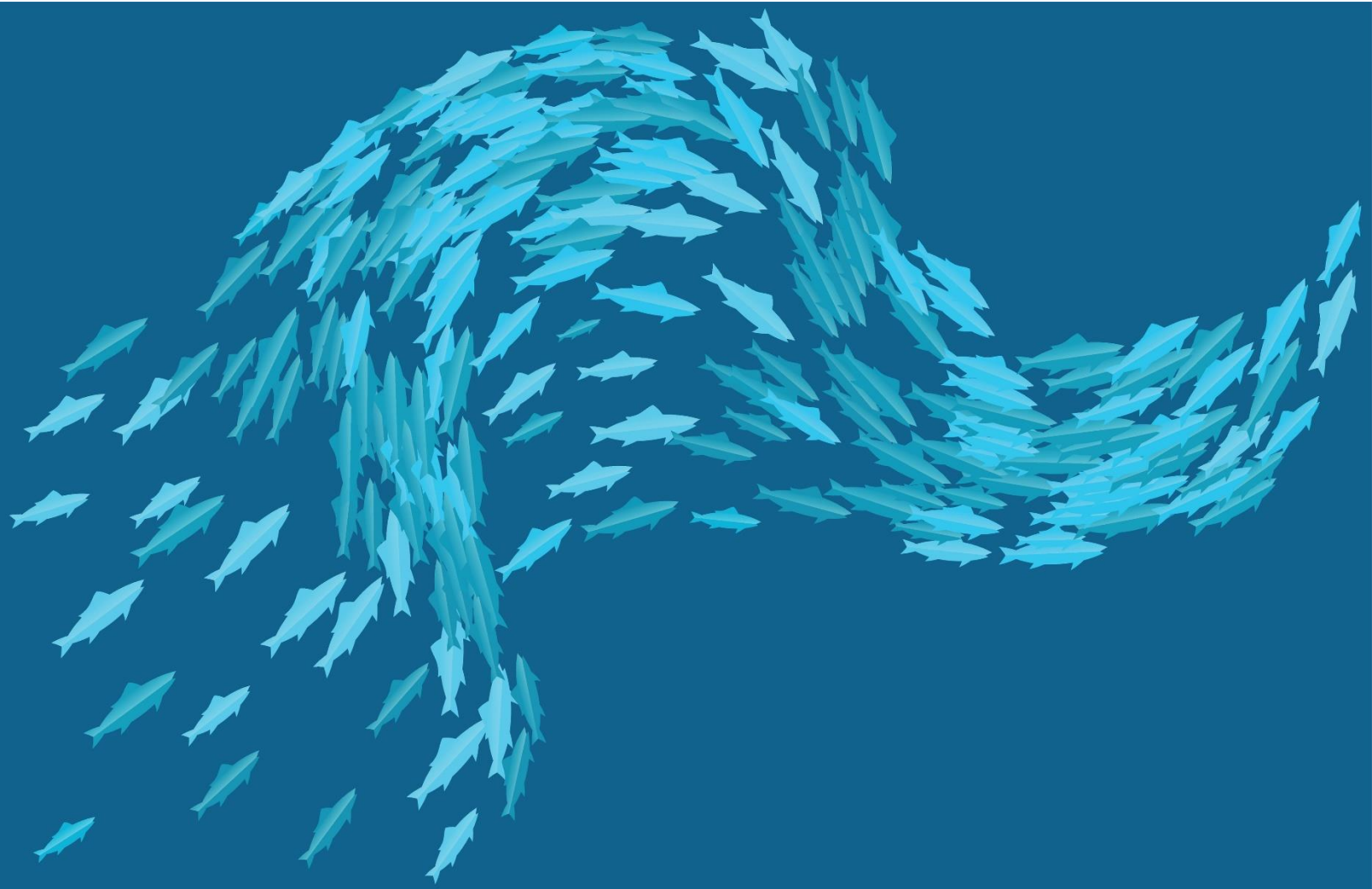


# FOUR LEADERSHIP STYLES: ARCHETYPES FOR STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE



BY ROBERT ROSS PETERSON *Principal, Avniel Consulting*

I recently sat in on a leadership development seminar for one of the largest healthcare organizations worldwide. We spent the day in a giant meeting hall filled with hundreds of first line to executive managers. Throughout the day, a senior executive and his aids covered an engaging activities-based training on Myers Briggs personality types.

As I sat at one of the tables, I began to hear a number of snide remarks.

*“Every time I take this test I get a different result,” said an executive coyly.*

*“Yeah, this is only generating a greater backlog of work,” said a middle manager.*

Comments such as these continued throughout the day. I watched the very people from the table who questioned whether the training was worth their time instantly change their tune and pitch superficial positive insights when they were asked to share in the limelight.

Seeing that human beings are fundamentally wired differently is one of the essential realizations that separates successful C-Suites in the large cap arena from everyone else and this article aims to explain why. Whether you learn it from Harvard’s leadership styles<sup>1</sup>, personality systems like Myers Briggs and the Enneagram<sup>2</sup>, or by keen observation of children—the world’s finest leaders not only understand diverse and fundamentally different personality constitutions, but embrace this reality and use it to their advantage.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://hbr.org/2013/12/the-eight-archetypes-of-leadership>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.enneagramworldwide.com/tour-the-nine-types/>

# The Bottom Line

Does your business have qualified successors for key positions? It's highly unlikely considering that employee attrition levels are at record levels. Losing an employee costs a firm 50% of their yearly salary<sup>3</sup>. A Gallup poll in 2014 found that 71% of employees are dissatisfied with their job<sup>4</sup>. What is the top reason employees leave? It has held steady for decades—not liking their boss.

As we will discuss, a mismatch in leadership style among staff, including between a superior and report, is a very common source of conflict. These are often archetypical conflicts not seen by either party. Other areas of application for leadership styles include effective communication, negotiation with clients, and team selection.

## Four Leadership Styles

Let's introduce some leadership styles as a basis to discuss archetypical strategy. We could use something as simple as type A/B personality theory<sup>5</sup> which has two archetypes or a larger personality system such as Myers Briggs which has sixteen archetypes. We'll be using a four archetype system based on four core leadership

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.aarp.org/work/employers/info-06-2013/costs-of-employee-turnover.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.gallup.com/poll/181289/majority-employees-not-engaged-despite-gains-2014.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.simplypsychology.org/personality-a.html>

values—wisdom, truth, compassion, and peace. Four leadership styles are manageable enough to learn quickly and apply in the workplace. The four styles map to the four classic elements—Air, Fire, Water, and Earth—which provide helpful metaphors. The system's origin is based on ancient philosophy in addition to psychology theory which we will revisit later.

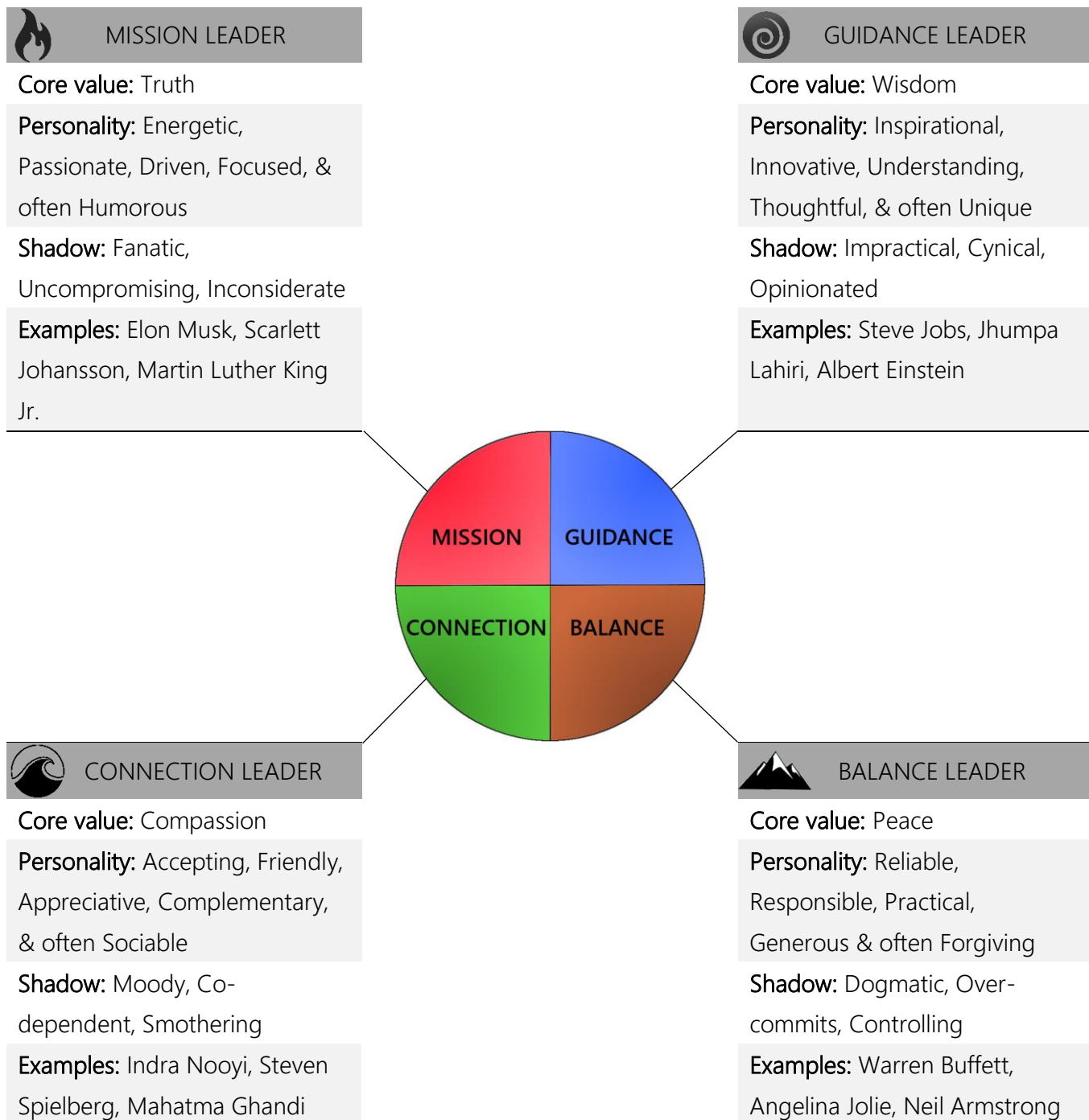


Figure 1. Four Leadership Styles

## GUIDANCE LEADER



The guidance archetype is able to communicate ground-breaking insights and highly complex concepts to nearly any audience. This is because they can access the edge of human potential and translate it to everyday language making them incredible, inspirational pioneers. Guidance leaders are often interested in research and new ways of doing business. They are the visionaries, oracles, and elders that are trusted so highly that their endorsement is of the highest value.

## MISSION LEADER



The mission archetype is found often in business leadership because they enjoy achieving goals and energizing those around them. They achieve unmatched results by using their intense focus and resolve. The CEO that started out as a janitor mopping floors and worked their way up the ranks is a mission archetype. The no-nonsense truth speaker that cuts right to the chase is a mission archetype. These are the knights of modern day times and their excellence and powerful capabilities are to be respected and honored.

## CONNECTION LEADER



The connection archetype excels at relationships and social situations because just to be in their presence is a delight. Their client and partnership skills naturally build vast networks of the highest caliber

relationships because everyone wants to connect with them. Organizations achieve tremendous results because they naturally align staff harmoniously and everyone wants to put in the extra effort to be a part of their initiatives. With their heightened emotional intelligence, they excel at negotiation and mediating heated situations that would otherwise be unresolvable. These are the partners and caretakers that are nearly universally beloved and admired.

## BALANCE LEADER



The balance archetype has mastery in maturing organizations and putting sustainable systems in place. They excel at chair functions, governance, and delivering reliability under extraordinary circumstances. People feel at ease and in good hands under the leadership of a well-developed balance archetype. They are the ones that are trusted with the treasures of the modern day kingdom. These are today's trustees, sovereigns, and monarchs that are the foundational leaders of our society.

## This is a tool, not a set of labels

Often when talking about personality archetypes, a light bulb goes off for someone and they begin labeling people in their life. This is important because that person has realized that others operate fundamentally differently than they do which is a paradigm shift. If you are absolutely certain that someone you know

fits the connection leader archetype, it is unadvisable to say, “You’re a connection archetype by the way.” No one likes to be put in a box and even if they did, no one precisely fits into these leadership styles because every human being is unique; we’d need a system of 7 billion archetypes which is completely unmanageable.

The four leadership styles are nothing more than tools to help us discover our own blind spots in understanding and interacting more effectively with people. They are for you—leave the self-development of others up to them. When observing the personality of someone else in the context of these archetypes, especially in business, continually test your working hypothesis of what leadership style is being demonstrated (see *Strategy 2: Honor the true nature of others*).

## Strategy 1: Master your leadership style

“ I must first know myself, as the Delphian inscription says; to be curious about that which is not my concern, while I am still in ignorance of my own self would be ridiculous — Plato

The most significant strategic advantage often comes from refining and deepening of your own leadership archetype. While people often have a mix of styles, they always specialize more in one than the rest and that is where there is



potential to embrace your greatest leadership strengths. To narrow it down, start by referring back to Figure 1 and asking, "Which of these am I not?" People who know you well such as close friends and family can also be very helpful in narrowing it down.

Sometimes it is an elusive process to see which type of leader we are for several reasons. One reason is that we sometimes have blind spots in seeing our strongest qualities. Another common reason is cultural conditioning in the west and especially the US overvalues the mission and balance leaders over the others. Our culture still has a lot of that ingrained pioneer work ethic and for that reason, these particular leaders are put on a pedestal.

Every day I see people masquerading as accomplishment-driven mission leaders or governing balance leaders when their true nature is clearly something else. Our society doesn't honor and reward people as much that excel in connection and guidance. If you are presenting personality characteristics that are superficial and opposing to your natural leadership style, it is vital to know and observe this misalignment. If it is being done from awareness, this becomes a different story as we all need to consciously borrow qualities and characteristics from leadership styles that are not our own from time to time.

An executive for Halliburton discovered such a mismatch. For nearly fifty years he'd thought that he was a reliable, trustworthy, dependable manager and he would work long hours, including nights and weekends, to prove this not only to his company, but to himself and his family. To his astonishment he eventually

realized he is a connection leader rather than a balance leader. He described it as one of the most relieving moments of his life.

*“No wonder I’ve felt miserable all these years trying to act like my boss who prides himself on cutthroat negotiations,” he said.*

He immediately had the company relieve him as a manager and he became an advisory consultant instead. He now works on projects that utilize his networking and interpersonal skills. He’s known as one of best story tellers in the industry and he’s never been happier.

## Strategy 2: Honor the true nature of others

Once you begin to really understand and embody your own leadership style, you can begin to observe the leadership style of people you work with—colleagues, clients, partners, suppliers, and the like. Again, begin by asking yourself, “What leadership style is this person not?”

Narrowing it down further is a process of testing. For example, if you think they may be a guidance leader you could see how they react when you ask them for their insights on solving a new problem. If they get excited and give you an ear full of ideas, this is more than likely someone who is functioning as a guidance leader. If they say they’ll do some research and get back to you or refer you to someone else, it’s unlikely.

As you work with others and witness the roots of their leadership style, honor them for who they are. This is where the magic starts to happen that separates leadership that understands different and contrasting personalities. For instance, if you see a lot of the mission leader in someone, celebrate their accomplishment of goals no matter how small. When they are excited and energized, acknowledge their passion and drive.

As another example, consider someone who displays qualities of the connection leader. When they bring greater success in the organization's outreach, partnerships, or relationships complement them for their natural charisma and if it's wonderful to have them as part of your team, say it often.

The balance leader creates initiatives in an organization step-by-step. Recognize their excellence at taking in various points of view and recommending a responsible next step. Go to them when risk assessment is a key factor in a decision or better yet, delegate these functions to them.

When people are seen and acknowledged for who they are at a deep level, it creates breakthroughs in organizations. This is beyond active listening and even practicing empathy. This is seeing that others work differently than we do; and not only that, this is honoring them for being who they really are perhaps even better than they can for themselves.

Seeing and acknowledging others is of particular strategic advantage in hiring. Balance leaders seek harmony and stability so they are attracted to large and historic organizations. Connection leaders select positions based on the people they'll be working with. Mission leaders look at the underlying purpose of an

organization. Guidance leaders select positions based on what they will learn or to explore new territory. By seeing and honoring candidates for who they really are, you have a tremendous advantage for attracting top talent.

## Strategy 3: Build resilient organizations

“ If there is something in nature you don't understand, odds are it makes sense in a deeper way that is beyond your understanding. So there is a logic to natural things that is much superior to our own. — Nassim N. Taleb, Author of Antifragile

In nature, when key species from an environment are removed, it has an effect on the entire ecosystem. A famous example is the reintroduction of the grey wolf at Yellowstone which had tremendous unexpected benefits<sup>6</sup>. Entire bird populations returned and even great improvements in the rivers were observed.

In the same way, healthy and thriving business organizations honor all leadership styles. This doesn't mean that the organization doesn't turn away mediocre leaders. Quite the contrary, top businesses seek top talent for all leadership styles. Underperformers are still underperformers and are either confused about their

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.yellowstonepark.com/wolf-reintroduction-changes-ecosystem/>

leadership strengths or are demonstrating a lot of shadow qualities from an archetypal perspective.

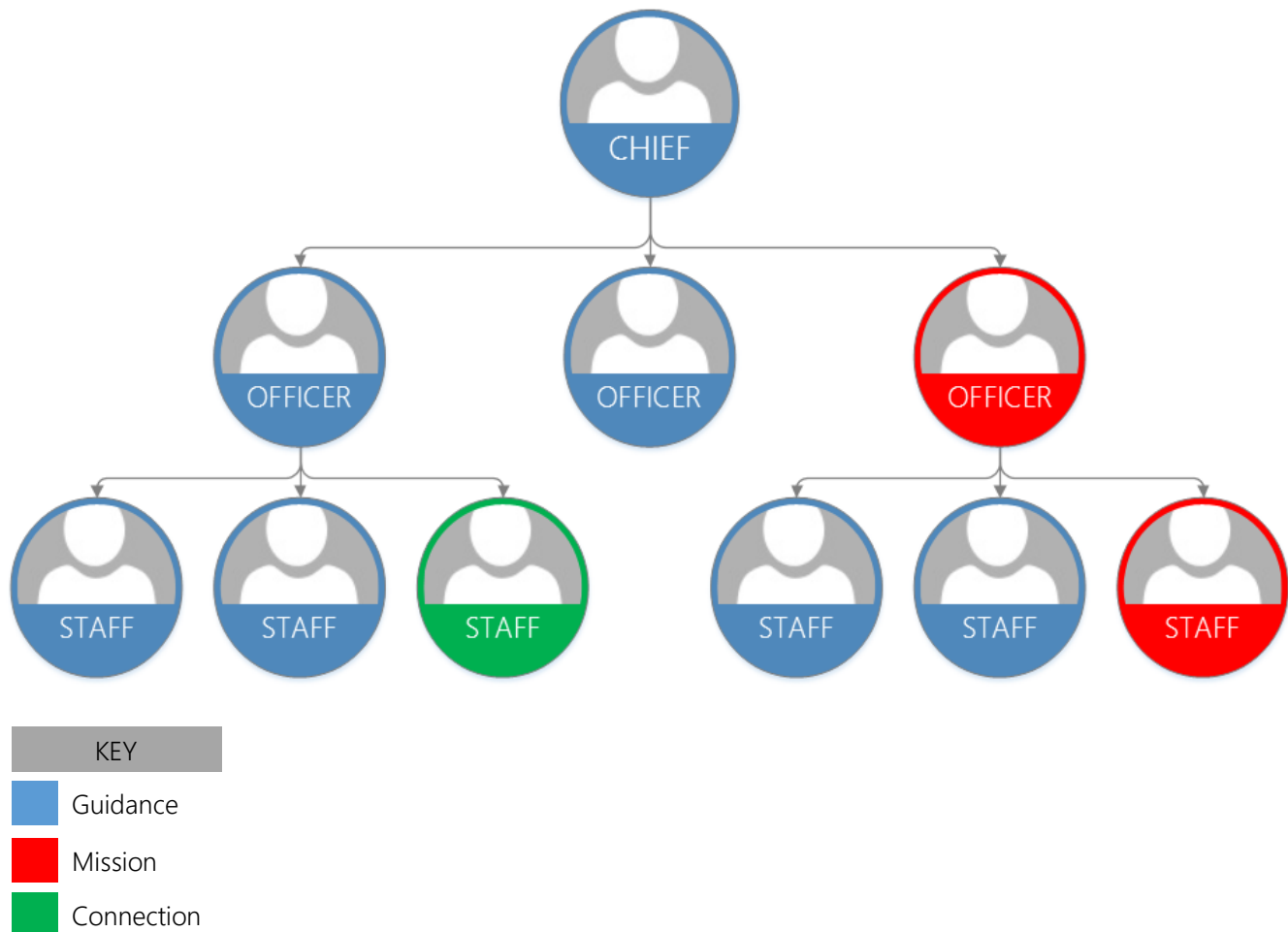


Figure 2. Archetypically Imbalanced Organization

As we become more adept at identifying trends in personalities at businesses, we begin to see that the entire organizations often have a leadership style bias. Recognizing trends in organizational culture is fundamental in management strategy and practices. Take a look at the simplified personnel chart in Figure 2. This is a business that is heavily imbalanced in guidance leadership. This is very

common with startups where the organization is filled with innovators and some driven personalities, but when it is time to create new business relationships or grow sustainably, the people that perform these functions naturally are missing.

Imbalances such as this are so common that an organization that is diversified in leadership styles is the exception. Even at the other end of the spectrum with the largest organizations such as government agencies, there tend to be far more balance leaders because they seek stability, process, and structure.

Organizations that are heavy in connection leaders tend to become inefficient because an excessive focus on relationships impacts performance and results. However, some functions of business do very well with abundant connection leaders such as outreach, marketing, partnerships, business development, and the like.









An overabundance of mission leaders is likely the most common bias and the hardest to resolve in organizations. Mission leaders are powerful figures in business and it's common to see the board room filled with other results-oriented professionals. The first step is to realize that this is a problem to begin with. Too much of the same creates organizations that are not resilient.

Why nature creates different people is beyond the scope of this article; however, we do know we can do no better than nature when building teams. The experience of having diversified leadership styles is unparalleled; it is the true dream team. It is worth the challenge to do the work. Are you seeing people for their deepest gifts or are you simply surrounding yourself with those that operate the same way you do?

## Strategy 4: Speak in their language

A large cap executive once told me, “10% of the business population is worth talking to and the rest are idiots.” Perhaps this manager truly values few relationships and the ones judged as subpar, he avoids. We all have working relationships, and even close colleagues, that we have a really hard time with. “They just don’t make common sense. How could this person possibly have gotten this far in their career?” we might think.

It is often the case that we are not dealing with “difficult people” but rather archetypical leadership conflicts—a mismatch in style. There is nothing wrong with our own leadership style or the leadership style of others. Both parties are simply operating in the way that has always worked for them. It is when these styles need to harmonize that conflicts can arise. Others have blind spots in recognizing our leadership style and vice-versa.

COMPLEMENTARY STYLES			DISJOINT STYLES		
Guidance Mission			Mission Balance		
Connection Balance			Guidance Connection		

In this four archetype system, there are two complementary leadership styles and two disjoint leadership styles. The complementary styles naturally feed off each other. Using the element metaphors become particularly helpful to intuitively see these dynamics. For instance, the guidance leader provides the insights for the mission leader to execute—air kindles the fire. The mission leader is inspired and delighted because they feel they are working on the right goals. The guidance leader is happy because their vision is coming to fruition.

The connection leader flourishes under stability and processes put in place by the balance leader—earth and water create life. The balance leader is recognized with greater responsibility thanks to the partnerships and social relationships of the connection leader.

In the case of disjoint styles, it is not as natural to work with these pairings. It takes a bit more awareness and understanding of where the other person is coming from. The mission leader often feels frustrated with the patient, practicality and risk-averse nature of the balance leader—earth and fire symbolize a volcano.



I once sat in on an energetic speech from a non-profit president to her staff on how they were going to expand that year by introducing a new program.

*"Perhaps it would be wise for us to first save enough capital this year to ensure we can support this new program," said a senior advisor.*

This is a classic example of the practicality of the balance leader conflicting with a driven mission leader often without awareness that they are doing so. I won't go into how the president reacted, but needless to say, it was not pretty.

When we can witness the gifts that a person's personality brings, we can speak in their language. When a mission leader is fired up and excited, a great habit is to ask more about the topic. Genuinely become interested and acknowledge their passion. "Can you tell me more?" you might ask. Now you are speaking their language and it is from here that you can build new successful relationships that would otherwise include conflict.

Similarly there is a common disconnect between the guidance leader and connection leader—air sees only the surface of water. The guidance leader lives in a world of concepts and abstraction and thus, undervalues the connection leader's excellence at cultivating human relationships. The connection leader is less likely to value partnership with the guidance leader because their charismatic approach, rapport building, and requests for quality engagement are often minimized.

I witnessed a sales engagement where a brilliant service provider, who demonstrated a lot of the guidance leader, visited a prospective client for a multi-million dollar opportunity. The client matched up well with the connection leader

archetype. She provided a warm welcome and made continuous attempts to find things in common both professionally and with small talk.

*"You're based in Seattle?" she said.*

*"I visit our office there often, the coffee is good," she added.*

*"Yes we have plenty of trendy cafes that's for sure, but the quality of coffee is based on the source of beans and I find it interesting that it's a plant native to Africa." he replied.*

This is a classic guidance and connection archetypical disconnect. The connection leader seeks to build rapport, but the guidance leader doesn't recognize these efforts and instead provides insights or knowledge which is often interpreted as dismissive.

I watched the service provider give an astonishing presentation covering market trends and the latest research in business intelligence analytics. Despite the exceptional delivery, the client turned him down and went with a competitor. Why? While he demonstrated experience and knowledge, he failed to deliver where it counted most. The client was continually seeking to build rapport and trust with him. It is likely she already considered the offerings for all the top providers as viable business solutions. She was focused on trying to gauge whether this particular provider would make a trustworthy and reliable partner. His interactions with her which he interpreted as imparting wisdom were interpreted as dismissive.

The common archetypical disconnect between connection and guidance leadership styles can be mitigated from either side. A guidance leader can use more eye contact and make more of a concerted effort to truly get to know a connection leader. A great way to do this is by asking questions about them such as "How did you get into this business?"

A connection leader can better work with guidance archetypes by honoring their interest in knowledge and understanding. That is how guidance leaders actually connect—by having interesting, theoretical discussions. Another approach is to seek their advice on a problem. Guidance leaders love to innovate and find new ways of doing business.

## Where to learn more

The four element archetype system used here, also known as the four humors, has roots that go back as far as ancient Egypt<sup>7</sup>. It was later mentioned heavily by Greek physician Hippocrates.

If a more in-depth psychological read sounds appealing—*King, Warrior, Magician, Lover* written by Jungian therapists, Robert Moore and Douglas Gillette is a fair source for masculine archetypes.

Mastery of personality systems is difficult by reading alone because applying them requires human interaction. A better way to dive deep may be to take a personality system workshop. Look for workshops that go beyond just questionnaires and lectures. For example, the Institute for Applied Meditation teaches archetypes through non-logical means such as observing the walk of participants and interpretive drawing<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> van Sertima, Ivan (1992). *The Golden Age of the Moor*. Transaction Publishers. p. 17. ISBN 1-56000-581-5.

<sup>8</sup> <https://iamheart.org/retreats/archetypes.php>

# Conclusion

Personality theory is an art, not an exact science. This is where business, psychology, and even philosophy meet. Hopefully this article has provided clear examples of the fruits from learning this art. I hope it motivates new thinking for seeing relationships and organizations in a different light.



Robert Ross Peterson is an independent consultant specializing in IT strategy. He has conducted business with Fortune 100 organizations in industries including big four banking, insurance, and healthcare. Robert is the author of *Persistence in the Enterprise*, is an inventor with fifty-eight granted patents, and is a frequent conference speaker.