



# ZEN LEADER

## Managing Paradox Mapping Guide

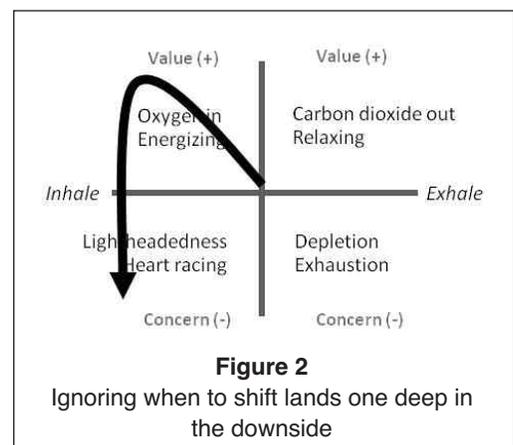
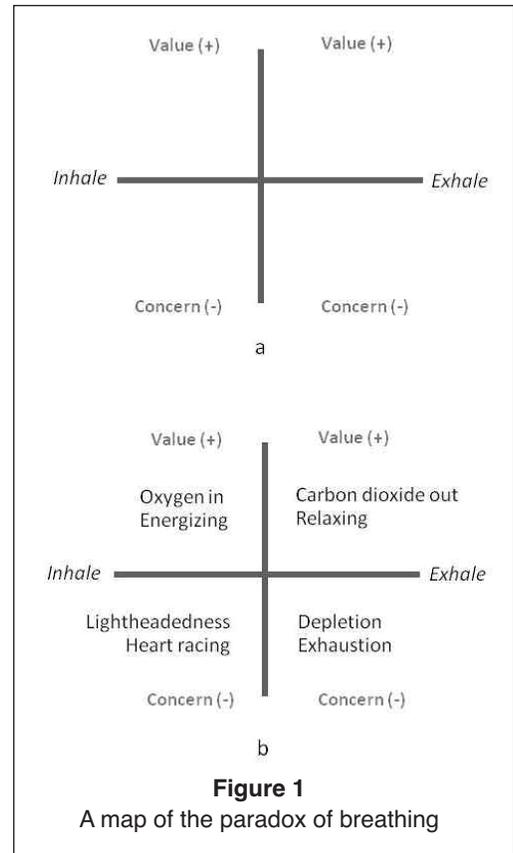
*LEAD THE WAY*

## Managing Paradox Mapping Guide

Understanding the benefits and pitfalls of both sides is the first step in managing paradox. This step-by-step mapping guide, based on Barry Johnson's, *Polarity Management\**, will show you how:

- 1) Take a piece of paper and draw two lines that cross in the middle. At the end each horizontal line write the two words that describe the conflict. At the top of the vertical line write "Value" and at the bottom write "Concern." You now have 4 quadrants that define the paradox in visual terms.
- 2) Identify the aspects of each quadrant. This will take some reflection and role-playing, but it will help you see the benefits of both sides along with their accompanying downsides.
- 3) Identify the overarching goal that unites both sides – what is possible with the best from both sides?
- 4) Set thresholds for each quadrant. Identify the minimal upside you'll settle for and the downside you'll tolerate. This will give you the guidelines for navigating between the differing poles so that you know when it's time to shift before extreme limits are reached.

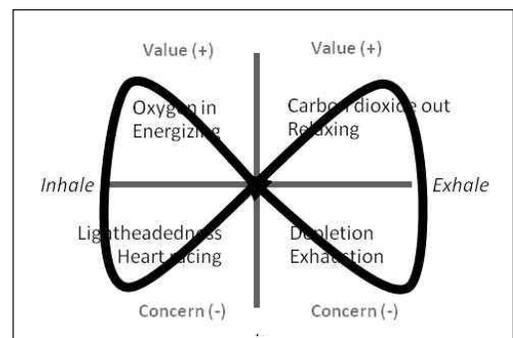
Let's take breathing as an example to illustrate this (Figure 1). In breathing, our nervous system reads subtle, physiological signals to the effect of, "OK enough inhale, time to exhale." If we were to ignore these subtle signals, more dramatic alarms would start firing off, as in a racing heart or lightheadedness, and we'd be deep into the downside of inhaling too long (we could draw this as in Figure 2). We might react by racing to the opposite side, staying here too long as well, ignoring the subtle signals, until we're deep into the downside drama of exhale. Figure 3a depicts this driving to extremes in what is known as the "psychotic butterfly." While one would have to work hard to make breathing this difficult, unmanaged paradoxes in business and organizational life tend to go to extremes, simply because the benefits of one side start gaining momentum, and those in power ignore the subtle signals to shift.



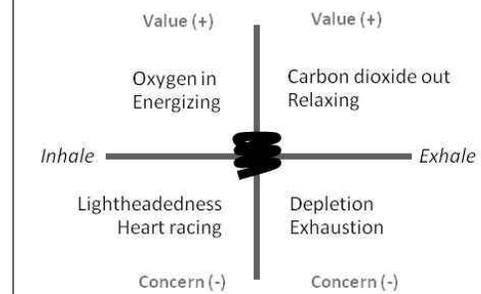
Continuing with the breathing example, we can switch between inhale and exhale so quickly, that we don't get much benefit from either one (see Figure 3b). This, too, will start signaling that something is wrong, as we find ourselves panting or hyperventilating. And this, too, happens in organizational life.

In the same way, for any paradox that we're navigating, we can look for signals, identify measures and set thresholds below which we don't want to sink, above which we don't need to go. We can identify the minimal upside we'll settle for, the downside we'll tolerate, the edges of the envelope we'll push, and fly our paradox like a plane between two altitudes (Figure 4).

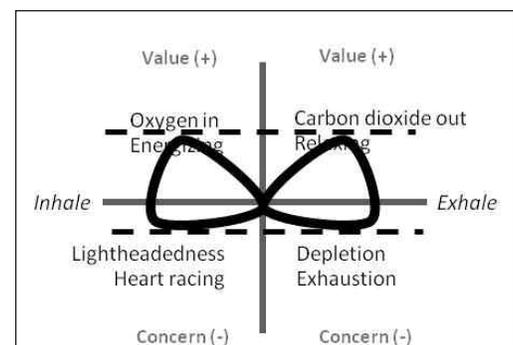
The biggest mistake leaders make in managing the healthy tension of both sides is that they look at measures only on one side – whichever one they are partial to. So a sales organization might have measures of revenue against their sales targets, but not pay attention to profit margins. Or a finance organization may be judiciously tracking profits, but may not be attending to important flags around growth, such as market share increase. Bring these two organizations into a dialogue around an optimal way to manage a healthy tension between them, let them talk through upsides, downsides, and measures on both sides, and one can move beyond the tyranny of growth vs. profits toward the greater good of sustainable, profitable growth.



**Figure 3a**  
The Psychotic Butterfly - with no net upside



**Figure 3b**  
Shifting too quickly - no time to gain value



**Figure 4**