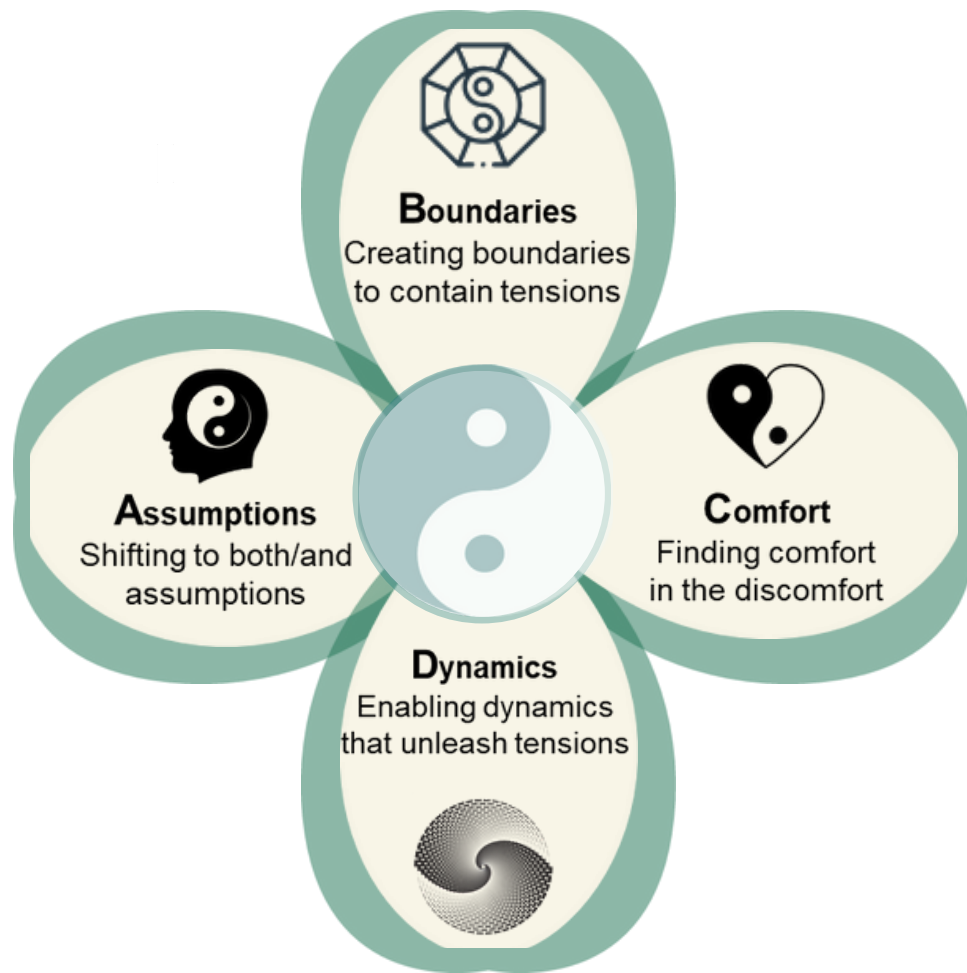


Both / And Thinking

# ABCD Paradox System



**A Both/And Thinking Decision Making Framework**

**Prepared for Wexner Foundation**

[www.BothAndThinking.net](http://www.BothAndThinking.net)

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\* We are grateful to Adam Magerman, RHR International, for building this decision-making tool with us.



# Decision Making Framework

## Facing a critical dilemma?

### Both/And Thinking can help us solve our toughest problems

We've all been there—stuck between two good but conflicting options.

- Do you stick to your values or adapt to the demands around you?
- Focus on today or plan for tomorrow?
- Speak up or keep the peace?

These tensions are everywhere: in our leadership, our strategies, our relationships, our work, and our communities.

When these tensions show up, our natural tendency is to frame them as either/or choices. It's a quick fix, but in the long run, this kind of thinking leaves us frustrated, fragmented and facing ongoing conflicts.

It's not a matter of if we'll face tensions—it's a matter of how we respond when we do.

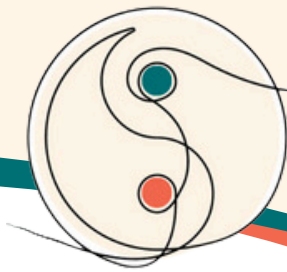
Both/and thinking offers an alternative path. At its core is the recognition that our most pressing challenges are underpinned by paradox—contradictory yet interdependent forces that must be engaged together. Leadership dilemmas are infused with paradox such as control and empowerment, today and tomorrow, global and local. Parental dilemmas swirl around paradoxes of consistency and flexibility, autonomy and boundaries. Individuals grapple with ongoing challenges fueled by paradoxes of self and other, long-term and short-term, work and life.

Paradoxes are not problems to eliminate, but dynamics to engage. Especially in times of complexity, uncertainty, and polarization, a both/and approach becomes not just beneficial but necessary. Yet while many leaders and individuals increasingly celebrate the value of both/and thinking, what we all need are the tools to practice it in the moment when it matters most.

That's why we created the ABCD Paradox System.

For more resources





# Both / And Thinking



## Decision Making Framework

### Facing a critical dilemma?

#### The ABCD Paradox System creates tools for Both/And Thinking

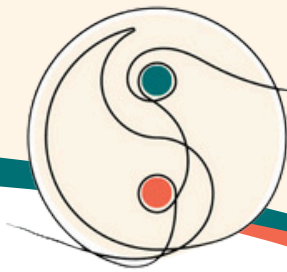
We integrated over 25 years of research to identify four sets of tools for both/and thinking. We labeled them ABCD to make them easy to remember. These tools work together, reinforcing one another in a system.

- **Assumptions** – shift your mindset and frameworks to both/and assumptions
- **Boundaries** – build the structures that reinforce both/and mindsets, emotions and behaviors
- **Comfort** – notice the challenging emotions and build skills to find comfort in the discomfort
- **Dynamics** – identify actions for continuous change, learning and adaption amid tensions

This decision-making framework brings the ABCD Paradox System to life. It walks you through a practical four-step process to apply both/and thinking to your most complex decisions. Whether you're in the C-suite of corporation, leading a team, navigating a tough personal choice, coaching a client or managing through personal challenges, this framework provides clarity and structure—so you can stop spinning in circles and start making decisions that are more creative, more inclusive, and ultimately, more powerful.

For more resources





# Both / And Thinking



## Decision Making Framework

### *Who should use this framework?*

This framework was developed with the following uses in mind:

- **Decision making** - Use this tool if you are confronting a thorny leadership or individual challenge.
- **Leadership** - Share this with your team if you want them to build these skills with you.
- **Coaching** - Use this tool with a client to help them get unstuck from a difficult decision.
- **Leadership training** - This tool works well in workshops as help others apply both/and thinking.

### *How to use this framework?*

Do you have a particular challenge in mind? Is there some issues that you are working through in your leadership? In your team? In your personal life? Then this framework is for you. It starts off with asking you to define your dilemma - and proceeds through steps that allow you to transform the dilemma from an either/ or to a both/and.

### *Additional Resources*

- *Both/And Thinking: Embracing Creating Tensions to Solve Your Toughest Problems* (HBSP, 2022) - Our book unpacks the details around the ABCD Paradox System, offering an extensive resource list to learn more.
- [www.BothAndThinking.net](http://www.BothAndThinking.net) - Check out our website for more content, including podcasts, videos, and additional source material
- *It's Not An Either/Or* - In this monthly newsletter, Wendy explore contemporary topics and how to apply both/and thinking.


For more resources





# ABCD Paradox System

## A Both/And Thinking Decision Making Framework

 <b>ASSUMPTIONS</b>  CHANGE THE QUESTION  From an either/or question to a both/and question  <b>Framing</b>	<p>What is your <b>dilemma</b>?</p> <hr/> <p>What are the alternative <b>options</b>?</p> <p>(A) _____ (B) _____</p> <p>Can you frame your dilemma as a <b>both/and question</b>?</p> <p>You might need to come back to this question after working through the pro/con of each option below.</p> <hr/>
 <b>BOUNDARIES</b>  SEPARATE & CONNECT  From separate and choose to separate and connect  <b>Analyzing</b>	<p>Where is <b>option A</b> at its best/worst? Where is <b>option B</b> at its best/worst?</p> <hr/> <hr/> <p>What is your <b>higher purpose</b> (long-term goal)? How do both options inform the higher purpose?</p> <hr/>
 <b>COMFORT</b>  FIND COMFORT IN THE DISCOMFORT  From avoiding to engaging emotions  <b>Comfort</b>	<p>What are you <b>feeling</b> as you explore this dilemma?</p> <hr/> <p>How are these emotions <b>enabling/obstructing</b> your decisions?</p> <hr/>
 <b>DYNAMICS</b>  RETHINK the OUTCOME  From making the right choice to choosing over time  <b>Experimenting</b>	<p>What is a '<b>creative integration</b>' that offers a perfect win/win (a mule)?</p> <hr/> <p>How can you make small shifts between options over time that allow you to be '<b>consistently inconsistent</b>' (tightrope walking)?</p> <hr/>





Want more details and information? Check out *Both/And Thinking* for more specifics as well as references to research and insights by other scholars and thinkers.





# ABCD Paradox System

## A Both/And Thinking Decision Making Framework Summary

 <p><b>Assumptions</b> CHANGE THE QUESTION</p> <p>From an either/or question to a both/and question</p> <p><b>Framing</b></p>	<p><b>Name</b> the dilemma</p> <p><b>Surface</b> the alternative options</p> <p><b>Reframe</b> from an either/or question to a both/and question</p>
 <p><b>Boundaries</b> SEPARATE &amp; CONNECT</p> <p>From separate and choose to separate and connect</p> <p><b>Analyzing</b></p>	<p><b>List</b> the pros and cons of each option</p> <p><b>Identify</b> points where the alternative options connect</p>
 <p><b>Comfort</b> FIND COMFORT IN THE DISCOMFORT</p> <p>From avoiding to engaging emotions</p> <p><b>Comforting</b></p>	<p><b>Pause</b> to name emotions</p> <p><b>Accept</b> negative emotions</p> <p><b>Broaden and build</b> on positive emotions</p>
 <p><b>Dynamics</b> RETHINK the OUTCOME</p> <p>From making the right choice to choosing over time</p> <p><b>Experimenting</b></p>	<p><b>Search</b> for a 'creative integration' that offers perfect win/win (a mule)</p> <p><b>Consider</b> small shifts between options over time that allow you to be 'consistently inconsistent' (tightrope walking)</p>

Want more details and information? Scan the QR Code or visit *Both/And Thinking* for more specifics.

