

Yin v. Yang in the Workplace

There are several reasons why any one of us could feel a bit out of sync with others in the workplace. This is especially true for *yin* leaders. What's a *yin* leader?

A yin leader is someone who doesn't fit the Western extroverted stereotype of leadership, but who leverages an alternative set of competencies and natural talent patterns to lead in a different way.

For *yin* leaders, their more introverted temperament is often under-appreciated in the office. Most of us, including these introverts themselves, have been fed a fairly steady diet of extroversion as synonymous with leadership. We have equated leadership with traits such as: gregariousness, charisma, optimism, aggressiveness, drivenness, competitiveness (a.k.a. extroversion). On this behavioral level, the *yin* leader can feel a fairly significant degree of invalidation and disconnection from others on the team, like they don't fit.

There is an even deeper level of *yin* or *yang* that is a core part of who we are. Not only do we behave differently, we are motivated differently. Each of us is driven, in a carrot and stick fashion, to pursue differing ends and not to pursue others. These different ways that we define success and put energy toward creating it are often at odds with each other.

Yang motivation is driven to see bottom line results and to win; it thinks ROI. If *yin* and *yang* are pitted against one another in a competitive fashion, *yang* will always win; this is its nature. *Yang* is also driven to achieve individual accolades and to work autonomously. It can be driven to promote authority and hierarchy. In a sense, *yang* drive is usually related to money, results, success, individualism, and power.

Yin drive is different. It is motivated to see the success in the team. It tends to think about how to help and promote others. It yearns for a deeper sense of harmony and the creation of shared meaning among team members. It is also driven to pursue deeper levels of knowledge and understanding that contribute to this search for truth and meaning. *Yin* is the opposite of *yang*. It is related to health, selflessness, wholeness, team, and meaning.

I notice these motivational differences when I am called upon to help resolve interpersonal conflicts between leaders in an organization. The first thing I normally do is to compare differences in drive and motivation between the conflicting parties. Our different temperaments and ways of behaving can cause conflict, our diverse beliefs and values even more so. Many of us will die for what we believe.

What are your current perpetual conflicts in the office, the ones that seem to keep repeating? Use the following four steps to help you see the bigger picture of differing motivation between *yin* and *yang* individuals and to reframe conflict on your team:

1. Identify the parties in these perpetual recurring conflicts.

Which individuals seems to often be at odds with each other? Why? What is driving each of them? What do each of them want? Are their drives more *yin* or *yang*?

2. Identify the conflicts that have occurred or are currently occurring in the office.

List out the recent and present conflicts on a sheet of paper. Who's involved? How does the motivation of the different people involved connect to the conflict

3. Understand the underlying nature of the conflicts.

Using the data derived from the first two steps, determine an overarching pattern that seems to explain the conflicts. Identify patterns that explain the real conflicts underneath the apparent ones.

4. **Deepen appreciation and respect for honest differences.**

Seeing that different things drive different people and knowing that these differences are neither right nor wrong, use this information to teach deepening respect and appreciation for differences, of all kinds, on your team.

When we find ourselves differing with each other around the conference table, we would do well to recognize the ever-present reality of these *yin* or *yang* differences. We behave differently. But at an even deeper level, we are driven to pursue different ends, to chase different carrots. What carrots are you following? What are others around you pursuing? Why does this matter?