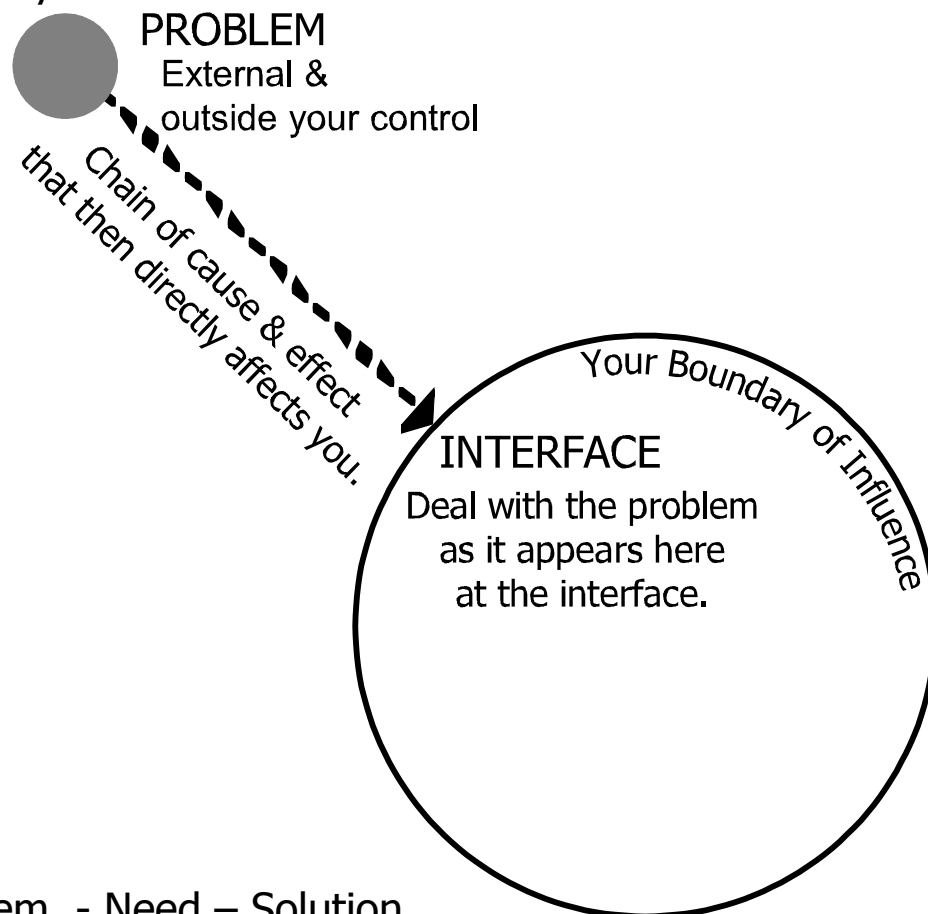


Two Sides of the Organisation: Rational and Emotional

Rational	Emotional
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systems and procedures • Objectives • Structure, roles & responsibilities • Management of task and process • Procedural/planned project side of change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paradox • Values • Ambiguity and uncertainty • Leadership of hearts and minds • Natural change and resistance

IMPOSSIBLE PROBLEMS: NEW PERSPECTIVES

1. An unresolvable problem is likely to have a paradox underlying it.
2. A problem is only a problem if perceived as a problem.
3. When a problem is outside your control, determine how it affects you directly. Deal with the problem at the point where it directly affects you.



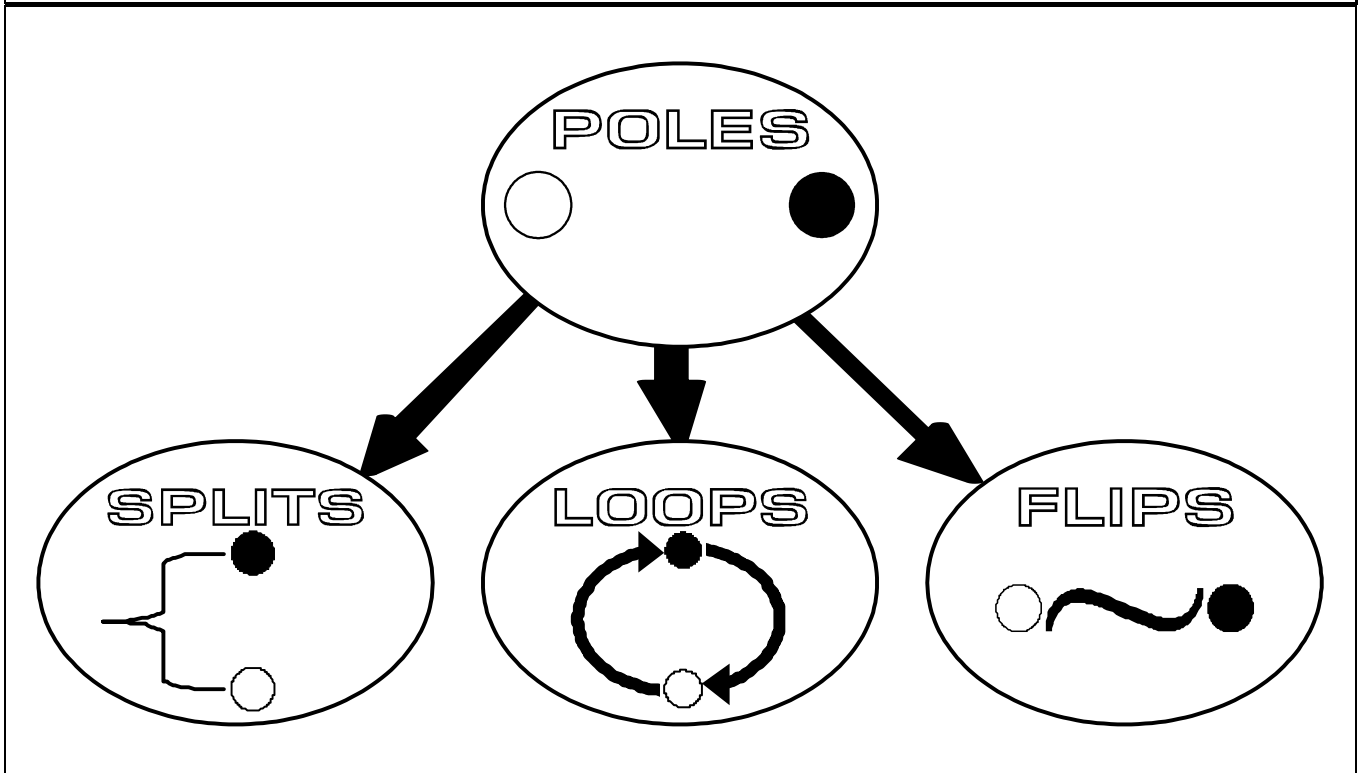
4. Problem - Need – Solution
 - a) Define the problem...

“How is this a problem to me directly?”
 - b) Establish the need/outcome...

“What specifically do I want instead?”
 - c) Explore options/solutions
“How might I get from ‘a’ to ‘b’?”

TYPES OF TENSIONS

Components



Poles Poles are the underlying tension/contradiction/opposition.

Splits Splits pull you in two or more directions or decisions. It can feel that whichever option you take, you lose.

- Dilemmas
- Double Binds

Loops Loops take you round in circles, either ending up where you started or perhaps having lost a little or gained a little.

- Vicious Circles
- Self Fulfilling Prophecies

Flips Flips lead you to the opposite to or negation of what you actually wanted or intended.

- Knots
- Law of Unintended Consequences

RESOLVING TENSIONS (1)

Conflict Resolution: Out Of Stuck Positions

- ❑ A position is a viewpoint or a personal frame of reference. "Where I am now!"
- ❑ Stuck in a position = not moving, taking the moral high ground. Leads to deadlock.
- ❑ You know someone else is stuck in a position when they repeat the same point again and again. You know you are stuck in a position because you know you are right (and they are wrong).

The Aim

The aim of resolving a conflict is to move from positions to underlying needs, then to work together on a solution ("We are on the same side").

The Process

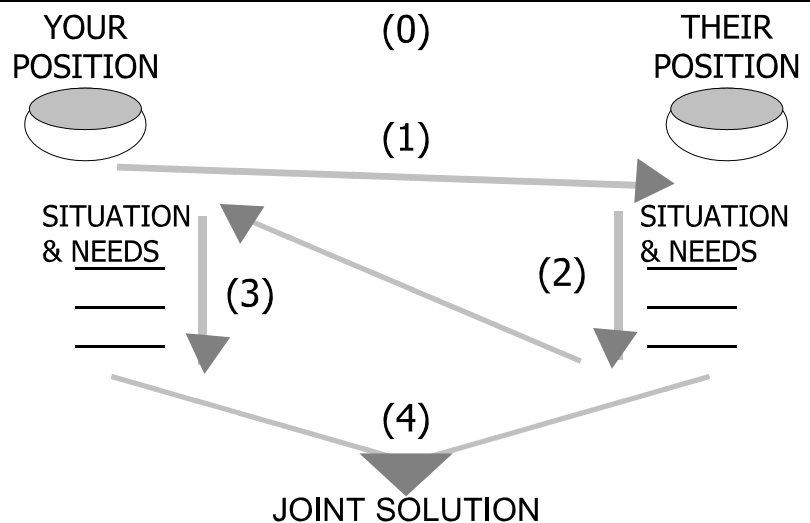
0) Establish immediate common purpose or intention (e.g. that you both want to resolve the issue).

1) Acknowledge their position and that it is important to them.

2) Find out their situation and underlying needs.
Ask questions and listen

3) Express your situation and needs

4) Find any common ground and work together to find a solution that meets needs.



Responses And Reactions

- ❑ Remember, you may have to deal with attacks, accusations, blame, "hurtful" comments/sniping.

RESOLVING TENSIONS (2)

Pros & Cons

When there is a tension between one or more ideas/positions, a useful start is by listing out the pros and cons of each position. This gives an overview of the situation and gives voice to the strengths and concerns about each idea/position.

Decision Analysis For Resolving Dilemmas

The following process is useful for resolving tensions that pull a person (or group of people) in two or more directions.

- 1) List out the options: a, b, c, d etc.
- 2) Select option 'a'.
- 3) Write a list of the pros and cons of this option.
- 4) Score each item on the pros and cons lists with a number between 1 and 5, where 1 = not much of an issue and 5 = big issue/very important.
- 5) Repeat this process for each option (b, c, d etc.)
- 6) Look at the totals of the scores for the pros and the cons of each option. Does this suggest a preference?
- 7) Look at all the scores. Where are the 5s? Is there another alternative solution that meets all the positive 5s and effectively manages the negative 5s?

RESOLVING TENSIONS (3)

Polarity Management

- Polarities occur everywhere! In this context, a polarity is a pair of interdependent opposites that causes ongoing problems. Too much of one side or the other can be damaging. Picking one side over the other doesn't really work.
- The term 'Polarity management' was coined by Barry Johnson (ref: 'Polarity Management')

Examples of Organisational Polarities

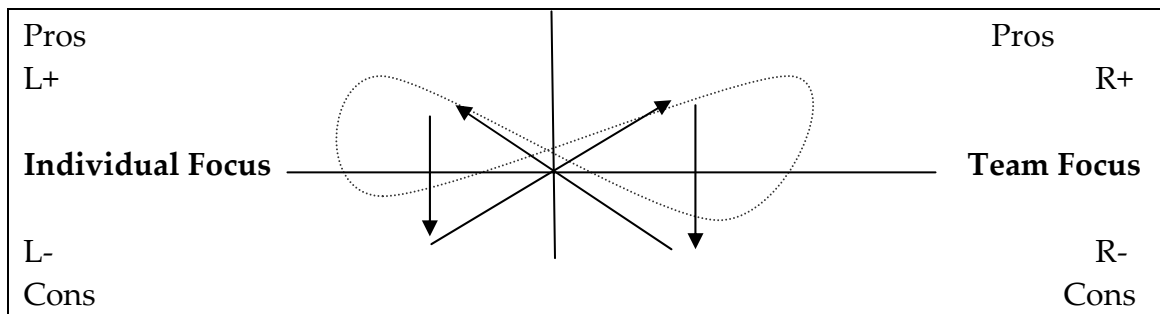
Empowerment	-----	Control
Individual	-----	Team
Internal	-----	External
Decentralisation	-----	Centralisation
Short term	-----	Long term
Order	-----	Creativity
Plan	-----	Opportunity
Stability	-----	Change
Competition	-----	Collaboration
Simple	-----	Complex
Analyse	-----	Synthesise

RESOLVING TENSIONS (4)

Polarity Management (Cont.)

- The Process:

- (1) Establish the polarity (eg individual vs team),
- (2) write the pros & cons of each polarity in the grid below,
- (3) when facing L- symptoms, shift attention to making R+ happen,
- (4) when facing R- symptoms, shift attention to making L+ happen.
- (5) Go to (3)



- If there is too much focus on one 'pole' the cons will also occur. If there is continued focus on that pole, the negative of the opposite pole is also likely to occur. "You get what you are afraid of by clinging to its apparent opposite." (Johnson 1996, p157).
- System questions to ask: (Johnson)
 - a) What communication systems need to be in place to alert the system when it slides into one of the downsides?
 - b) What additional system practices would be in place if this polarity was being well managed (moving back and forth with relative ease and staying primarily in the upper two quadrants)? What steps could you take to move in that direction?
- Ongoing questions to ask: (Johnson)
 - a) What do we need to do to keep us in the upper two quadrants? ↓
 - b) At this moment, how do we measure pros of both poles and give recognition?
 - c) How do we know when it time to shift focus from one pole to the other?
 - d) How do we communicate most effectively with those who want to focus on the current pole when we want to shift focus?

RESOLVING TENSIONS (5)

Synthesis

- One of the key mindsets that leads to tensions and polarities is thinking in 'either/or' terms.
- Creating a synthesis of polarities takes you way beyond and outside the limitations of 'either/or'. How about 'both/and'?

Using The Example of 'Results vs Relationships'...

Polarity

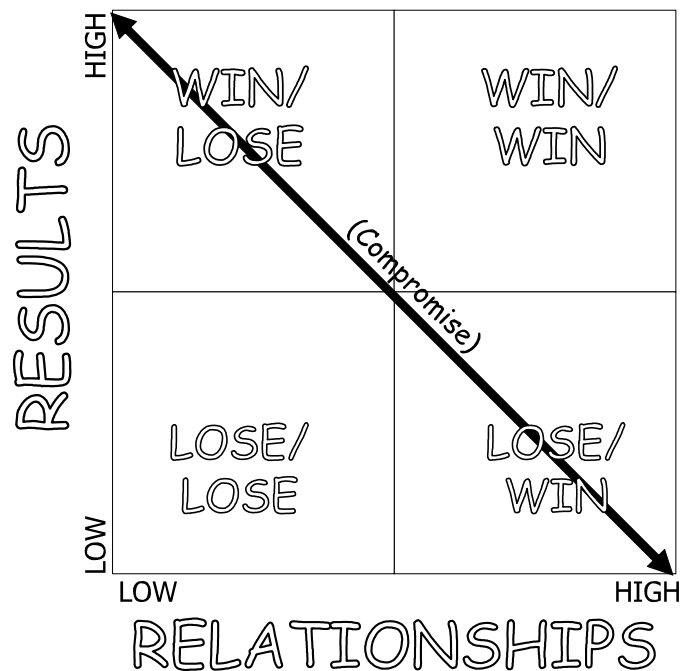
RESULTS vs RELATIONSHIPS

Continuum

(Compromise)

RESULTS ←————→ RELATIONSHIPS

Synthesis Quadrant



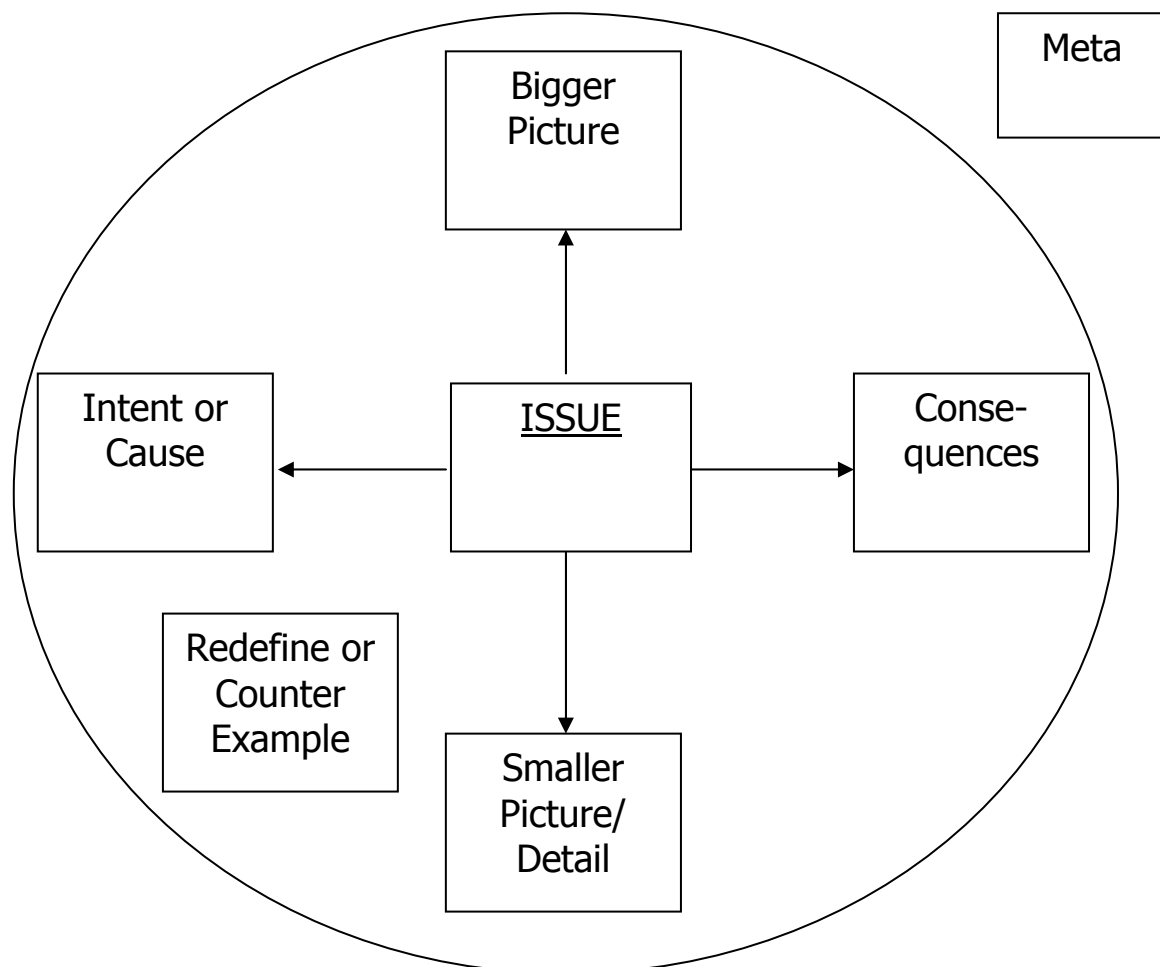
RESOLVING TENSIONS (6)

Framing and Reframing

- Charles Handy (ref: "The Age of Paradox"/"The Empty Raincoat") suggests that "framing the confusion is the first step to doing something about it." (p17)
- The next step would be reframing. Below is a simplified version of Dilts' 'Sleight of Mouth' patterns, called "Directions of Thinking".

Directions Of Thinking

- This simplified model is designed to give you more flexibility in your thinking and more awareness of the directions you can take when you are thinking. This model can help when influencing, handling objections, being creative, problem solving etc...



USING PARADOXICAL THINKING

Creativity & Problem Solving

- Paradoxical Thinking is the bringing together of seeming opposites or thinking in 'opposite' directions. This can be particularly useful in creativity and in problem solving.
- One method of Paradoxical Thinking is called Contrary Thinking which is the ability to consider the opposite to where you are and/or what you do now.

Contrary Thinking

- Kent Keith in his book 'Anyway' uses paradoxical thinking in the form of: "If you do X (positive action), sometimes Y (negative reaction) happens. Do X anyway." Perhaps a safer version for a risk adverse organisations might be to ask the question: "What would happen if we did it anyway?"

Contrary Thinking Activity

- Write a list of the qualities of an idea/proposal and then write a list of the opposites. Find the positive frame of each opposite (if not already positive). What does the new list suggest to you?

Proposal/Idea:

Key Qualities	Opposite	Positive of Opposite