

A New Tool for Executive Coaches: The Dynamic Engagement Model Leverages the Self-Determination Theory with Polarity Thinking to Enhance Engagement in the Workplace

Laura Mendelow, Janet Goodman, Paula Britton, Nhat Nguyen, and Han Zhang

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Abstract

Research shows that engaged employees are more motivated and productive, yet, employees today are connected but not engaged. This article presents a model for coaching leaders to create a more engaged workforce by expanding on Self-Determination Theory and combining it with Polarity Thinking. A survey of 182 professionals determined what managerial behaviors influenced their sense of engagement. Hypotheses were supported. This research presents a new model called the Dynamic Engagement Model, which creates a different lens with which to view the workforce and a tool for coaches to guide leaders to create a culture of engagement.

A New Tool for Executive Coaches: The Dynamic Engagement Model Leverages the Self-Determination Theory with Polarity Thinking to Enhance Engagement in the Workplace
Introduction

A Need for a Culture of Engagement

In the workplace today, huge technological advances are rapidly occurring (Agarwal et al., 2018). Even so, with all the new technology, workers are connected, but not engaged (Berger, 2019; Hougaard & Carter, 2018). Berger (2019) believes that tried and true business solutions may no longer work in turbulent times, even though managers may rely on old solutions. Meanwhile, leaders are falling behind at home and at work and are fighting burnout. A need clearly exists for leaders to develop a culture of engagement with their workforces.

A McKinsey & Company survey (Bazigos & Caruso, 2016) reports that 77% of managers in a group of 52,000 rate themselves as inspiring and good role models. However, in a Gallup engagement survey, 82% of employees find their leaders to be uninspiring, contradicting the self-report of many managers. In addition, Gallup finds that only 13% of the global workforce is engaged, and 24% report that they are actively disengaged (Rigoni & Nelson, 2016).

Engagement can be defined as a positive state of mind in which an individual is dedicated, energized, and motivated to work. Individuals are absorbed in their work when engaged and bring their full potential. Individuals are happier, more productive, and better employees (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Leiter & Bakker, 2010; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010).

According to the 2019 Global Human Capital Trends report, organizations need to focus on employee experiences to enhance meaning in the workplace. The concept of employee engagement includes meeting the psychological needs of the employees. This will lead to better outcomes in performance. The need for meaning will help employees understand and answer questions such as: ‘Am I making a difference?’ and, ‘Am I delivering something of value?’ All of this contributes to a more productive workforce (Volini, et al. 2019; Van den Broeck et al., 2008). McKinsey data shows that 32% of employees are more committed to their jobs when they are intrinsically motivated and show less burnout than employees who are less committed. They also perform 16% better (McKinsey, 2012).

What type of leadership will be robust enough for the current climate and the future? We need leaders who are able to embrace both stability and change: nimble enough to both run and punt, yet brave enough

to experiment when needed and able to recover quickly from mistakes and set course corrections. We need leaders who are both fluid and firm at all levels of an organization.

This research explores a new framework for coaches to use with leaders in organizations, one that is both supportive and challenging, that the authors propose will lead to an increase in engagement in the workplace. This concept is based on an expansion and adaptation of Self Determination Theory (SDT) using a Polarity Lens. Before describing the research and theory, a short literature review of both Self Determination Theory and Polarities is needed.

Literature Review

Self Determination Theory in Brief

Self Determination Theory is a highly researched theory of motivation developed by Ryan and Deci (2017) that looks at the social conditions that enhance or hinder a person's wellness. They have examined under what conditions people will flourish and what prevents flourishing. The theory states that people have three basic psychological needs, and when these three needs are supported, people are happier, more satisfied with life, are better employees, and function in a healthy, motivated way (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Ryan, 1995). Thwarting these needs has a direct yet negative impact on people. They are more dissatisfied, unhappy, and depleted (Ryan & Deci, 2017). These needs are innate and exist across cultures (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Levesque et al.2004; Otis & Pelletier, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Ryan and Deci (2017) describe these three needs as the need for competence, the need for relatedness, and the need for autonomy. Competence refers to the sense of feeling effective and capable. Relatedness refers to a sense of connection with others. Autonomy refers to the sense that individuals have control over their own lives and can make decisions on their own.

According to SDT, needs can be supported or thwarted by the people around an individual, including managers and leaders. When these needs are supported, people are more motivated and have outcomes to enhance their well-being. When these needs are thwarted, people are negatively impacted and have less of a sense of well-being (Rocchi, et al., 2017).

When applied to organizations, this theory suggests that leaders supporting these three basic needs in their employees have employees who are happier, more intrinsically motivated to do a good job, more involved, and more creative. When leaders thwart these needs, employees report more distress and engage in undesired job behaviors (Slemp et al., 2018). A meta-analysis conducted by Slemp and colleagues

(2018) confirms results that, in organizations where leaders give support for autonomy in their employees, job satisfaction, work engagement, and trust in their managers all improve.

SDT provides a background and rationale, along with a great deal of research to support the idea, that three areas—competence, relatedness, and autonomy—are indeed important for all people to feel more satisfied and happier, and to be better, more motivated employees. However, this research looks to take these concepts a step further. SDT tends to illustrate a static view of behaviors: support or thwart. The authors intend to expand this theory by adding a more dynamic view of leadership, that leadership skills exist in sets (or interdependent pairs), and the ability to move between skill sets is the key to optimizing one's leadership potential and performance, as well as engaging a workforce. This core concept is explored in this research and highly useful for coaches in developing and supporting leaders. This notion of navigating and managing two seemingly opposing concepts or behaviors is cited in the research as paradoxes, dilemmas, dialectics, creative tensions, or polarities.

A Brief Overview of Polarities, Paradoxes, Creative Tensions, Dialectics, and Dilemmas

The concept of paradox, creative tensions, or dilemmas is rooted in our history from Hinduism, 5000 years ago with Ardhanarishvara representing feminine and masculine energies (Seid, 2004); Judaism 4000 years ago with Justice and Mercy (Levine, 2006), to Taoism, 2500 years ago with Yin/Yang (Xinyan, Xinyan, 2013).

Paradoxes and tensions in organizations are such an important topic that the Academy of Management Review (2000, Vol 25, No. 4) had a special topic forum titled "Paradox, Spirals, Ambivalence: The New Language of Change and Pluralism." Regardless of the differences among tensions, paradoxes, dilemmas, dialectics and polarities described in the literature, they all have some common ground (Smith & Lewis, 2011). There are two opposing forces that seemingly contradict each other. In the complexity of organizations today, these contradictions exist and must be acknowledged and handled. Eisenhardt (2000) embraces the notion that leadership and employees must find a creative way to hold both sides rather than either side. The most effective leaders have learned how to manage these tensions for the betterment of the workforce and the organization (Gibbs, 2009; Holt and Seki, 2012; Lewis & Dehler, 2000; Smith & Lewis, 2011; Sokol, 2012; Tracy, 2004).

One author in particular, Barry Johnson (2014), has not only described paradoxes and the issues associated with them in organizations, but he has also proposed a useful and practical way to leverage paradoxes that will benefit individuals, teams, organizations, and societies. Johnson (1992) has developed

a model for dealing with these tensions. He has coined the term “Polarity Thinking” and developed a practical methodology and tool called the Polarity Map®. This map visually represents a paradox that one might be experiencing and offers a strategy for individuals to navigate through these tensions. Due to the practical methodologies available through Johnson’s work, the authors primarily leverage Polarity Thinking to aid in expanding the Self Determination Theory. The authors will discuss and explain Polarity Thinking and then use it to expand the view of Self Determination Theory through a polarity lens.

A note to coaches as you read through this discussion of the model: although this is a model for leadership to create a culture of engagement, leaders will undoubtedly need help in figuring out what they need to look at and change. Changing from an either/or to a both/and mindset is difficult to do without guidance and insight from another person. As stated earlier, a McKinsey & Company survey (Bazigos & Caruso, 2016) shows that self-reports of managers are not that reliable so coaches can be invaluable in using this model to help leaders gain insight and clarity and expand their repertoire of behaviors and see leadership itself in this new view.

Overview of Polarity Thinking: A New Way of Leading

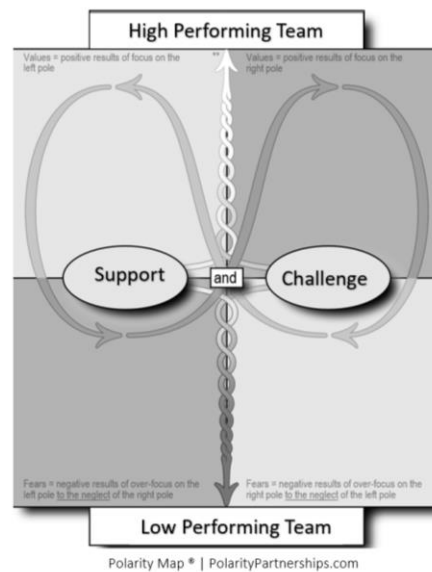
Polarity Thinking involves two poles that are interdependent and together create a complete system. The model provides a new, less dichotomous framework or lens for individuals to sort through complexity (Johnson, 2014). When viewing the world through a Polarity lens, individuals expand their view of what’s ‘right’ and ‘wrong.’ When ‘either/or’ thinking is not helpful in addressing the problem, individuals are able to adopt a ‘both/and’ approach and identify the solutions that lay in the gray space. When faced with a complex issue, Johnson encourages people to ask themselves: “Is this a problem to be solved or a polarity to manage?”

The Polarity Map® offers a visual representation of these complexities and tensions and allows individuals to dissect a problem or challenge in a more holistic and practical way. In addition to the practical application, there are three main elements to the Polarity Map® and the Polarity Thinking model that the authors feel are essential in helping leaders create a culture of engagement in the workplace as well as a model for coaches to use in helping leaders work with tensions in the workplace.

The first element is that there are two poles that are both equally valued and are interdependent. In a leadership context, these poles may be “Strategic and Tactical,” “Hands-On and Hands-Off,” “Structured and Flexible,” or “Confident and Humble.” The words themselves are either neutral or positive, indicating that each pole or side of the Polarity Map® holds value. For the purpose of this research, let us view the poles as one side representing supportive leadership behaviors and the other pole as challenging

leadership behaviors as seen in Figure 1. In other words, the way a leader may engage with others may be to support that individual or to challenge them. In this context, however, both challenging and supporting behaviors are positive in helping to grow and develop the individual.

Figure 1. Source adapted from Polarity Partnerships (Johnson, 2014). Sample Leadership Polarity of “Support and Challenge.”

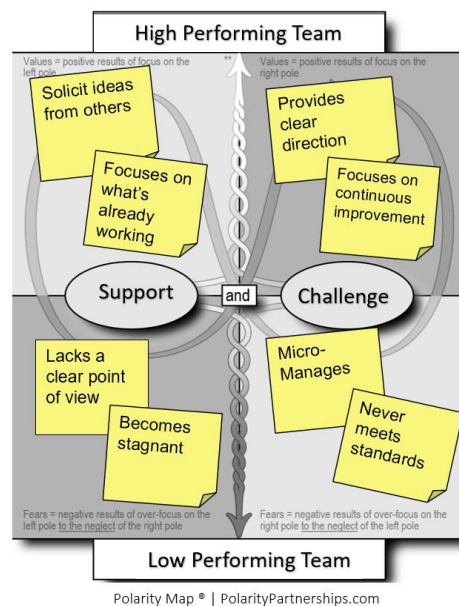


The second important element of the Polarity Map® as it relates to this research is that this model presents a systems-view of the world. In other words, whether or not we “see it,” polarities are at play all of the time in every encounter. For example, one cannot only focus on “activity” without eventually engaging in “rest.” Imagine if a child wants to stay up and never sleep, rest is still part of the equation. The poles within a Polarity Map® are interdependent and connected to one another. When applied to leadership behaviors, leaders often live on one side of the Polarity Map® and may ignore the other side until, over time, they experience the downside (or overuse) of one pole to the neglect of the other pole. For example, if a leader values and demonstrates being straight-forward to the neglect of being empathetic, over time, the leader’s staff will become demotivated and disengaged. Why? One pole (being straight-forward) was being overused and the other pole (being empathetic) was not being leveraged. Once the leader can view his/her behaviors as interrelated and dynamic, that leader will begin to find ways to leverage both sides in a positive manner.

Third, it’s important to note that each pole has an upside and downside. The upside indicates when that behavior is being “leveraged” well and effectively. The downside indicates when a behavior is being

“overused” to the neglect of the other pole. As illustrated in Figure 2, there are upsides and downsides within the Polarity of “Support and Challenge.” It is important to be aware that virtually every behavior can be dissected in this manner of being leveraged positively or being overused. For example, if the leader exhibits the upsides of supportive behaviors, one may expect to see the leader solicit ideas from others and focus on what is currently working. Yet, if these behaviors are overused (to the neglect of challenging behaviors) this leader may appear to have no clear point of view on matters and may begin to accept status quo too much, so that the leader becomes too stagnant. On the other pole (challenge), the upsides may be that a leader provides clear direction and focuses on continuous improvement. Yet, if the leader overuses this behavior (to the neglect of supportive behaviors), the leader may be seen as micro-managing or a person whose standards are difficult to meet.

Figure 2. Source adapted from Polarity Partnerships (Johnson, 2014). Polarity Map® of Support and Challenge highlighting the upsides and downsides of both poles.

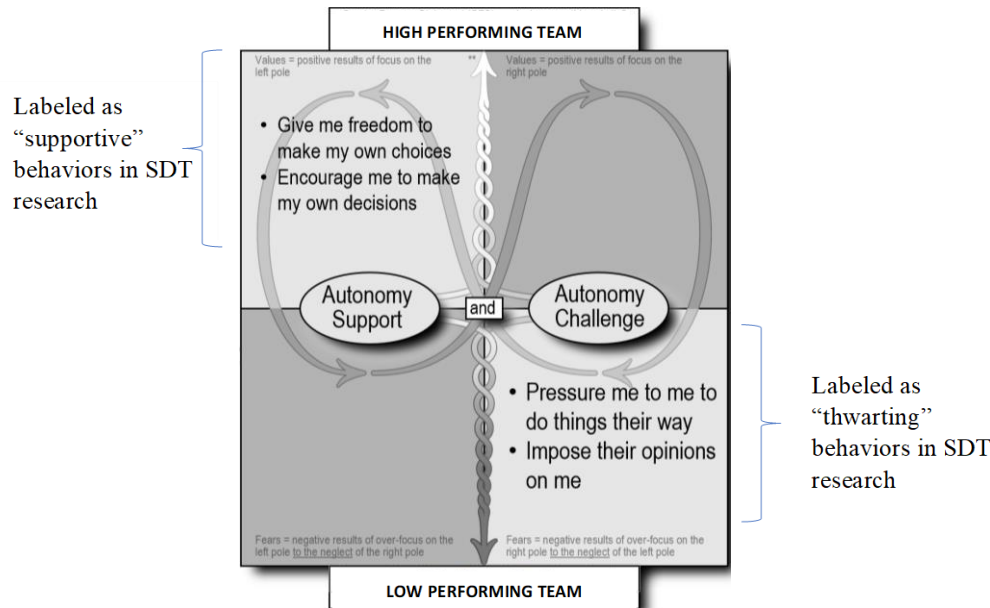


Overlaying SDT with Polarity Thinking to Expand Leadership Effectiveness

The authors were intrigued to explore the possibilities of overlaying the Polarity Thinking model onto the Self Determination Theory. If these two theories are overlaid, could this create a more robust framework for leaders to support their staff and increase motivation and engagement in the workplace? The following illustrations offer a visual representation of overlaying the SDT psychological needs of Autonomy, Competency, and Relatedness into Polarity Maps.

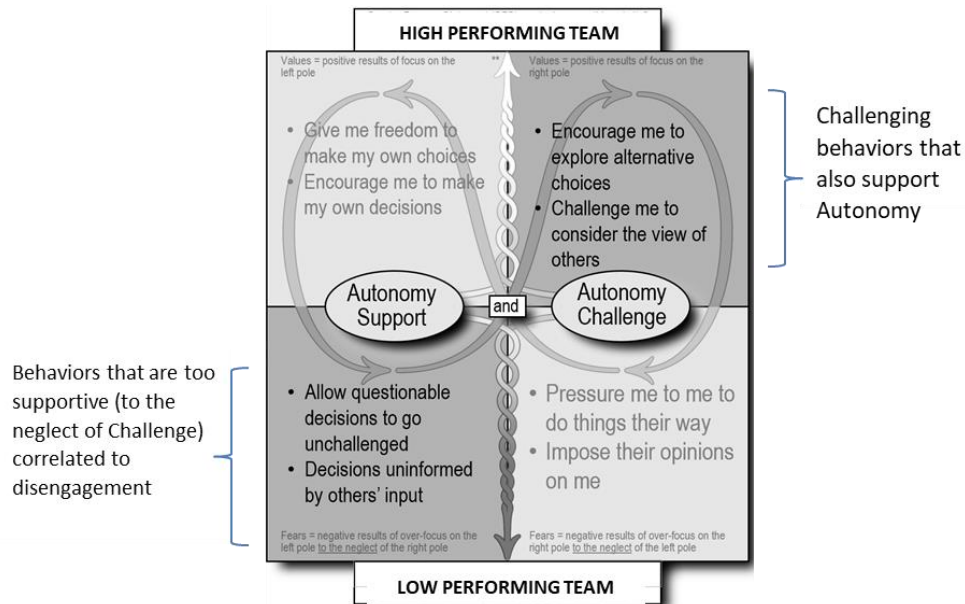
Example: Overlay of Autonomy and Polarity Thinking. Based on an SDT Interpersonal Behaviours Questionnaire (Rocchi et al., 2017), the researchers identified “need-supportive” and “need-thwarting” behaviors. For the purposes of illustrating how Polarity Thinking may enhance SDT, the authors have pulled a sampling of their study and assessment to include in the following Polarity Maps. In Figure 3, the SDT lens reveals the “need-supportive” behaviors listed in the upper left quadrant and the “need-thwarting” behaviors are listed in the bottom right quadrant. Although these behaviors are correct in addressing Autonomy, they are not representing the complete system or bigger picture of the behavior dynamics at play.

Figure 3. Source adapted from Polarity Partnerships (Johnson, 2014). Autonomy “need-supportive” and “need-thwarting” behaviors mapped in a Polarity Map®.



With the overlay of the Polarity Thinking lens, SDT becomes expanded and reveals the larger system. As seen in Figure 4, the bottom left quadrant indicates what happens when there is an over-focus on the “need-supportive” behavior. Similarly, and most relevant for this research, is that there is acknowledgement of “need-thwarting” behaviors when they are leveraged positively. In other words, there are behaviors (indicated in the upper right quadrant) that are challenging *and* positive. When looking at the behaviors from a larger system view, a leader then recognizes the importance of leveraging the upsides of both Autonomy Support and Autonomy Challenge to be the most effective in managing a team member’s need for Autonomy.

Figure 4. Source adapted from Polarity Partnerships (Johnson, 2014). Upsides and downsides of Autonomy behaviors in a Polarity Map®.



The following illustrations, Figures 5 and 6, continue to use a sampling from the SDT Interpersonal Behaviours Questionnaire (Rocchi et al., 2017) to represent the other two dimensions (Competency and Relatedness), revealing an expanded view of SDT.

Figure 5. Source adapted from Polarity Partnerships (Johnson, 2014). Upsides and downsides of Competency behaviors in a Polarity Map®.

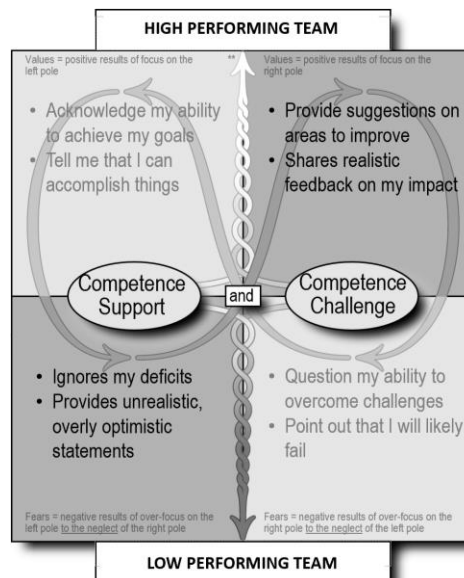
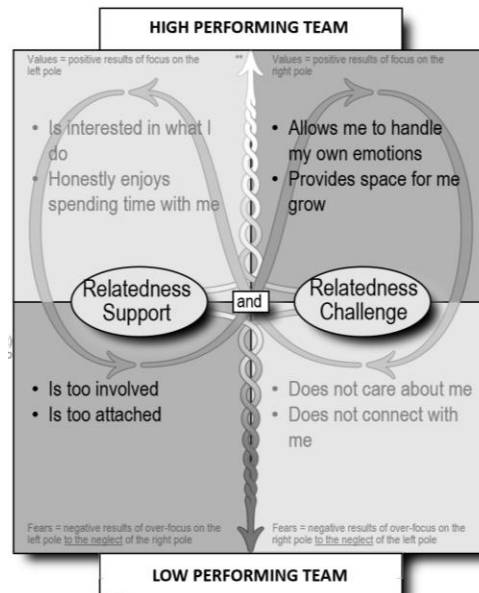


Figure 6. Source adapted from Polarity Partnerships (Johnson, 2014). Upsides and downsides of Relatedness behaviors in a Polarity Map®.



Research Hypothesis

The hypothesis of this research is to determine if leaders who create engaging work environments for their team members leverage the upsides of *both* challenging and supportive behaviors. When viewing SDT with an ‘either/or’ lens (i.e., supporting or thwarting), we miss out on the full set of critical skills that aid in engaging others. When expanding SDT to a ‘both/and’ lens, this expands one’s view to see 1) the downsides to over-focusing on supportive behaviors to the neglect of challenging behaviors and 2) the upside to challenging behaviors. By expanding SDT through a Polarity lens, the authors hope to offer new skill sets to leaders that will allow them to be more effective in engaging with their teams. Specifically, the research hypotheses explored in this study are: (1) Both supportive and challenging leadership behaviors increase a team member’s level of engagement, (2) When asked open-ended questions, team members will describe effective leaders as exhibiting both supportive and challenging behaviors, and (3) When team members feel disengaged, they will attribute that to an overuse of supportive and/or challenging behaviors.

Method

To conduct this research, the authors collected data using the survey method through SurveyMonkey. SurveyMonkey has an existing audience of individuals who give their consent to take surveys and are easily segmented into the categories relevant for our research. The authors included a cover letter of

consent in addition to their consent with SurveyMonkey and had the approval of the Institutional Review Board at John Carroll University, University Heights, Ohio.

The authors specifically targeted professionals who, at the time of the study, were 30 years of age or older, were working full-time in the United States, were employed at a company of 200 or more people, and who had been in workforce for at least eight years. The criteria allowed the researchers to capture the thoughts of professionals with work experience and who have likely engaged with more than one manager in their career to date. The authors received a total of 182 respondents across the United States. The demographics were aligned to the criteria. Respondents were 44% male, 56% female. All were over the age of 30, with 84% who were 45 years or older.

The target respondents were employees who could share the impact that their managers’ behaviors had on their level of engagement. Respondents were asked to respond to a list of leadership behaviors and evaluate if that behavior from their manager led them to feel more engaged, less engaged, or had no impact on engagement at work.

The first half of the survey asked the respondent to think of two to three managers they have worked with or currently work with. Then, they were given statements beginning with “When my manager consistently...” and ending with 36 types of observable behaviors. For example, one item read, “When my manager consistently has fixed opinions...” to which the respondents selected one of three choices, “I feel *more* engaged,” “I feel *less* Engaged,” or “My level of engagement is *not* impacted” for each item listed. The questions were divided into the three SDT psychological needs of Relatedness, Competency, and Autonomy, with 12 items per area. These categories were further divided into behaviors associated with the SDT needs with six behavior items related to supportive tendencies and six behaviors related to challenging. Furthermore, of those six items, three behavior items related to the upsides and three related to the downsides. Table 1 reveals the different categories:

Table 1: Types of leadership behaviors within the three SDT psychological needs

SDT Psychological Need	Types of Leadership Behaviors	
Relatedness	Supportive (6 items)	Challenging (6 items)
	Too Supportive (6 items)	Too Challenging (6 items)
Competency	Supportive (6 items)	Challenging (6 items)
	Too Supportive (6 items)	Too Challenging (6 items)

Autonomy	Supportive (6 items)	Challenging (6 items)
	Too Supportive (6 items)	Too Challenging (6 items)

In addition, towards the end of the survey, there were two open-ended questions asking the respondent to share examples of how their manager contributed to the respondent feeling engaged or disengaged at work. The authors examined the comments, capture overarching themes and aligned them to categories consistent with SDT.

Results

The quantitative data was analyzed through a common factor analysis (CFA) with principal axis factor extraction to identify which of the 36 behavior items indicated strong engagement or disengagement across the three SDT categories. First, the authors examined the adequacy of the correlation matrix. The correlation coefficients in the matrix are widely dispersed, ranging from 0.028 to 0.635 among pairs of the 36 items. The determinant of the covariance matrix is not equal to zero (determinant = 1.731E-27), indicating that the matrix is not a singular matrix and that it would not cause computation problems due to the inability to invert the matrix. Next, the authors assessed the sampling adequacy by measuring the strength of the relationship among items, which was indicated by the result of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test. In our data, the KMO result of 0.824 was deemed as “meritorious,” according to Kaiser (1974); therefore, there is a sufficient sample size relative to the number of items. Lastly, the result of Bartlett’s test of sphericity was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 2282.148$, $df = 630$, $p < .001$), which suggested that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix. All these preliminary examinations show that the correlation matrix produced from our data is factorable.

Next, the authors continued with the initial factor extraction process, which involved defining the number of initial factors and rotating the factors to improve interpretation. As shown in the Table 2 the total variance in all items that can be explained by a given factor is indicated as eigenvalues. Even though the traditional criterion to determine the number of initial factors is to select those factors whose initial eigenvalues are greater than 1 (Guttman, 1954), the authors selected three factors based on the scree plot (See Figure 7) and percent of variance explained (See Table 2). Cattell and Jaspars (1967) recommended finding the break where a straight line can be drawn through the lower values of the plotted eigenvalues. The authors decided to extract the first 3 factors above the straight line, which explained up to 35.98% of the total variance. To improve the meaningfulness and interpretation of the generated factors, the authors continued to examine the rotated factors. The authors requested varimax rotation to maximize the

variance of the loadings of factors as well as the differences between the high and low loadings on a particular factor.

Table 2. Eigenvalues and total variance explained

Factor	Initial Eigenvalues	Percentage of Variance	Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings	Percentage of Variance	Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings	Percentage of Variance
1	2.199	20.294%	2.016	18.6%	1.759	16.233%
2	0.969	8.938%	0.679	6.263%	0.733	6.764%
3	0.731	6.749%	0.395	3.643%	0.597	5.509%

Figure 7. Scree Plot of Factor Eigenvalue.

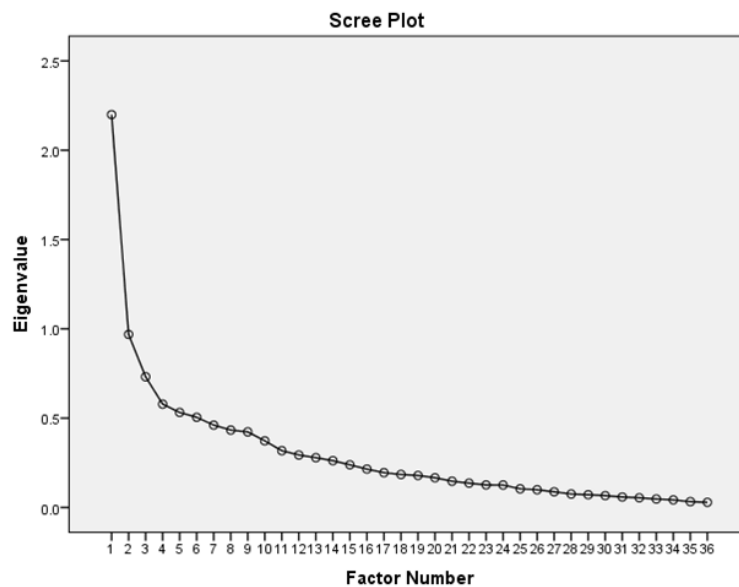


Table 3 indicates the items that were strongly related to one of the three factors after rotation. Items are sorted from the highest to lowest by factor loading. It appears that majority of the items were clustered on the first factor and two smaller factors were supported by the remaining items.

Table 3. Rotated Factor Matrix.

Rotated Factor Matrix ^a			
	Rescaled Factor		
	1	2	3
Communicates the overall strategy	.717		
Acknowledges others for their contributions	.684		

Provides a realistic view of the current state	.682		
Sets clear expectations around tasks	.678		
Knows when to step in and make decisions	.678		
Listens to multiple points of view	.657		
Provides honest feedback	.653		
Encourages continuous improvement	.638		
Communicates a clear vision	.631		
Is optimistic when talking about the future	.623		
Conveys confidence	.616		
Is humble	.607		
Demonstrates empathy	.600		
Encourages others to make their own decisions	.589		
Pays attention to details	.527		
Is true to his/her own values	.509		
Encourages others to find their own solutions	.441		
Honors others' values	.439		
Views others' needs as more important than his/her own	.319		
Puts themselves down	.264		
Excludes others' points of view	.163		
Is critical		.512	
Dictates the way things need to be done		.474	
Micromanages		.454	
Is inflexible when he/she thought he/she was right		.443	
Has fixed opinions		.433	
Changes direction to accommodate others' points of view		.329	
Finds fault with my work		.300	
Gets stuck in the details		.299	
Ignores poor behavior			.577
Provides positive feedback that is inaccurate			.452
Is out of touch with the day-to-day activities			.446
Conveys a negative outlook			.365
Is distant or not involved			.324
Accepts all decisions without question			.313
Is nice, even if it entails some dishonesty			.197

The authors conducted a high-level analysis on the open-ended comments to determine common behavioral themes that emerged under each SDT category. In addition, the authors grouped comments as supportive or challenging behaviors for both questions (feeling engaged and disengaged). Lastly, the authors highlighted any comments written as polarities in their description of leadership behaviors.

Discussion

Research Hypothesis: Both Supportive and Challenging Leadership Behaviors Increase a Team Member’s Level of Engagement

Based on an analysis of the factor loadings for each factor (Table 3), the behavioral items did not load to the three SDT categories; however, the items loaded according to engagement and disengagement. This expands the list of leadership behaviors essential in addressing employees’ SDT psychological needs. For example, items related to “Relatedness,” such as “Is humble (supportive)” and “Conveys confidence (challenging),” were both positively correlated with employees feeling engaged. Items related to “Competency,” such as “Demonstrates empathy (supportive)” and “Provides honest feedback (challenging),” were both positively correlated to employees feeling engaged. Lastly, items related to “Autonomy,” such as “Encouraging others to make their own decisions (supportive)” and “Knows when to step in and make decisions (challenging),” were both positively correlated to employees feeling engaged. Our research expands SDT to include the upsides of challenging behaviors.

Factor one correlated with all of the upsides, including both supportive and challenging behaviors. The second and third factors correlated with the downsides that included the overuse of both challenging and supportive behaviors across all SDT needs. There were also a few items that loaded with a factor of .3 or less indicating that those items were not clearly viewed as behaviors that led to employees feeling engaged or disengaged. In sum, the research supports the hypothesis that both supportive and challenging leadership behaviors increase a team member’s level of engagement.

Research Hypothesis: When Asked Open-Ended Questions, Team Members Describe Effective Leaders as Exhibiting both Supportive and Challenging Behaviors

When reviewing the open-ended comments, the categories aligned to the three SDT psychological needs of Relatedness, Competency, and Autonomy and contained comments that were classified as supportive and challenging leadership behaviors. A sampling of the comments aligned to the three SDT psychological need areas are listed in Table 4.

Table 4. Examples from open-ended comments of supportive and challenging leadership behaviors leading to engagement.

SDT Psychological Need	Examples of Leadership Behaviors from Open-Ended Questions	
Relatedness	Supportive	Challenging
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shows interest - Cares about me outside of work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Schedules 1:1 meetings to address issues - Asks about the progress of tasks

	- Is inclusive	- Makes decisions after listening to input
Competency	Supportive	Challenging
	- Solicits my opinions - Takes suggestions seriously - Acknowledges my work	- Provides honest feedback - Gives me tips to improve - Encourages further learning
Autonomy	Supportive	Challenging
	- Includes me in decision making - Trusts my judgement - Gives me independence to do my work	- Provides challenging tasks - Steps in when needed - Establishes clear expectations & direction

In addition, in the open-ended comments, there were examples of polarities that describe both supportive and challenging comments leading to engagement. Some examples include: “Present manager expects me to handle 99% of the situations that arise but is not shy about telling me when I made an error...,” “My managers (all three I have had in mind) have given me direction but left me to the creative implementation,” “Gives me direction when I am stuck [and] helps me come up with my own solution to a problem,” and “The best supervisor I ever had knew when to push me to go a little out of my comfort zone and when to lay back.”

The comments by respondents show support for this hypothesis. When asked an open-ended question to describe leadership behaviors that lead to engagement, the comments by respondents included both supportive and challenging leadership behaviors.

Research Hypothesis: Disengagement Entails both Supportive and Challenging Leadership Behaviors

Based on the factor analysis, both supportive and challenging behaviors had downsides that were correlated to disengagement. In other words, when a manager is too supportive or too challenging, the outcome is similar to thwarting behaviors in the SDT research and these items are positively correlated to employees feeling disengaged. From a Polarity Lens, “thwarting” behaviors are viewed as the overuse of challenging behaviors (to the neglect of supportive behaviors) and, to no surprise, revealed a correlation to disengagement. However, the research also indicated areas where disengagement occurred due to an

overuse of “supportive” behaviors (to the neglect of challenging behaviors). A sampling of the comments aligned to disengagement can be viewed in Table 5.

Table 5. Examples from open-ended comments of leadership behaviors that are too supportive or too challenging leading to disengagement

SDT Psychological Need	Examples of Leadership Behaviors from Open-Ended Questions	
Relatedness	Too Supportive (to the neglect of challenging)	Too Challenging (to the neglect of supportive)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Avoids conflict - Does not push back on difficult issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does not listen - Does not care about others - All “I” never “we”
Competency	Too Supportive (to the neglect of challenging)	Too Challenging (to the neglect of supportive)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tolerates poor performance - Does not push me to my full potential 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Criticizes others publicly - Discounts my opinion
Autonomy	Too Supportive (to the neglect of challenging)	Too Challenging (to the neglect of supportive)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of clear direction - Provides no guidelines or expectations - Absent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Micromanages - “My Way or the Highway” attitude - Unrealistic expectations

This research hypothesis was supported by the comments of respondents. The overuse of both supportive and challenging behaviors led to feelings of disengagement by the respondents. Overall, the research conducted was the first step in beginning to expand upon SDT. The results of this research provide a more comprehensive set of behaviors for leaders to demonstrate when building engagement with their teams.

The Dynamic Engagement Model

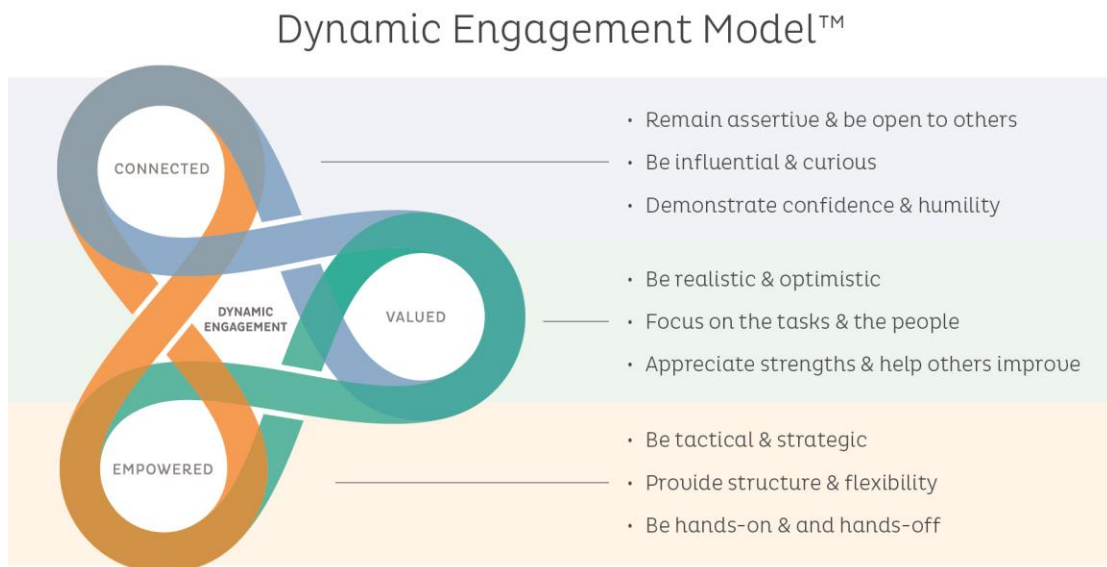
Based on the outcomes of this research, one of the authors (Mendelow) developed a new, Dynamic Engagement Model that combines and expands both SDT and the Polarity Thinking model. Mendelow recognized the need to update the names of the psychological needs to reflect contemporary terminology used in the workplace today. The words selected were based on the frequently used terms in the comments from the open-ended questions. Table 6 identifies the new labels for these categories. The

Dynamic Engagement Model seen in Figure 8 provides a framework for overlaying a Polarity Lens on SDT.

Table 6. New terminology for the Dynamic Engagement Model

SDT Psychological Need	Dynamic Engagement
Relatedness	Connected
Competence	Valued
Autonomy	Empowered

Figure 8. The Dynamic Engagement Model



The purpose of Mendelow’s Dynamic Engagement model is to offer coaches a new dynamic leadership framework that will help their clients (leaders in organizations) 1) identify psychological needs of their staff and 2) address employees’ needs effectively using supportive and challenging leadership behaviors, which exponentially increases the leader’s effectiveness.

Application with Real-World Coaching Example

An Executive Coach worked with a leader who managed a highly sophisticated data analytics group and was faced with a disengaged team. He described the members as exceptionally smart with no ambition. The main issues were: 1) The team was silent during team meetings, 2) no one was offering ideas or new innovations, and 3) no one seemed to have a sense of urgency.

As a result, the leader was becoming frustrated and took matters into his own hands. He described to the coach that he was feeling stuck. He needed the team to be more committed, he didn't have time to babysit the team members and do the work for them. Yet, he felt he had no choice but to intervene because he was the leader and ultimately held accountable for the output of this team. He was given feedback recently from his Executives that he needed to be more inclusive, trust his team more, and find ways to let others lead. This was confusing feedback for him because, in the leader's mind, he *either* needed to focus on getting the work done *or* he could step back and nothing would get done.

The coach helped this leader analyze the situation and to recognize his "either/or" mindset. First, the coach explained the three elements in the Dynamic Engagement Model (connected, valued, and empowered) and asked the leader, what he thought might be happening beneath the surface. The leader began to brainstorm possible reasons as to why the team might be behaving in this way. He recognized that he was shielding the team from some information around recent changes in the organization. The leader's intentions were good; he didn't share the information because he didn't want to cause more anxiety in the team. However, by limiting the information, the team ended up feeling disconnected to the vision, not valued for their expertise and disempowered to make decisions. They attended meetings but didn't contribute because they felt that the manager simply did not care. The team had tried to offer ideas in the past but the ideas were dismissed or criticized for not being strategic enough. The team didn't have the full picture and therefore were not in a position to make the best decisions for the organization.

Once the coach helped the leader see the situation from a deeper perspective, the coach then explored the polarities at play. The coach mapped out the polarity around "Stepping in" and "Stepping back." The coach used the map as a tool to map out the leader's "either/or" mindset. She wrote in the upside of stepping in being "getting things done" and the downside of "stepping back" which was "nothing gets done." The leader revealed that he was so afraid of failing that he had difficulty trusting others. He also mentioned that he wanted the team to like him. If he put all of the burden on the team, he was afraid they would burn out or, even worse, leave the organization. The coach continued to work with this leader to fill in the rest of the map and identified what happened when he over-focused on "stepping in" which the leader immediately recognized as "micromanaging." Next, they filled in what it may look like to live in the upside of "stepping back" but not completely letting go of control. Lastly, they brainstormed solutions in leveraging the upsides of both "stepping in" and "stepping back" in which the leader was able to think of strategies to solicit feedback, remain open to criticism, build trust gradually, and become more comfortable with sharing challenges around the organizational changes. By using the PolarityMap® as a

coaching tool, the coach was able to help the leader assess his team's situation and identify strategies that would work best for him, his team, and the organization.

This model identifies options for leaders to engage with staff by offering sets of behaviors (using polarities) within the three primary psychological needs. Knowing that one size does not fit all, the Dynamic Engagement Model provides fluidity in the leader's approach and flexibility to address each situation as appropriate. This allows the coach to provide a framework for the leader to select the best course of action based on the needs of his/her situation. Due to the dynamic nature, there is also an underlying assumption that there is no "right" way of leading. Instead, this model reinforces the importance of focusing on the context and environment in which the leader is operating in and leveraging the upside of both poles to optimize each situation. Furthermore, the fluidity of the model encourages leaders to solicit on-going feedback and continuously assess and tweak one's behavior based on the feedback of others. Just as we see in the Polarity Model, there is no end game. A coach can use this model in a tangible way with the leader to assess his/her actions towards leveraging the upsides of one of the polarities as well as identifying early warning signs of the downsides. These early indicators increase self awareness and allow the leader to readjust behaviors to become more effective. By doing this, the coach is reinforcing that leadership is a practice, not a goal. Leaders who are most effective are aware of these dynamics at play and are consistently modifying their approach to create a culture of engagement in the workplace.

Limitations and Future Research

Some limitations of this research were a small sample size with a limited number of behavioral items related to SDT needs. Another limitation was that the behavioral items included in this research were not mutually exclusive among the SDT categories.

Further research is needed to validate supportive and challenging leadership behaviors that align to each category. This list of behaviors will be a helpful assessment tool for leaders to evaluate their own level of effectiveness and understand what they need to do differently to be more successful in engaging their workforce. Mendelow plans to further refine this model and develop an assessment tool that will help leaders gain a 360 view of their leadership behavior. This will help leaders understand how much they are leveraging the upsides of both supportive and challenging behaviors and will give them a sense of how to adjust their style and approach to engage their team. Other research could include established Leadership Effectiveness scales to measure the correlation of high performing leaders with the dynamic leadership behaviors.

Conclusion

In today's complex world, leaders need to have a dynamic skill set to be able to engage their employees and lead their organizations to success. SDT has provided a good basis for understanding and engaging the workforce. However, it leaves some gaps in its 'either/or' (i.e., support or thwart) model. Choosing one behavior to the neglect of another will lead to problems down the road. Using the Polarity Thinking Lens along with the Polarity Map® overlaid on SDT expands the ability of a leader to understand and engage the workforce by increasing the behaviors available to him/her with a both/and approach. By filling in the upside of challenging behaviors (i.e., what is referred to as 'thwarting' in SDT language) more choices become obvious and leaders can move between both supportive and challenging behaviors to the betterment of the organization as a whole and the employees on an individual level. This 'both/and' approach to managing tensions—or polarities—in the workplace can be seen in the Dynamic Engagement Model developed by Mendelow. This model takes the best of SDT and combines the best of Polarity Thinking to provide a roadmap for leaders today to increase both their flexibility and their stability in dealing with the workforce at all levels. Coaches that use this model can be invaluable in guiding leaders to create a much-needed culture of engagement.

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About the writers

Laura Mendelow, MAOD, PCC

Masters in Organization Development from Marymount University

301-325-5123

Laura.mendelow@mendelowconsulting.com

www.Mendelowconsulting.com

Laura Mendelow has a Bachelor's degree in psychology, a Master's degree in Organization Development (OD) and is a Professional Certified Coach (PCC). She launched MCG, a leadership and team development company in 2012 after leading the coaching and OD services at Booz Allen Hamilton for 10 years. Mrs. Mendelow was an adjunct faculty member for George Mason's Leadership Coaching for Organizational Performance ICF accredited certificate program.

Janet Goodman, Ph.D.

Kent State University, Ph.D., Counseling and Human Development Services.

Licensed Psychologist, Certified Coach (ICF)

216-403-7707

drjgoodman@gmail.com

Dr. Goodman maintains a psychology private practice providing individual and couple counseling for adults. Licensed for diagnosis and treatment of mental and emotional disorders. She is also trained as a business and life coach and coaches small business owners and start-up companies.

Paula J. Britton, Ph.D.

Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology from the University of Akron

Professor, Psychologist, licensed clinical counselor

216-397-1710

pbritton@jcu.edu

www.paulabritton.com

Dr. Britton has been a counselor educator at John Carroll University for 27 years. She maintains a private practice as well as giving trainings to mental health providers on supervision and administration/management. She is licensed as a psychologist and clinical counselor.

Nhat Nguyen, BA.

Graduate Assistant of the Counseling Department at John Carroll University

216-778-0376

nnguyen21@jcu.edu

Nhat Nguyen holds BA degree in International Business and BA degree in Psychology. He has work in Human Resources and Learning & Development field for over 8 years in Vietnam before moving to the United States for the Master study. He is currently a second year graduate student of Clinical Mental Health Counseling at John Carroll University.

Han Zhang, Ph.D.

Ph.D. degree in Evaluation and Measurement from Kent State University.

262-595-2235

zhang@uwp.edu

Dr. Zhang currently works as an institutional planner at the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, University of Wisconsin-Parkside. She received her Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction from Otterbein University and Ph.D. degree in Evaluation and Measurement from Kent State University. Dr. Zhang's main area of expertise includes quantitative data analysis, research methodology, measurement instrument development, and educational program evaluation and assessment.