Embracing the Tension: A New/Ancient Approach to Problem Solving

Rick Olsen
*University of North Carolina Wilmington, olsenr@uncw.edu*

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Embracing the Tension: A New/Ancient Approach to Problem Solving

Rick Olsen
Chair, Department of Communication Studies
UNCW
What We Will Try to Get Done Today

- Basics Assumptions: communication is a tool not simply a solution.
- Exploring Dialectic Tensions: what they are, how to clarify them.
- Application: Self Work
- Application: Collaborations
- Sharing: Victories, insights, etc.
- Q/A and wrap up
- But first . . .
Who is in the Room?

- Preferred name
- Current Institution
- Role
- Time at that Role
- Hobby or interest outside of work*

*If you have no time for interests outside of work, the conference offers mentoring sessions—please sign up!
The Year was 1966 . . .
“All leaders are leading language communities. Though every person, in any setting, has some opportunity to influence the nature of the language, leaders have exponentially greater access and opportunity to shape, alter, or ratify the existing language rules. In our view, leaders have no choice in this matter of being language leaders; it just goes with the territory.
Interactions Co-create and Sustain The Meanings in Our World

- Meet someone new.
- Think of a word, phrase, frame or story that is sometimes or often that is helpful in referring to the challenges of your unit.
- Think of a word, phrase, frame or story that is sometimes or often used that is not helpful or even harmful in meeting the challenges of your organization.
We Live in a World of Meaning not Things
we do understand the world better not in terms of things, but in terms of interaction between things, and how things interact with one another, even in biology. We understand biology in terms of evolution, how things change, and how — we understand the antelope because there’s a lion and the lion because there’s antelope. We don’t have them in isolation.”

~ Carlolo Rovello, Physicist
Make Room in Our Language to Move From Nouns to Verbs

Noun Focus
- “Build”
- Destination
- Closure
- Goal of Certainty
- Conflict as “breaking” continuity
- Solve Contradiction

Verb Focus
- “Navigate”
- Journey
- Process
- Goal of Adaptability
- Conflict as part of continuity
- Manage tensions
Performing Leadership: How should a leader be a “leader?”
We Live in a World of Motion and Relationships
We are Leading People, not Job Titles

- This perspective should foster humility, not despair.
- This perspective should help us remember that our expertise does not save us from basic struggles:
  - Autonomy
  - Mastery
  - Purpose
  - We’re known, valued and accepted/loved

“He who despairs of the human condition is a coward, but he who has hope for it is a fool.”

~Albert Camus
We Are Leading People, Not Job Titles
Personal Reflection and Application

- What aspect of “human nature” offers the biggest leadership challenge to you?
- What strengths do you have as a person that you anticipate leveraging in your approach to leadership?
Application Activity!

- Find a partner—someone you don’t know yet!
- Introduce yourselves
- Try to get as many “pins” as possible
Responding to Enduring Challenges

Is it a problem you can solve . . . . Or a problem you can only manage?
Dialectics: Ancient Roots

- Classical Era: Debate, Dialectic and Dialogue
- Hegel’s Dialectic: contrary processes not just ideas
- Other synonyms: paradox, double-bind, etc.
Contemporary Dialectics: Management not Synthesis

One Need + Another Need → Ongoing ambiguity with only temporary resolution

Key Scholars
- Leslie Baxter and Barbara Montgomery
- William Rawlins
- Many others have followed . . .

Current best thinking/doing/being
Relational Dialectics: The Big Three

- Integration --- Separation
- Stability --- Change
- Expression --- Nonexpression
Internal Manifestations

- Connectedness --- Separateness
- Certainty --- Uncertainty
- Openness --- Closedness
Many Other Tensions

- Ideal --- Real
- Empathy --- Efficiency
- Responsive --- Responsible
- _______ --- _______
- _______ --- _______
- _______ --- _______
Reframing Enduring Challenges

Not This

Save | Spend

Good | Bad

But This

Responsive | Responsible
Many Other Tensions

- Ideal --- Real
- Empathy --- Efficiency
- Responsive --- Responsible
- _______ --- _______
- _______ --- _______
- _______ --- _______
“Let’s try it!” part ONE: Self Work

Work individually → Identify a key enduring leadership challenge → Clarify the tensions—why is it ongoing?

Seek anchor terms that empower healthy actions (frame/reframe) → What are responses for managing the tension → Be prepared to share!

Key: Positive --- Positive
GOAL: “Healthy, Sustainable, & Effective Management of Ongoing Tensions”
“Let’s try it!” part TWO: Collaborations

1. Work 1 or 2 others with a similar challenge
2. Clarify and “name” the leadership challenge
3. Clarify the tensions—why is it ongoing?
4. Seek anchor terms that empower healthy actions (frame/reframe)
5. Identify TWO responses for managing the tension
6. Be prepared to share!

Key: Positive --- Positive
Share the Brilliance!

- Final “name” for enduring challenge
- Final terms for clarifying tension(s)
- How this help your leadership efforts
- Two things to “verb” this insight
Bringing This Perspective Back With You

Explore meanings held by self and others through circular questioning.

Focus on “use” and “outcome” not right/wrong or good/bad.

Search HARD for the enduring tensions. Use them to frame/reframe enduring issues.
Rapid Review: Retirement for Faculty

- World of Meaning: What does retirement mean?
- World of Interactions: What interaction patterns are sustaining those meanings?
- Leading People: autonomy, mastery, purpose? Fears? Hopes?
- What imbedded tensions need articulation and navigation?

DEVELOPING FACULTY ACROSS THE CAREER SPAN

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How Can You Bring This Perspective Back With You?

- Explore meanings held by self and others through circular questioning.
- Focus on "Use" and "outcome" not right/wrong or good/bad.
- Search HARD for the enduring tensions. Use them to frame/resolve enduring issues.
Prep and Landing

- What questions can I respond to so this session is useful to you?
- What insights have emerged for you or your group that might help others see how to understand or apply what we’ve covered?
- Other thoughts or comments?
Thank you!

Rick Olsen, Ph.D.
Dept. of Communication Studies,
UNCW
olsenr@uncw.edu