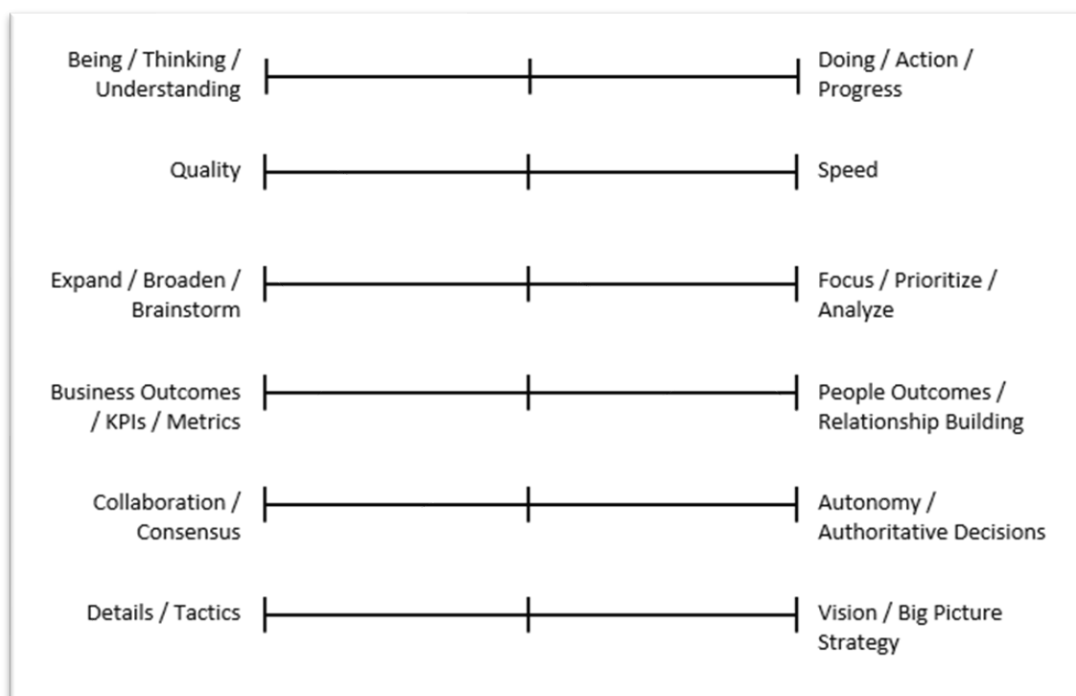


What are we optimizing for?

Use a scale of polarities to guide challenging meetings



When you experience meetings where the dialog becomes stuck, circular, or tense, likely there are advocates for two sides of a continuum. For example, you may hear from those who believe quality is most important, that slowing down to get it right must be prioritized. You may also hear from those who believe speed is critical, and that accelerating quickly must come first. We know that BOTH speed AND quality matter. A holistic approach would consider both sides of the equation. A realistic approach may optimize for one or the other based on the circumstance. What can you do during a meeting when the group may be mired at opposite ends of the spectrum on one or more of these common ranges?



- **Reflect for yourself.** Where are you on the continuum in this moment?
- **Articulate what is going on and acknowledge the energy.** "In this conversation, I hear several people talking about quality and others talking about speed. Both are important. Thank you for weighing in. I see this is important to you."

What are we optimizing for?



- **Assess the current range of discussion.** Either internally or in conversation with the group, consider where you have spent sufficient time (e.g., brainstorm), where you might need to spend more time (e.g., prioritize), or when you might reserve time for the other edge in the next meeting or alternate format.
- **Choose your path and state your intention.** If you are the meeting owner, step into your leadership of the group's time. After assessing where you might be stuck in discussion, clearly state your intention. "Today we will focus on ABC (e.g., vision). We will reserve time to discuss XYZ (e.g., tactics) in our next meeting."
- **Use non-meeting time to explore the "whole" of both sides.** Leverage non-meeting dialog to continue the conversation and round out the yet-to-be considered perspectives: email, group chat, 1:1 discussion, or written summaries.
- **Embrace the value of polarities.** Honor the fact that both sides of every equation bring value to the project. Of course, we need both collaboration AND autonomy. Certainly, we need to understand business metrics AND people outcomes. Each one of us operates from a base of skill, comfort, and experience that may tend to have us stay in a default mode or comfort zone. That is why diversity of thought is so important. Stretching into the sides of a discussion that feel new for us can lead to more well-rounded plans and delivery.
- **Reflect on patterns to address chronic imbalances.** Use this list of questions to explore where the group may consistently spend time and identify intentional choices to move from one-sided to more holistic discussions.
 - What are we optimizing for today?
 - What do we most often optimize for?
 - What areas may be overlooked (now or frequently)?
 - What trade-offs are we making?
 - What do we choose to optimize for next?
 - What choices honor our team values?