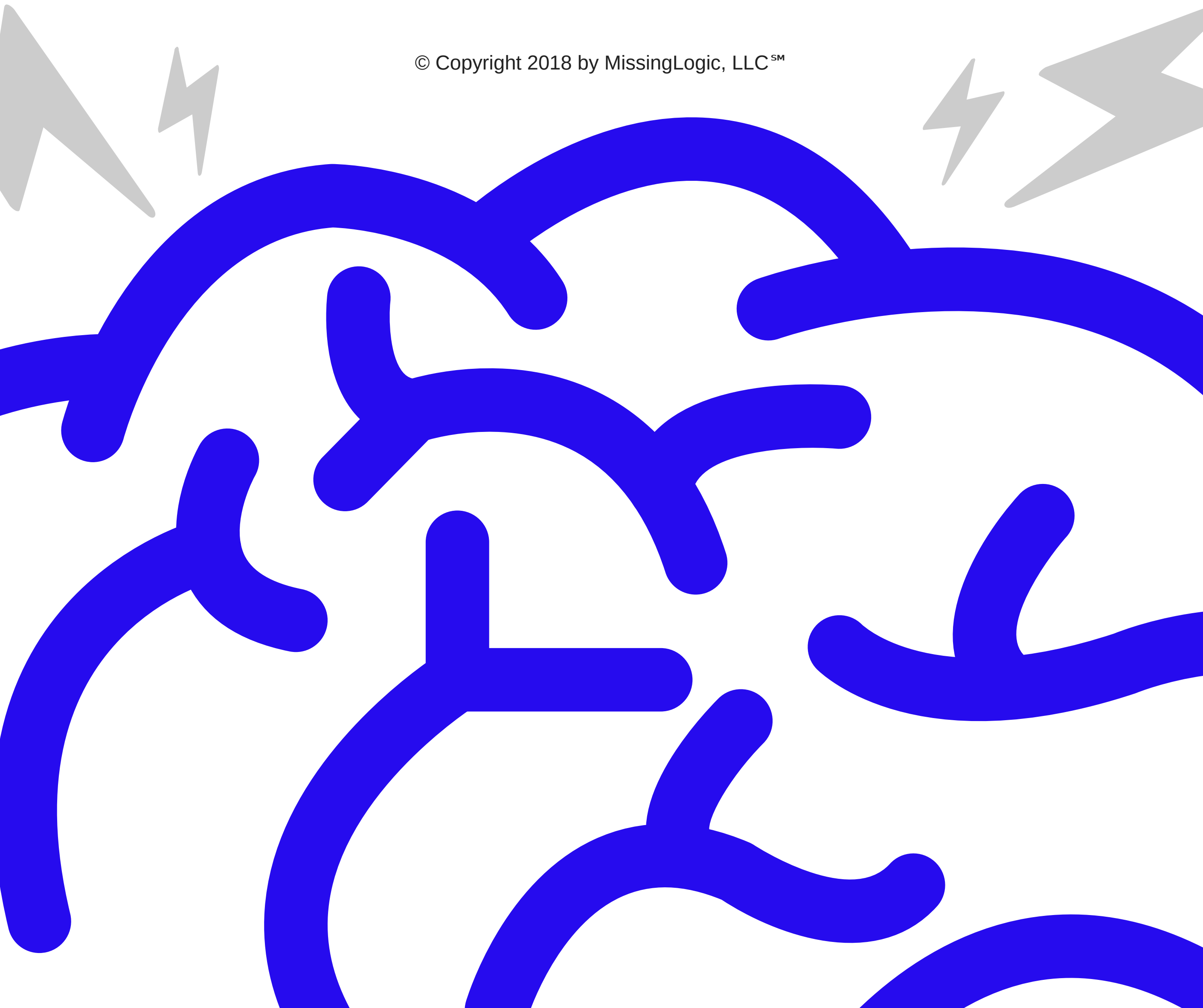


POLARITY THINKING™ MINDSET

COMPLETE GUIDE TO APPLYING
BOTH/AND THINKING

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Looking at challenges and issues as problems to be solved comes easily to us. As children and leaders we are rewarded when we solve problems. We have been doing this all our lives and have become experts in this way of thinking.

Developing a Polarity Thinking™ Mindset will take a little effort at first. It's like the exercise where you cross your arms in the opposite direction than you normally do (we've all done that exercise at some point...right?) but once you're able to recognize polarities you will begin to see them everywhere. Good news...some of you may naturally recognize polarities and manage them effectively, you just never knew what they were or what to call them, but now you will!

Why is it important to be able to recognize a polarity? Polarities are everywhere! They are indestructible, unsolvable, unavoidable, and unstoppable (Johnson, 1992). When you misdiagnose a polarity as a problem you end up **unnecessarily** experiencing negative consequences which lead to the inability to achieve your greater purpose over time. The negative consequences also include repeatedly having to address the same issue over and over.

This guide will provide you with the essential steps to recognize polarities and differentiate them from problems. The ability to differentiate between these two ways of thinking will provide you with an essential skill for achieving sustainable results.



Step One: Gain Clarity

What is a problem?

A problem is a challenge or issue that we find unpleasant or unfavorable and want to remedy. Problems have answers/solutions that are independent. You choose either solution A or solution B and you are finished.

What is a Polarity?

A polarity is an "interdependent pair of values or alternative points of view that appear to be different or unrelated, competitive or even opposite, but in reality need each other over time to reach outcomes neither can reach alone" (Wesorick, 2016. p. 6). Polarities are also known as dynamics, chronic tensions, paradoxes, dilemmas or wicked problems. With polarities the answers/solutions are interdependent.

Polarities persist over time, there is no endpoint.

Step Two: Differentiate Between a Problem and Polarity

This step requires using the definitions and characteristics of problems and polarities to differentiate between the two.

Characteristics of Problems and Polarities

<i>Problem</i>	<i>Polarity</i>
<i>The difficulty is not ongoing.</i>	<i>The difficulty persists over time.</i>
<i>There is an endpoint.</i>	<i>There is no endpoint.</i>
<i>The challenge is solvable.</i>	<i>The challenge is not solvable. It requires management.</i>
<i>The alternatives are independent.</i>	<i>The alternatives are interdependent.</i>

To differentiate between a polarity or a problem ask yourself the following questions:

- 1) Is the problem ongoing?
- 2) Is there an endpoint?
- 3) Is there a single solution?
- 4) Are the alternatives independent?
- 5) Is the desired outcome achievable with a single solution?

Step Three: Recognize Tension

Polarities represent an energy flow or dynamic tension that exists between the interdependent pairs or poles. The tension has a predictable flow or pattern and moves around and back and forth between the poles in the form of an infinity loop.

You can experience the tension as either negative or positive depending on how you engage with it or approach it. When the tension is experienced as negative our desire is to move away from that tension and toward a solution or potentially more positive experience.

When trying to distinguish between a polarity and problem it is helpful to look for or observe “from/to” statements or thoughts. This indicates the desire to move from the current state to a desired future state.

FROM/TO EXAMPLES

FROM SELF TO OTHERS
FROM RIGID TO FLEXIBLE
FROM MAKING A DIFFERENCE TO ENJOYING LIFE
FROM REST TO ACTIVITY
FROM ORGANIZATIONAL INTERESTS TO EMPLOYEE INTERESTS

Observing the use of From/To statements in association with the questions from step two above will help you make an accurate distinction between a problem or polarity.

An individual with a Polarity Thinking™ Mindset recognizes the tension that flows within a polarity and resist the temptation to release that tension by choosing to focus on one pole or the other.



Step Four: Think Neutral



Remember polarities consist of interdependent pairs. The pairs represent poles in a polarity and **both** are needed to achieve a greater purpose or outcome. One pole is not more important than the other, they are equally important. One is not right and the other wrong, or one positive and the other negative.

When identifying the poles in a polarity you want to think in neutral terms. This enables you to see and embrace the positive attributes of each.



Step Five: Both/And Thinking



This step is where you start to embrace both/and thinking. Once you begin to see the polarities around you this will come more naturally.

Both/And thinking enables us to embrace the existence of the interdependent pairs and to recognize that **giving attention to both** is the only path to achieving the desired outcomes.

Both/And thinking also leads us to recognizing that the tension between the pairs/poles is good and can be leveraged.

Once you begin to see the polarities around you embracing both/and thinking will come more naturally.

Both/And thinking enables us to embrace the existence of the interdependent pairs and to recognize that giving attention to both is the only path to achieving the desired outcomes.

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