



Polarisation and Leadership: A Leadership Scan

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Introduction to the work



Thought leadership is crucial in today's rapidly changing world. With the constant

evolution of technology, shifting political landscapes, and the ongoing pandemic, leaders and communities need to find new solutions to old problems, particularly considering the growing tensions and increased polarisation we are experiencing in Tasmania and abroad.

The Tasmanian Leaders alumni are an invaluable resource for thought leadership in Tasmania. As a diverse network of leaders with experience across a range of sectors, they possess a wealth of knowledge and insights that can contribute to advancing our vision of purpose-driven and inclusive leadership for the betterment of all. By sharing their experiences, expertise, and ideas, the alumni can contribute to new thinking about seemingly intractable issues.

As alumni ourselves, we would like to extend on behalf of Tasmanian Leaders our gratitude to all those who have contributed to this project. We also thank Trevor Cousins and Neill Thew from Cru Leader Development in the UK. We would also like to thank our sponsor, Nekon Pty Ltd, for generously supporting this project.

We are grateful for these continuing partnerships and look forward to working together in the future to reduce the negative impacts of polarisation in Tasmania.

Angela Driver, CEO, Tasmanian Leaders
Dr Danielle Campbell, Social Researcher

Introduction to the topic



Polarisation – the fact of people holding stark differences between ideas – has always been with us. However, in recent years the volume and range of polarisations seem to be increasing exponentially.

This invaluable piece of work initiated by Tasmanian Leaders aims to increase understanding of polarisation, to identify Tasmania-specific issues and, most importantly, to work out how our future civic leaders can respond.

Many old polarisations that we thought sorted (for example claims to rights) seem now to be even more contested than in the past.

Although Australia is on a trajectory towards greater diversity and enhanced individual and group recognition, a parallel and more uncomfortable growth of polarisation is also taking place.

Deep structural causes include the apparent loss of traditional ethical anchors, for example in religion and the nation state.

While the actual differences between people are often inflated, polarisation is fuelled by the media's propensity for moral outrage and 'rude leaders'.

As identified in this report, potential solutions lie with leaders who can inspire rational debate and challenge community members to tackle issues with kindness, openness and compromise.

Professor David Adams
University of Tasmania
Former Social Inclusion Commissioner

Executive Summary

This document presents the findings of a scan of members of the Tasmanian Leaders Network, capturing their experiences, observations and ideas about polarisation and how leadership can mitigate its negative aspects.

We believe this is a unique – and possibly Australia’s only – exploration of polarisation from within a leadership network to produce location-specific knowledge and insights.

Tapping into the knowledge of our graduates and others within the Tasmanian Leaders Network, our aim is to find solutions to Tasmania’s most intractable issues and motivate and inspire our future leaders to seize opportunities to benefit our island home.

These diverse perspectives have been pulled together to generate new thinking on the nature, prevalence, causes and consequences of polarisation in Tasmania.

Our work in this area seeks to understand what operating in a polarised world means for leaders and what skills they need to better understand and respond to polarisation.

Nearly 65% of participants in the scan believed that polarisation was becoming ‘somewhat more’ or ‘more’ intense across Tasmania. Similarly, 65% believed that there were many more types of polarising issues emerging, with 158 such issues identified. Respondents gave 120 examples of polarisation being experienced and/or witnessed.

These examples can be broadly categorised as economic, environmental, and related to the Tasmanian identity. However, there were many nuanced subsets within these categories that offer valuable insights for leaders working in polarised settings.

When asked to identify where polarisation was increasing, respondents identified social media as the main forum (87%), followed by politics (78%), workplaces (44%) and families (36%).

Respondents believed the main solutions to polarisation were:

1. Creating safe environments
2. Active appreciation of diversity
3. Real listening and real airing
4. Self-reflection in leaders and modelling

The leadership skills identified as important in dealing with polarisation, from 180+ mentions, can be grouped as:

1. Character
2. Communication
3. Skills

Strategies that our respondents felt could support greater leadership included building skills around having hard conversations, understanding differences with empathy, and facilitating and engaging with stakeholders to better engage different views.

“Leaders need to be curious and open minded, willing to examine their own assumptions and biases. They also need to be comfortable in emotional, heated conversations and able to hold space for others to share. Leaders need to be brave and engage in public debates on these issues to bring nuance, grey and balance to debates where this is missing.”

In summary, the 2022 Leadership scan found that:

- Across Tasmania there is an increasing range of issues where there are divergent views.
- Polarisation behaviours are moderate but gradually increasing in intensity.
- Polarisation is increasing but is not always problematic/toxic.
- Polarisation in Tasmania does not differ significantly to that in other Australian states and territories.
- Leaders have an important role to play in mitigating the risks and downsides of polarisation.
- Respondents are confident that polarisation can be mitigated.

“Seeking to find common ground including in acknowledging when motivations and intentions might be similar despite differing views. Building relationships and seek the human stories behind the polarisation.”

Other considerations included:

- Does Tasmania express polarisation in unique ways?
- Is polarisation always a negative? How can polarisation create positive outcomes?
- What are the pathways to decrease negative impacts and what is the role of leadership?
- How can this polarisation and leadership research scan be most useful and produce practical strategies?

Overall, the scan process drew extensive insights based on firsthand experience. These insights provide a unique resource for leaders.

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Thought leadership and why is it important?

Our thought leadership work brings together diverse perspectives to generate new thinking to inspire and motivate decision makers and influencers. Tapping into the knowledge of our network, made up of our graduates and other key stakeholders, our aim is to find solutions for Tasmania's most intractable issues. We want to empower the community – through good leadership – to seize opportunities for positive change within our island home.

We are working on the assumption that the world is becoming increasingly polarised, with individual opinions potentially becoming more extreme.

We are driven by the question 'How can this polarisation and leadership research scan be most useful and produce practical strategies?'

Tasmanian Leaders Program alumni are, by definition, high potential leaders with a strong drive to help make Tasmania a better place for everyone. Their insights offer an incredible depth and diversity of experience in leadership. This research, drawing on the experiences, observations and ideas of Tasmanian Leaders alumni will help us as an organisation offer continuing relevant and practical support leaders in Tasmania.

This project is likely the first of its kind Australia, providing location-specific insights, firsthand experiences and findings on polarisation from a leadership perspective.

Our hope is that this scan report will encourage leaders and community members to talk about a difficult topic, which many people are hesitant to tackle, and to consider solutions that will work at a local level.

Introduction

This thought leadership project has been undertaken following a traditional research process, but we are calling it a scan. The scan is intentionally heavy on quotes to give context to respondents' reflections on polarisation. The insights (presented as direct quotes and implicit responses) help to demonstrate the discomfort and tension many felt with this topic. The responses could never have been black and white.

In having a conversation about polarisation, it is important not to expect definitive answers. We need to be comfortable with ambiguity rather than certainty. It is very clear from the data encompassed in this scan that the pursuit of certainty and comfort are the two greatest drivers of polarisation.

Instead, we need to 'speak to the gap' to support new ways of thinking. The scan demonstrates the importance of getting people in the room together to achieve benefits for a greater number of stakeholders.

The nature of polarisation means that the loudest voices in any debate are at the extremes, generally the 5% of people with strong opinions at either end of the topic. This leads to 90% of people potentially without a voice on issues that could affect everyone, not just those who are heard. Similarly, the polarised way in which information is produced and disseminated means that we don't hear from the majority of people who may be affected.

A commitment to hear the voices of the middle section potentially offers a way forward, although it is worth noting there is often a group of people who are not overly committed to any particular outcome.

As many of our respondents have identified, unlocking creative thinking and compromise among the voices at the more polarised edges of issues would have enormous benefits.

The scan is not attempting to deliver numerologically rigid data, but rather an in-depth and diverse exploration of how we could approach the issue of polarisation in our communities in a much more beneficial way.

The data and insights offer practical, achievable, and logical ways to combat negative outcomes of polarisation, particularly when it becomes rigid and no longer very useful in our community.

Defining polarisation

Polarisation is the act of dividing something, especially something that contains different people or opinions, into two completely opposing groups. It has become problematic, with perceptions that:

- The differences are growing in number.
- The differences are widening and becoming starker.
- The differences are being fuelled by some leadership behaviours and access to widespread communications platforms.
- The differences are important to our lives and futures.
- Our institutions and norms of civilised behaviours are under threat.

Within democracies there will always be contests and debates about issues, but the challenge of polarisation is that the extreme and intractable nature of the debates is putting at risk our social, economic and institutional fabric.

For clarity, we can use the phrase toxic polarisation to distinguish between mainstream civic discourse and more problematic forms of opposition.

The primary expressions of toxic polarisation are:

- (1) The personalisation of criticism. That is, the characterisation of people who hold or express a different opinion as misguided, confused, unable to see the big picture, narrow minded and/or irrational.
- (2) The extension of (1) to categorise all people holding opposing views.
- (3) Behaviours that attempt to denigrate and marginalise or exclude opponents from civic discourse.
- (4) A loss of trust in and willingness to support opponents in other aspects of life – such as employment, group membership and provision of support.
- (5) Challenging the legitimacy of institutions and platforms that reflect alternate views.
- (6) The undermining of norms of respect, tolerance and moderation.

Here is a you tube video that further explains the nature and consequences of toxic polarisation:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=2BXG_jvZQRg.

There are several seminal texts on polarisation (see resource section), which generally argue that the origins of polarisation ultimately go back to unresolved tensions between ideologies, ethnicity and religions.

These tensions have been exacerbated by the behaviours of some political leaders and through widespread access to communications platforms.

Behaviours that follow include a tendency to engage only with likeminded people (the echo chamber effect) cause further divisions.

Here is a good summary of these framing ideas around polarisation:

<https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/10/01/how-to-understand-global-spread-of-political-polarization-pub-79893>

An eminent author on polarisation concludes that polarisation in and of itself is not the problem; it is the effect on the political system. The political institutions and actors become more politicised, polarising the public even further and setting off a feedback cycle that forces institutions to become polarised. It is, in effect, a 'death machine' between politicians and media, one seeking votes and donations, the other desiring growth in audience. (Klein 2019)

Globally there is an abundance of literature on how to mitigate or eliminate polarisation, with some suggesting better control of social media, others targeting the control of toxic leadership or focussing on the key role of business. Some hone-in on the role of civic leaders and others in promoting wider understanding of the virtues of diversity and tolerance.

In comparison to this extensive literature globally there is relatively little on polarisation from an Australian perspective and even less about Tasmania. The purpose of the scan has been to explore the dimensions of polarisation in Tasmania through the voice of leaders.

The topics explored are:

1. Intensity and types of polarisation
2. Where is polarisation increasing or decreasing?
3. Role and skills of leaders in dealing with polarisation
4. Negative and positive outcomes of polarisation
5. Role of Tasmanian Leaders in the future

Approach and methodology

There were five elements for this Leadership project:

1. **Leadership scan** completed by 62 members of the Tasmanian Leaders Network, via a survey tool, to capture their experiences and views on polarisation.
2. **Webinar series** to provide skill development in relation to polarisation. This involved Professor David Adams and polarity mapping experts, Neill Thru and Trevor Cousins, from Cru Leadership in the United Kingdom.
3. **Online forums** with the Tasmanian Leaders Network to unpack and explore the results of the leadership scan to generate further insights and advice for leaders working in polarised contexts.
4. **Follow up interviews** for a deeper dive into the perspectives and experiences of respondents.
5. **Reporting key finding** and preparing for Tasmanian Leaders' upcoming thought leadership work on Tasmanian aspirations.

Demographics

The leadership scan has 62 respondents, which was a response rate of approximately 15% among those invited to participate. Graduates who had completed a Tasmanian Leaders program made up 77% of respondents, with the remainder from the wider Tasmanian Leaders network (colleagues, supporters, stakeholders and others). The respondents were geographically dispersed: south 35, north 18, north west 9, nicely aligning to the relative population ratios of the regions.

The representation of gender, age and industry sector are as follows:

Gender

Gender	%
Female or woman	52.63%
Male or man	47.37%
Non-binary	0%
Prefer not to disclose	0%
Other, please specify	0%

Age and Gender

Age	%	Female	Male
18-24	0%	0%	0%
25-34	10.5%	10%	11.11%
35-44	37%	36.67%	37.04%
45-54	36%	40.00%	29.63%
55-64	12.3%	13.33%	11.11%
65+	5.2%	0%	11.11%

Sector

Sector	%
Not for Profit	25.4%
Private	42.4%
public	25.4%
other	6.8%

The engagement level of respondents is further reflected in the fact that 20% expressed a willingness to have more engagement with the researcher in the form of an interview if asked.

The voice of leaders – what leaders told us

The value of what leaders told us should not be underestimated. These insights offer both content and confirmation of material and strategies to use in leadership development and with established and emerging leaders in Tasmania.

The following five different areas take the components of polarisation in reference to leadership.

The material from the scan is presented in two forms:

- **Statistics** Direct answer percentages
- **Quotes** Hero quotes and quotes broken up into characteristics, which are not separate but overlap and indicate ways for action and learning to be implemented.

Also included are questions or considerations that support the reflections on the data presented. These are provocations for further thought.

Respondents were also asked for descriptions of experiences to highlight strategies and the reality of human experience of a polarising context. We posed the question:

In thinking about polarisation and the divisions we encounter in our personal and professional roles, can you outline an experience where you confronted a sharp division? Please outline what the situation was and what you felt, thought and did?

This aspect of the scan is presented at the end of this document. See section: Direct quotes from a lived polarising experience. It offers valuable insights in future use of the polarisation and leadership research in practical settings such as future Tasmanian Leaders programs and initiatives.

1. Intensity and types of polarisation

Polarisation trends

We were interested in canvassing views on the intensity of polarisation in Tasmania, to help establish whether respondents consider it an important topic affecting leadership. This is what they told us:

With the definition below in mind, do you believe polarisation in Tasmania is becoming more intense?

DEFINITION: Polarisation is the act of dividing something, especially something that contains different people or opinions, into two completely opposing groups. This project did not seek to legitimise views of opposing groups, but to seek what it means for leaders working in polarised communities or on polarising projects and how they might find common ground.

Intensity	%
less intense	0.00%
somewhat less	7.14%
about the same	28.57%
somewhat more	47.62%
more intense	16.67%

With the definition in mind, do you believe there are more types of polarisation emerging in Tasmania?

Overall, it was felt that polarisation was broadly becoming more intense, and that more types of divisions are emerging.

Types	%
definitely less	0.00%
somewhat less	2.44%
about the same	31.74%
somewhat more	53.66%
definitely more	12.2%

Topics more and less polarised

On what topics or areas is Tasmania becoming more polarised and becoming less polarised?

There were large number of contributions of where polarisation was been experienced and witnessed. These can be broadly categorised as economic, environmental, and related to the Tasmanian identity. However, there was considerable nuanced subsets that offer valuable insight into leaders working in polarised settings.

Interestingly, a number of topics appear on both more polarised and less polarised lists.

It is important to keep in mind that the mention of these topics does not indicate the contributor's attitude, just that they consider the topic becoming more or less polarised in the Tasmanian context.

More polarised (158 topics)		Less polarised (132 topics)
Covid	Frequent	Marriage equality
Salmon farming		Forestry
Politics		Attitudes to Sexuality
Economic divide and real wages		North versus South
UTAS behaviours: impacts on Tasmania		Religion
Religion		Environmental impact awareness and global warming including sustainability
Identity politics		Climate change
Environment		Equality and equity
Forestry		That climate change is actually occurring
Class and socio-economic polarisation		Women's roles
Attitudes towards economic development		Environmental
Healthcare		Housing crisis
Vaccination		Covid
Politics		Other pressure areas have drawn focus away from education
How to resolve the housing 'crisis'		Housing
Property development		Diversity e.g. Immigration/race, LGBTQI
Planning Scheme Processes including urban sprawl		flexible working
Local issues like UTAS relocation and kunyani		The best place to live, work, raise family
Mount Wellington cable car		Environment impacts of climate change and the need to take real action
Primary industries vs environmental and North South parochialism		Country of origin for residents
Education – public vs private	Respect for diversity in general	
Spending priorities of Government including infrastructure stadium in the south	North South parochialism	
Education – access and attainment	Mental health and wellbeing	
Aboriginal recognition and rights	Recognition of Aboriginal history and culture protection	
Government spending priorities	Working location with ability to work from home	
Housing – a right or a financial asset	Gender and sexual identity education	
Population growth – wanting to preserve our pristine places	how we respond to covid – we seem to	
Mining		
Gaming		
Local government reform		
Political ideology		

<p>Wealth (esp. property ownership) Wind farms and transmission infrastructure Cancel culture (becoming less forgiving of things from the past) Development vs environmental protection in a time of inflation pressure Tourism dollar vs community preservation of lifestyle available Looking after Tasmania v looking after a broader world Private funding and foreign investment Economic drivers for the future of the State Truth Telling, Treaty and the Voice Home as a human right; Real estate as wealth creation Sexism and gender inequality; violence against women and speaking out Climate Change and the science behind it and real action to address climate change that impacts directly on people Development – kunanyi cable car Migration and foreign investment Party political allegiance expectations v personal beliefs More people moving to Tasmania Corporatisation Science vs opinion</p>		<p>be moving on now gender identity (and same sex marriage) Tourism North vs south Sexual orientation equality Recognition of our aboriginal history General tourism issues importance of value adding of our raw materials understanding and acceptance of Tas aboriginal heritage Acceptance of religious diversification Valued place of migrants in our society Women in professional and leadership roles Social media The need for additional renewable energy Green energy and sustainability Fundamental respect for environmental values Mental health</p>
<p>Perceived entitlements of younger gens Cycling facilities Our collective social responsibility work Location of development in national parks Workforces' skill gaps Public transport Age: old vs young Mining Development E.g. near Tarkine region Location of wind farms in the absence of legislated renewable energy zones Increasing use of critical pedagogy in schools Health policy for greater good vs individual freedoms AFL and large sporting events that cost considerable money to establish Issues of faith or moral beliefs</p>	<p>Some</p>	<p>Illicit drug use (especially cannabis) Law enforcement Cable Car Human rights Abortion Rural vs city living as we see more people want to live outside of cities Multiculturalism Health animal welfare</p>
<p>I think polarisation is relatively stable The return of cruise ships to our state Social media and those who live by it vs those who are frustrated by it Independent political representation vs party/union backed representatives.</p>	<p>Unique</p>	<p>Politics doesn't seem to be a big player for most people anymore and we see more independents Operations of Gunns (now that it no longer operates)</p>

Note: These were categorised based on number of times mentioned

Unique expression of polarisation in Tasmania

The uniqueness to Tasmania was not clear but it is important to note that many thought the communication of polarisation was unique and that Tasmania 'does and should play its own game'.

This provocation offers an insight into the way in which Tasmania might approach any polarisation. Although the anatomy of polarisation presents in similar forms, the reactions and solution will be very specific to the context. This is what leaders told us.

High level impact quotes	In what ways is polarisation uniquely expressed in Tasmania?
<p>There are some distinctly Tasmanian polarising topics, survival of the tiger, damming Pedder, AFL stadium in Hobart, cable car on Mt Wellington, name of Kunyani. But at their essence these cable cars, extinction, dams can occur anywhere. In terms of expression, I think polarisation becomes distinctly Tasmanian when elements of the Australian culture come into these such as supporting the underdog or battling the system. Then the level of pride and ownership people have on their State changes the expression to make these issues uniquely Tasmanian.</p> <p>I am unsure if this is unique to Tasmania, but I believe people in Tasmania sometimes express their polarisation by isolating themselves and withdrawing from spaces where conflicting views can be found, eg leaving community clubs or sports teams because they do not agree with some of the views expressed in these social settings.</p>	Other perspectives
	<p>I don't know how it's unique in Tasmania compared to other areas, but I can say how I think it's expressed. What I notice is people jump onto social media and use emotive language about something they don't have a lot of facts or detail about. Then other people quickly jump on board and spread the ill-informed opinion. Traditional media does the same. Journalists and editors often miss quotes or take things out of context which then sways public opinion and polarisation then snowballs.</p>
	<p>I don't believe Tasmania is unique.</p>
	<p>The environment as an example – the country and indeed the whole world, is seeking natural and return-to-roots values with Tasmanians embracing this for generations. Now we just need to stop others wanting buy-in and enforcing their 'Sydney-ness' upon us!</p>
	<p>I'm not sure. It does seem that opposing views are able to exist without a degree of radicalism. I'm not aware of violent protests or the extreme levels of disagreement shown elsewhere.</p>
	<p>Expressed but with diplomacy and kindness in most part to try to persuade others to their thinking...some extreme issues a bit more dogmatic.</p>
	<p>Environmental issues – old growth forests, pulp mill, Pedder, Franklin, salmon industry.</p>
<p>We have authors writing books attacking entire industries that are critical to the state. Political leaders refuse to believe gambling is a deadly issue. Tourism is held aloft as the saviour of the state while real people struggle to put food on the table.</p>	

2. Where is polarisation increasing and decreasing?

In terms of where polarisation occurs, some interesting data emerged. Predictably it was accepted that there are significant increases in polarisation in social media and politics (85% and 80%). In the comments section below are questions or considerations posed to add value rather than statements of fact.

In thinking about where polarisation is occurring, do you think it is increasing/decreasing?

Workplace	%	Comments/considerations
definitely decreasing	4.88%	Interestingly, the workplace setting produced a range of increases and decreases in the polarisation experienced. Although overall, 80% think polarisation in the workplace is staying the same or increasing. Interestingly, younger age groups considered polarisation in the workplace was decreasing more than older age groups.
somewhat decreasing	17.07%	
about the same	35.15%	
somewhat increasing	39.09%	
definitely increasing	4.88%	

Politics	%	Comments/considerations
		Politics is an area that the question of actual and perceived reality of increased polarisation is interesting.
definitely decreasing	0.00%	
somewhat decreasing	9.76%	
about the same	12.2%	
somewhat increasing	46.34%	
definitely increasing	31.71%	

Society	%	Comments/considerations
		70% plus believe that polarisation is increasing.
definitely decreasing	0.00%	
somewhat decreasing	9.52%	
about the same	16.67%	
somewhat increasing	54.76%	
definitely increasing	19.05%	

Family	%	Comments/considerations
		Interestingly, the family setting produced a range of increases and decreases in the polarisation experienced. Family seems to be a place where polarisation is steady with over 43% reflecting that it was about the same.
definitely decreasing	2.44%	
somewhat decreasing	17.7%	
about the same	43.9%	
somewhat increasing	31.7%	
definitely increasing	4.88%	

Social media	%	Comments/considerations
		Social media is a standout in terms of increasing polarisation with a response of 87%. In the increasing measures, it is interesting to surmise whether this is in personal or professional social media interactions, or indeed both.
definitely decreasing	0.00%	
somewhat decreasing	2.38%	
about the same	9.52%	
somewhat increasing	26.19%	
definitely increasing	61.9%	

Traditional Media	%	Traditional media is also high in increase figures although has a close to 20% response of remaining about the same.
definitely decreasing	0.00%	
somewhat decreasing	7.14%	
about the same	19.05%	
somewhat increasing	50.00%	
definitely increasing	23.81%	

Tasmania	%	These responses to the Tasmanian context are best read. In combination with the Australia and rest of the world.
definitely decreasing	0.00%	
somewhat decreasing	4.76%	
about the same	38.10%	
somewhat increasing	52.38%	
definitely increasing	4.76%	

Australia	%	Australia more generally is seen to be increasing in polarisation with no responses indicating decreases at all. The age bracket 44-64 years has the strongest response to polarisation increasing. Why would this group have these experiences? Is it exposure or chapter of life concerns?
definitely decreasing	0.00%	
somewhat decreasing	0.00%	
about the same	20.00%	
somewhat increasing	62.5%	
definitely increasing	17.5%	

Elsewhere in the world	%	Alarmingly, 95% considered polarisation increasing
definitely decreasing	0.00%	
somewhat decreasing	0.00%	
about the same	4.76%	
somewhat increasing	47.62%	
definitely increasing	47.62%	

3. Role and skills of leaders in dealing with polarisation

Role of leadership

In the leadership scan we asked members of the Tasmanian Leaders Network of their experiences to reflect on the roles of leaders. Below are common themes that emerged with quotes to illustrate the sentiment.

As well as the high-level impact quotes, the themes that emerged included:

5. Creating safe environments
6. Active appreciation of diversity
7. Real listening and real airing
8. Self-reflection in leaders and modelling

Role and skills of leaders in dealing with polarisation continued...

<p>High level impact quotes</p> <p>Demonstrating how to have robust, respectful discussions. assisting in identifying the common ground in building alliances between differing views by acknowledging different needs and meeting those needs to some degree Advocating a vision that embraces polarisation as an important and somewhat inevitable process in the change game that need not be feared.</p> <p>Understand the root causes better. Understand that polarisation is a reality, and when it is unavoidable deal with it directly with strong leadership rather than increased levels of politicking or mediatisation.</p> <p>Not to take sides (even if they do have one), but to listen to both and see if they can facilitate learning and compromise, as well as utilising any innovation to emerge from the learning.</p> <p>I think it is the role of the leader to show support and understanding on polarising issues. Leaders should be open and help to remove any misleading information or untrue statements from the discussion. They should also be able to facilitate effective discussion.</p>	<p>Theme 1: Creating safe environments</p>
	<p>Hold a space where ideas are valued and an understanding of different ideas and where they come from.</p>
	<p>Finding a way through the middle of the noise.</p>
	<p>Leaders can play the role of steady centre if they offer deliberate, engaged, consistent, kind presence and communication.</p>
	<p>They should be very careful about not getting drawn into emotive language and maintain a 'facilitator/conflict resolution' type role in situations. Otherwise, they will only make the matter worse. I believe the role of the leader is to facilitate a safe space where difficult conversations can be had. Things need to be aired out in the open, but it needs to be done in a way that people don't feel threatened.</p>
	<p>Be brave enough to have the uncomfortable conversations and challenge people in their extreme views.</p>
	<p>We must always allow robust conversation and sharing of ideas, but leaders must reign these in when polarisation becomes racism or blatant disrespect.</p>
	<p>Facilitate conversations. Help others to focus on the task rather than the person and understand that it's OK to disagree. Role model acceptance of difference. Show curiosity about different views. Find and focus on areas of agreement.</p>
	<p>Theme 2: Active appreciation of diversity</p>
	<p>Maintaining open perspectives. Good negotiation skills, ability to relate to a wide spectrum of people.</p>
	<p>Facilitate conversations. Help others to focus on the task rather than the person and understand that it's OK to disagree. Role model acceptance of difference. Show curiosity about different views. Find and focus on areas of agreement.</p>
	<p>Open minded – understand that everyone has different thoughts.</p>
	<p>... to get people to understand both sides of a division (or at least see both sides). This leads to better informed people that can then make better informed decisions.</p>
	<p>Maintaining open perspectives. Good negotiation skills, ability to relate to a wide spectrum of people.</p>

<p>Raising awareness of polarisation, how it happens, and encourage and support people to diversify their media diet. You are what you eat!</p> <p>..... asks respectful questions to challenge people's beliefs without pushing his own beliefs seems to be far more successful in de-polarising people than, for example, arguing with facts and logic (which, ironically, seems to drive polarisation more).</p> <p>Polarisation can be deeply damaging to those who are being personally attacked for their views. It can also mean that choices that are in the broader public good are overridden by loud, vested interests. It is therefore important that as leaders we get better at navigating diverse perspectives and supporting those in challenging roles seeking to navigate an appropriate way forward. Get better at helping all sides feel listened to, and understanding the reason for the choice made, including changes that may have been made as a result of the diverse perspectives.</p>	<p>Theme 3: Real listening and real airing</p>
	<p>Listening and observing and then facilitating and enabling the preconditions for change so there can be conversation and change.</p>
	<p>Core responsibility is to be true to facts and seek qualification of perspectives driving opposing positions. Also being clear not to alienate or demoralise anyone for what they hold to be true.</p>
	<p>Active listening to the arguments. Respect in all communications.</p>
	<p>Listening and observing and then facilitating and enabling the preconditions for change so there can be conversation and change.</p>
	<p>Allow robust debate but apply reasoning, science, rationale etc. and a solution focus with tangible outcomes.</p>
	<p>Theme 4: Self-reflection in leaders and modelling</p>
	<p>Identifying polarisation and managing the negative impacts.</p>
	<p>Leaders need to be curious and open minded, willing to examine their own assumptions and biases. They also need to be comfortable in emotional, heated conversations and able to hold space for others to share. Leaders need to be brave and engage in public debates on these issues to bring nuance, grey and balance to debates where this is missing.</p>
	<p>I don't see much positive in polarisation, so I think leaders should act as role models in demonstrating thoughtful judgement and recognising that most problems don't have an either/or answer but require trade-offs and nuance.</p>
<p>Identify it exists. Identify drivers. Identify solutions. Implement solutions.</p>	
<p>Leaders need to do what is right for the people they represent. If that causes some polarisation, then so be it, but the polarisation should be a secondary issue to then carrying out their duty for the people they represent.</p>	

Skills required of leaders

In the leadership scan we asked members of the Tasmanian Leaders Network from their experiences to reflect skills needed for leaders in a polarised environment. Understanding these skills allows us to continually improve the professional development of our leaders and potential leaders in Tasmania.

Below are common themes that emerged with quotes to illustrate the sentiment.

The leadership skills, collated from 180+ responses, can be grouped as:

1. Character
2. Communication
3. Skills

There is also characteristics and traits that were overarching of these skill sets which are also important to consider and understand.

Skills Required of leaders continued...

It was considered important that the areas were characterised also by the ways those skilled are gained. This is not definitive or objective but highlights how the skilling up process may be most effectively undertaken.

1. Character: Innate and experience
2. Communication: Innate and learned
3. Skill sets: Learned
4. Overarching: Experienced to be appreciated

What do you believe are the most important skills leaders need in a polarised environment?

Character: Innate and experience

Courage
Resilience
Empathy
Creativity
Compassion
Emotional regulation
Humility
Curiosity
Intuition
Ethical behaviour – model it!
Wisdom

Adaptability
Observation
Coaching
Integrity
Emotional intelligence
Uphold values and behaviours
Kindness
Consistency and persistence
Authenticity

Communication: Innate and learned

Active listening
Negotiation skills
Conflict resolution
Articulation
Diplomacy
Nuance
Deep listening
Ability to consider and respond, rather than react
The ability to tell a story in a way others can hear
Responsibility and accountability
Ability to communicate
Eloquence and ability to take people on a journey through storytelling

Skill sets: Learned

Mediation
Conflict resolution
Storytelling
Taking people with you
An approachable manner
Facilitation
Critical thinking
Willingness to make decisions
Not to avoid hard decisions
Ability to change
How to be effective in opposition
Quashing misinformation
Knowledge and technical expertise
Visioning skills to understand the future/results needed for a more tolerant and accepting community
Understanding the drivers for the responses of various people to a particular issue
Hold any opinions until the end of any process
Strong evidence-based leadership
Ability to listen and ask questions to understand opposing views
Knowing what type of advocacy to use and when

Overarching: Experienced to be appreciated

Ability to debate rationally
Ability to consider rather than react
Kindness (in action)
Perspective taking
Self-awareness
Strategic thinking
Tolerance of ambiguity
Emotional and social intelligence
Provide a confidence to all parties that there is no bias
Inspiring and motivating and developing others to facilitate their growth
Understanding the impact of their own behaviour
Robust mental health
Appreciation for diversity and ability to stand up for all people
Self-awareness and the ability to acknowledge a difference of opinions
Thoroughly understanding issues so they are informed themselves about context and options
How to navigate leaderships in different environments understanding the needs of each space.
Problem solving – Identifying what needs to be addressed/done and implications
A thorough knowledge of your rights as some will try to take away from you
Surround themselves with people with different views and ideas
We need to acknowledge the other persons feelings/views/humanity even the difficult people.
Ability to inspire others to seek more information and be informed of fullness of issues being polarised.
Engaging in providing a better understanding of context and options – and the reasons why, in many cases, 'doing nothing' can ultimately disadvantage us all.
Trying to find ways to address concerns without diverting from supporting what may need to be done
The ability to research opposing viewpoints.
Understanding the impact of any policies or systems that they introduce.

4. Negative and positive outcomes of polarisation

In the leadership scan we asked Tasmanian Leaders Network from their experiences to reflect on any divisions that have had positive outcomes and in addition, any pathways to decrease negative impacts of polarisation. Below are common themes that emerged with quotes to illustrate the sentiment.

As well as the high-level impact quotes, the themes that emerged included:

1. Rare/strength/resilience
2. Focus
3. Promoting change
4. Evolution

High level impact quotes	From your experience and/or observations, can you identify any divisions that have had positive outcomes?
<p>My experience is that polarisation is a symptom of people feeling threatened and unheard. Therefore, I am not sure we can describe it as 'bad' in itself, rather it can be used to gauge who and how people are feeling unvalued in society.</p> <p>Significant polarising divisions have led to major social change over time. It seems that polarisation increases on the cusp of this change.</p> <p>All fundamentalism is flawed. However, viewpoints from opposite sides can unearth each other's deficiencies, so polarised groups engaging with a mediate who has control, can result in good outcomes – such as balanced policy making.</p>	Theme 1: Rare/strength/resilience
	Yes – there are examples of communities working together for change. It takes will, shared direction, and continued effort.
	Polarisation can motivate groups into action or open up a constructive conversation
	Diversity of opinion and lived experience helps create robust discussions and informs good decisions at a Board level.
	Yes, I have been able to broker good outcomes. In the majority of cases however, angst and division prevail, creating a pretty unhealthy work environment for some and undermining public confidence in local government and undermining aspiration.
	I look like the last person you would expect to be a strong supporter of women's rights, aboriginal people and the LGBTIQQ communities so this does surprise people when they see how passionate I am in supporting others. This then leads to fantastic conversations that can often help others understand what I am trying to achieve as a champion of being inclusive
	Unfortunately, no. But these instances have emphasised the importance of having people as centralists, in the middle who are able to work with both sides to achieve some consensus (no matter how large or small) – otherwise progress/meaningful outcomes will not progress
	Theme 2: Focus
	Sometimes polarising views/people can draw attention to important topics just by the nature of who is arguing.
	Not when the division has been too polarised. However, when there is a difference in belief between people who genuinely respect one another's intelligence and try to understand why and how they have come to differing beliefs, this regularly has positive outcomes.

<p>I think time in a problem always generates good outcomes. Deep listening and engagement. There are not too many examples whereas a community we are brave enough. I think Mac Point is a good example though, not rushing to build stuff, decontaminating the site. Regardless of thoughts about the sports stadium you can't say that the space hasn't had time to evolve into what it should be.</p> <p>The Franklin Dam campaign was highly divisive yet in my opinion positive outcomes. Some might suggest the 'me too' movement is highly divisive yet in my opinion I have seen positive outcomes for the public awareness around violence against women.</p> <p>Some might say that polarisation and activism against Gunns and the forestry industry had a positive outcome, but I suspect market forces and realities forced the outcome rather than polarised debate. Social issues such as gay rights, abortion, dying with dignity and same sex marriage are all polarising topics which appear to have been settled with positive outcomes.</p>	<p>Arguing about climate change has probably been a positive because it has raised awareness and ultimately provided a basis for better understanding. I have found that by using the pathways to decrease negative impacts of polarisation and getting the relevant stakeholders engaged in the development of a new procedure/project that has opposing views has resulted on a broader understanding of each other views and a common ground to collectively work on.</p>
	<p>Theme 3: Promoting change</p>
	<p>Some people naturally have contrarian personalities. This can have good and bad aspects, but it can certainly be harnessed positively to avoid groupthink.</p>
	<p>Covid had made people more extreme on both sides.</p>
	<p>Many divisions over time have reflected societal shifts – where people were comfortable to challenge the status quo to progress a view they believed in. E.g., our current respect for environment, homosexuality, and same sex relationships, is a result of what was once very polarised views on these matters.</p>
	<p>Theme 4: Evolution</p>
	<p>We have had Australian employers learn to approach certain employees differently – adapt their leadership style to suit the culture of the employee. We have also decreased grievances and complaints, improving understanding of employees on Australian leadership styles, they are now less prone to take offence.</p>
	<p>Maybe the Gunns collapse, where there was less environmental impact after the collapse and a lot of workers we reskilled, and land redistributed.</p>
	<p>One division I have observed, is the extreme protests undertaken by groups such as Extinction Rebellion. These displays often spark conversation and interest, and over a long period of time, I believe these views at the extreme ends shift the "centre" of the debate and allow people to find where they sit on the spectrum of the issue.</p>
	<p>Where rationale and reasonable argument can be aired yes, social media unfortunately has an endless option of confirmation bias available, and if you're committed to your cause, you'll inevitably find an empathetic ear to whatever misguided thought process you may have. Having face-to-face forums usually weeds out the major polarisers.</p>
	<p>I can't think of any specifics but there would be a host of situations that have led to equal opportunities or rights for those who have not been recognised previously. Sometimes the overall benefit isn't seen in the immediate circumstances, but others benefit fully later.</p>
	<p>People will often work to reduce polarisation, so over time topics like climate change become better accepted. Generally, better science and understanding dissonance will smooth out polarising views.</p>

In the leadership scan we asked leaders from their experiences to reflect on any pathways to decrease negative impacts of polarisation. Below are common themes that emerged with quotes to illustrate the sentiment. As well as the high-level impact quotes, the themes that emerged included:

1. Skilling up
2. Models of success
3. Conscious choices

Negative and positive outcomes of polarisation continued

<p>High level impact quotes</p> <p>Getting to know people on a human level – on what makes us the same. Rather than what divides us. Putting aside my own judgement and frustration.</p> <p>Seeking to find common ground including in acknowledging when motivations and intentions might be similar despite differing views. Building relationships and seek the human stories behind the polarisation.</p> <p>Be hard on the problem and easy on the people involved. play the ball, not the man – as it were. Allow people to be felt to be heard, i.e., perspectives to be shared. Focus on the common ground.</p> <p>You need to ensure that the issue is discussed on its merits, not through the prism of identity</p> <p>Ensure everyone knows they have the right to an opinion but that is just what it is, an opinion. Scientific facts need to be taken more seriously than an opinion and through sharing this starts to debunk wild rumours spread through opinion. Social media has helped spread 'alternative realities' much easier than in the past! Need to teach critical thinking in school and not just to science students!</p> <p>Communication of information, feelings and perspectives and having shared experiences. Humans are normally empathetic and while we may not fully embrace another's idea, we can be increasingly open or sympathetic to their position.</p>	<p>From your experience, can you identify any pathways to decrease the negative impacts of polarisation?</p> <p>Theme 1: Skilling up</p> <p>We need to find ways for people to tell personal stories that explain why they hold certain views and be willing to listen to them. Coach for open mindedness. An example I would give is the Tasmanian Leaders program Linking Sessions where diverse views are shared via personal stories told in a confidential environment. Ever since then I have had less confidence and conviction in my own opinions and greater ability to see "grey" not just black/white and understand how others can have different views to me.</p> <p>There needs to be more discussion of how our world is changing and the implications – providing context for people. Too often we focus on a specific local, short-term issues without a robust appreciation of why 'we are where we are' and what sustainable options there may be.</p> <p>Giving organisations tools to have robust conversations, importance of setting up not only vision and values but showing how these need to be upheld and worked on.</p> <p>Education, calling it out and learning to have really hard conversations.</p> <p>Raise awareness of polarisation, how it happens, and encourage and support people to diversify their media diet. You are what you eat! See Street Epistemology – in particular Anthony Magnabosco. The way that he listens, mirrors, and asks respectful questions to challenge people's beliefs without pushing his own beliefs seems to be far more successful in de-polarising people than, for example, arguing with facts and logic (which, ironically, seems to drive polarisation more).</p> <p>Being able to disagree well seems to be a forgotten art. I think communication is the best way to work through differences. This becomes difficult if one side can't communicate or can't be heard. I struggle with the concept of cancelling references to what we now consider.</p> <p>Policies that embed expectations for organisations to test assumptions. Embedding organisational values into all decision-making processes (did that decision align with the values of our organisation if our values are compassion and evidence based) Role modelling focused on compassion and understanding.</p> <p>Theme 2: Models of success</p> <p>I'm relation to land use planning, conversation, time and trust are required, as part of the problem is people not understanding a complex system.</p> <p>In many polarised discussions, it seems conversation often centres around only one or two key differences. I believe spending time outlining the things both sides do agree on, and then taking time to try and understand why they have a different view to your own would lead to a better understanding of each other, and less of a divide.</p>
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<p>Avoid mediatisation of the issue. Focus on facts and evidence. Avoid politicisation.</p>	<p>My strategy is to build connection on issues other than the polarising one where possible.</p>
<p>From my point of view, I simply try to establish good connections with people, and being genuine and considerate of others. Setting the example of a fair and equitable person shows others that we should accept everyone for their individuality and not judge people.</p>	<p>Identify the drivers of polarisation (i.e., is it driven by limited education/experience on a topic, ideological differences, lack of resources (e.g., being poor)). Then identify how that polarisation can be addressed. It is easier to address educational issue than it is to address issues driven by a lack of resources by one group. All issues will require effort, some is time.</p>
<p>Listening and respecting both point of views Don't engage in one over the other, unless one of them is harmful for the team, the group or the company Find a common ground with common objectives to start the discussion Shift the focus from the polarised idea to the benefits and impact on the group as whole.</p>	<p>Accept that there are cycles back and forward.</p>
<p>Bringing people together with polarised views to express those views, and discussing why they have those views, can bring greater understanding to each party, reduces negative reactions as people see it as a learning opportunity instead (even if they still don't agree).</p>	<p>The easiest way is to listen and respect the alternative. It doesn't mean you need to change your view (also does not mean you can't. If you can at least try to understand an opposing view, then there is a starting point.</p>
<p>Transparent and honest information.</p>	<p>Theme 3: Conscious choices</p>
<p>There's also education needed that the media responds to our human instincts for juicy content, controversy, human challenges, loud voices. Plus, online content is data driven, based on what we follow and like. Therefore, we have created a media and social media system that feeds from our own</p>	<p>After two decades of working as a journalist, I have stopped consuming any news media that is driven by the 24-hour news cycle. By stepping out of this stream of biased opinions, I'm in a better position to assess issues as they come up and apply my own values.</p>
	<p>Checking facts vs assumed realities. EG Are great numbers of mainlanders actually moving here pushing locals out of the housing market? Challenging personality politics. Is someone's social media feed more powerful than their policy position now?</p>
	<p>Make efforts to protect those these debates are directed at. Stand up for people in unequal power dynamics. Bring conversations back to principles and concepts rather than personal attacks. Offer opportunities for people to personally connect with others that have different views. Sport, arts and culture, schools and neighbourhood houses/associations can be great places for people to connect without these differences at the fore front. Wouldn't it be great to have our cities and towns designed to have diverse people living next door to each other, with walkable areas and shared amenities that encouraged connection! Really small rural towns seem to have less polarisation as people have to connect and work together – although this seems to be less and less the case as people increasingly connect online and only with people just like them.</p>
	<p>Not using emotive language, myself and kindly point it out to others when they use it. As humans, I feel it is our natural default to want to sensationalise things. I know really intelligent and educated people who do this a lot without even thinking about it before they speak. People want to think they're right! I think it's about awareness, reflection and personal growth that will broaden minds and reduce polarisation.</p>

<p>prejudices and reinforces them and feeds polarised views. Making this more visible may make us more accountable for thinking more objectively.</p> <p>Everyone is entitled to their own opinion; we should not be told what to do.</p>	<p>Need wide ranging engagement, with some skilled facilitators who provide room for feedback from a wide variety of perspectives. The inputs and outcomes need to be transparent. There need to be champions of the process and acknowledgement of where and how different perspectives have informed outcomes. Data based analysis that tests true sentiment, rather than just noisy voices, is also helpful.</p>
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5. Role for Tasmanian Leaders in the future

In the leadership scan we asked leaders from their experiences to reflect on the role of Tasmanian Leaders. Below are common themes that emerged with quotes to illustrate the sentiment.

As well as the high-level impact quotes, the themes that emerged included:

1. Skill development
2. Supporting influence in leaders

<p>High level impact quotes</p> <p>As an independent objective observer and mediator Providing tools to facilitate open, constructive communications.</p> <p>It is doing that already through all its programs, bring people together from different industries, regions, backgrounds to build understanding and shared experience and learning. We need more of this and not just for 'so called' leaders.</p> <p>Take the centralist position and help the divisions to find common ground. I work in a peak body, and this is our role within our subject matter expertise and there is absolutely a role for it in broader community discussions.</p>	<p>Tasmanian Leaders is an independent a-political organisation with an extensive and diverse network. With this in mind, what role might Tasmanian Leaders play in assisting individuals, communities and Tasmania manage current, future and possible polarities for a better more inclusive Tasmania?</p>
	<p>Theme 1: Skill development</p>
	<p>Giving leaders the skills and space to practice exploring polarised issues and sharing the learnings of other leaders who have successfully navigated this space.</p>
	<p>Skills to help lead through polarisation and educate our community how to consider perspectives more objectively on polarised issues</p>
	<p>It could lead the way by facilitating sessions for graduates on contentious issues. It will allow the participants to then go away and see how it can be done in their own community/workplace etc. This is similar to linking sessions – but rather than just listen to the experts – it will enable everyone there as community members to participate in the actual discussion.</p>
	<p>Tap into existing networks to help support people where needed – mentoring, guidance, coaching etc</p>
	<p>Tasmanian Leaders can play a role in doing what they are doing. Understanding the importance of managed polarisation in creating positive change and equipping future leaders to be able to manage positive outcomes.</p>
	<p>Theme 2: Supporting influence in leaders</p>
	<p>Some great opportunity to influence policy and political, social and economic directions for the State.</p>
	<p>Continue to be a voice and offer opportunity for those least likely to be heard or present.</p>
<p>Promoting diversity of thought. Many businesses try to promote superficial diversity by hiring people based on their appearance. They usually end up, however, with a diverse-looking group of people who think similarly. You have people from all walks of life attending your events. Being able to harness true diversity of thought would be hugely helpful to this state. I also think you are increasingly pushing the a-political line when you push progressive policies.</p>	

Summary

Overall, respondents found the range of polarising issues in Tasmania was increasing, although there were some areas where there was a decrease.

Nearly 65% of respondents believed that polarisation was becoming somewhat more or more intense across Tasmania. Similarly, 65% believed that there were many more types of polarising issues emerging. Indeed, some 158 were identified. There were 120 mentions of situations in which polarisation has been experienced and witnessed. These can be broadly categorised as economic, environmental, and related to the Tasmanian identity. However, within those categories there were many nuanced subsets that offer valuable insight into leadership in polarised settings.

Respondents identified the main areas for increasing expression of polarisation as social media (87%) and politics (78%), with increases also in the workplace (44%) and in families (36%).

Respondents were generally very optimistic about the range of solutions that could mitigate polarisation and the crucial role of leaders modelling good behaviours.

Leaders believed that they had a personal responsibility to further develop and apply skills for promoting healthy conversations about contentious issues, with key actions being:

- Creating safe environments
- Active appreciation of diversity
- Real listening and real airing
- Self-reflection in leaders and modelling

Leaders were also clear that Tasmanian Leaders as a network could play a role in facilitating community conversations on contentious issues and engaging more broadly with communities and business in developing skills to mitigate polarisation.

“I think it is the role of the leader to show support and understanding on polarising issues. Leaders should be open and help to remove any misleading information or untrue statements from the discussion. They should also be able to facilitate effective discussion.”

On the question of Tasmanian distinctiveness, the majority of respondents considered that while there were some Tasmanian specific issues (for example the so-called north/south divide and the UTAS move into the city), the intensity and other characteristics of polarisation were not dissimilar to elsewhere. One example of difference identified was the relatively sharper divide in Tasmania between the privileged and underprivileged as a source of tension.

Several respondents noted that in Tasmania the history of polarisation (especially over forestry) has led to many Tasmanians being less inclined to engage in public discourse because of the perceived personal and social risks.

Crucially, the respondents were generally positive about being able to manage polarisation, to be able to understand root causes and mitigate the toxic

“I am unsure if this is unique to Tasmania, but I believe people in Tasmania sometimes express their polarisation by isolating themselves and withdrawing from spaces where conflicting views can be found, e.g. leaving community clubs or sports teams because they do not agree with some of the views expressed in these social settings.”

components while promoting healthy debate regarding our many tensions in Tasmania. However, it was widely acknowledged that this is a challenging aspect in leadership.

This leads to some interesting options for Tasmanian Leaders to contemplate.

Opportunity 1. Tasmanian Leaders design and deliver programs on understanding and mitigating polarisation.

It is clear from the scan that there are very few comprehensive programs or short courses in Tasmania that focus on developing the skills and capacities of leaders and other Tasmanians to better understand and be able to mitigate the impact of polarisation.

Globally there are an increasing number of specialist leadership centres (see for example <https://kansasleadershipcenter.org>) that focus on developing the suite of skills and competencies to mitigate polarisation. Importantly such an entity could also help to overcome the reluctance of many Tasmanians (noted in the scan) to becoming engaged in polarising issues.

Opportunity 2. Tasmanian Leaders convene forums to enable respectful civil conversations on polarising issues.

The scan respondents consistently noted the lack of civic forums in Tasmania in which current and emergent polarising issues could be the focus of respectful conversations. While there have been occasional ad hoc forums (such as those undertaken by MONA in the past and currently proposed by MONA around forestry) there is no ongoing forum or 'agora' where a marketplace of ideas can be debated.

Tasmanian Leaders has the potential infrastructure, authorising environment and capabilities to create such forums and has held occasional forums in the past on key issues such as education.

Potentially, in conjunction with other key parties such as the Ethics Centre (<https://ethics.org.au>), there is an opportunity for innovative leadership here in Tasmania.

Opportunity 3. Tasmanian Leaders create a longitudinal evidence base on polarisation in Tasmania.

The Tasmanian Leaders survey provides a baseline for future surveys to be undertaken and therefore to build up a longitudinal picture of change.

There are several global and Australian surveys that are used to measure polarisation. The most detailed is the Edelman annual trust survey. www.edelman.com.au/australia-path-polarisation-edelman-trust-barometer-2023

Importantly the Edelman survey is global, enabling international comparisons around key parameters such as the ranking of polarisation from less to severely polarised and the measurement of trust from low through to high. It is important to note that none of the existing surveys have sample sizes that would enable reliable Tasmanian observations.

An option would be to engage with Edelman on structuring a more tailored survey for Tasmania or to seek and increase in sample size for Tasmania.

A second option would be to refine the existing survey and for Tasmanian Leaders to administer the survey on an annual or biannual basis, possibly with corporate sponsorship.

Useful resources

If you would like to further your knowledge on polarisation below are some resources.

The Basics of Polarisation

- Klein, E., (2020) Why We're Polarized, Simon and Schuster, New York
- <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/09/24/democracies-divided-global-challenge-of-political-polarization-pub-79753>
- www.brookings.edu/books/democracies-divided
- www.brookings.edu/articles/reducing-extreme-polarization-is-key-to-stabilizing-democracy
- www.amazon.com/Uncivil-Agreement-Politics-Became-Identity/dp/022652454X/?ots=1&tag=thneyo0f-20&linkCode=w50
- www.amazon.com/Great-Alignment-Party-Transformation-Donald/dp/0300245734/?ots=1&tag=thneyo0f-20&linkCode=w50
- www.newyorker.com/books/under-review/ezra-kleins-why-were-polarized-and-the-drawbacks-of-explainer-journalism

Key Australian Literature on Polarisation

- <https://lens.monash.edu/@politics-society/2022/05/02/1384632/the-australian-government-is-trapped-in-a-cycle-of-distrust-how-can-it-break-out>
- www.edelman.com.au/australia-path-polarisation-edelman-trust-barometer-2023
- <https://new.parliament.vic.gov.au/49f01a/contentassets/fd4a28ea575142b1ae936bea274e6a52/attachment-documents/102.-attachment---2-.pdf>
- <https://snurb.info/files/2021/The%20Dynamics%20of%20Polarisation%20in%20Australian%20Social%20Media.pdf>
- www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/australia-ranked-choice-voting-mitigates-polarization-by-peter-singer-2022-06
- <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/213693>
- www.eurekastreet.com.au/article/the-myth-of-polarisation-in-modern-australia
- https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-16-5268-4_5
- <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781003170051-14/role-political-polarization-american-australian-trust-media-use-covid-19-pandemic-andrea-carson-shaun-ratcliff-leah-ruppanner>
- <https://blogs.qut.edu.au/qutex/2021/10/08/polarisation-and-hyperpartisanship-in-social-media-some-further-reflections>

Trust

- <https://academic.oup.com/book/32011/chapter-abstract/267782268?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

Role of Leadership in Mitigating Polarisation

- www.australianleadershipindex.org
- <https://hbr.org/2021/10/how-business-leaders-can-reduce-polarization>
- <https://kansasleadershipcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/KLC-Framework-E-Book.pdf>
- <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/07/23/7-ideas-to-reduce-political-polarization.-and-save-america-from-itself-pub-82365>
- www.brookings.edu/articles/how-social-media-platforms-can-reduce-polarization
- www.johnmaxwell.com/blog/leading-in-polarized-times
- <https://apolitical.co/solution-articles/en/why-governing-in-a-time-of-polarisation-requires-different-tools-and-processes>
- <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/democracy-belonging-forum/polarisation-distraction>

Direct quotes from a lived polarising experience

In thinking about polarisation and the divisions we encounter in our personal and professional roles, can you outline an experience where you confronted a sharp division? Please outline what the situation was and what you felt, thought, and did?

These were people's experiences:

Following the media coverage of Grace Tame and Scott Morrison meeting, there were many workplace conversations. People who I had known for many years shocked me by their views on who was behaving inappropriately or appropriately in that meeting, and their justification for their opinion. I felt surprised, and that feeling led me to feel that I didn't understand that person as well as I had thought. In some of these discussions, I was uncomfortable in sharing my challenging views on the matter and excused myself from the conversation.

In my work on Aboriginal recognition and truth-telling there was significant push back from some of the decision makers. The conversation became heated and ideological with the 'sky is falling' argument frequently used by some with others pushing the moral arguments. There was little nuance in the debate and both sides were emotional and quite scathing of the other view. As these opinions were public, and I knew the direct impact on Aboriginal people, I found it distressing. We focussed on bringing personal stories into the conversation and having people share these in person to the decision makers. Sometimes this helped (when the storyteller was calm, measured and articulate in their delivery) at other times it had the opposite effect (particularly with angry, emotional story tellers). Overtime some of the moderate members developed more of a voice and were able to bring some nuance and grey to the debate which was the most powerful moment of all!

Friends on covid vaccination... I observed that which side people took was determined mainly by their underlying political philosophy. For example, libertarians tended to be against vaccination, and communitarians were for vaccination. Social media bubbles then drove their thinking to polarised extremes, not just on what they thought was right, but what they thought the facts were. I have always tried to be as sceptical as possible, striving to identify and correct for my personal biases, practising humility, having a diverse media diet, and forming beliefs as rationally as I could muster. However, in 2020 I got lazy with my media diet and consumed too much from one source, and not enough from differing viewpoints to balance it. This source gradually became more extreme and after several months I found myself in the position of holding significantly different beliefs about factual matters to other people in my social networks who strived to form rational beliefs. It took some effort to re-diversify the viewpoints in my media diet, and my beliefs shifted to positions more in-line with other people who strive to form rational beliefs. During this shift, I was suspicious of myself... If my beliefs and positions are so easily swayed by the information I consume, then how much agency do I have over who I even am?! I can choose which information I consume, but even that is heavily influenced by factors such as social conditioning and my emotional state. For example, how much of my shift back to more 'rational' views was motivated reasoning to rejoin my tribe? This was a major eye opener for me. I have become humbler, and more compassionate about what others believe and why. The metaphor between information and foods is a useful one. You are what you eat. And while ostensibly you can decide what you eat, that also depends on social pressures, willpower, education, etc.

As a climate scientist I live in a polarised world. Less educated, more ideologically driven, short-term-focused people do not believe in evidence-based decision making. This is true for climate but applies across other sectors too. I have met people who disbelieve the science and are passionate about 'climate change being a hoax'. However, those some of those same people have changed their minds

after talking to me. So, I always confront the division, but work from where they are, in order to overcome the problem/issues. Those that change their minds typically came from a perspective driven by a lack of understanding/trust of the evidence – so education allows them to change their minds. Also, it is important to disconnect their 'beliefs' from their 'personalities' so that it is not an assault on 'who they are', it is just learning about a new topic. 5 I'm the meat in the sandwich of environmental polarisation.

I've encountered North/South divide at work before with some team members holding the position that we are south biased. I felt a little disappointed and frustrated that we could still have this perspective in a world economy and digitally connected workforce. I thought it may have been a matter of perspective, where this person had come up through local councils to the position, they were in whereas I'd worked in national organisations.

The pressure to get Covid job – I did it due to peer pressure from work. I wish I stuck to what I wanted and didn't do it, it's gone away now anyway.

Polarisation makes me extremely uncomfortable as my personality is one that is always trying to create unity and understand all perspectives. Usually, I can do this and then I work to build understanding and focus on commonalities. If I cannot understand a point of view, then I tend to freeze and deflect rather than confront.

In a multicultural workplace, we often have polarised beliefs on how people should be treated in a professional setting. i.e. real-time feedback is highly regarded in western countries, considered insulting by cultures such as Japan and Vietnam. Western countries regard leaders as anyone showing leadership, and we expect to see it in someone before they apply for a managerial role. Cultures such as Indian, Japanese see this as overstepping boundaries and disrespecting the hierarchy.

Cancel Culture – where an individual didn't want to involve someone in a project because 15+ years ago they had been involved in a football club activity where they had participated in 'black face'. Since that time, the individual had apologised and had their employment impacted because of it. I felt that it was unfair that the person was continuing to be cancelled for something that they had apologised for, and undertaken steps to educate themselves on and remediate. In this situation I expressed my view, but it wasn't shared by all and the individual was excluded. I also left the group ultimately and this was a key contributing factor to that decision. I felt that those involved were not operating in line with their organisational values but more so from fear of potential criticism (which was an assumption not fact).

Examples would include interacting with people who have very different value base. Coming from an inclusion lens, it is hard at times to manage conversations when people have a different (inflexible) lens, driven by their privileged position. It is upsetting, frustrating and I try to talk through issues openly, offering a different perspective and encouraging wider discussion.

In a workplace I was part of a senior leadership team that were divided on the direction. Vision of the organisation was too vague; head of the organisation didn't have the ability to lead or draw consensus from the group. Problems with ability for individuals to express views, lack of listening, inability to have robust conversation or debate issues. I felt frustrated and stuck, not able to move the conversation, at a standstill. I left, status quo always the preference from accepting a new idea or change. On reflection perhaps could have been more patient but life is short, want to be involved in dynamic organisations they are willing to change. Does this leave other organisations that are stuck without leadership to stagnate because good people leave?

In a professional environment, there is growing conflict between managers unable to accept that work can be done remotely and those who accept that the workplace and employees have changed, and we need to manage it. One manager forwarded a newspaper article about an employee bingeing Netflix at home to the entire leadership team as 'evidence' that employees cannot be trusted and must come into the office. Luckily our company had conducted research into remote workforce productivity and culture so other managers were not influenced by him. However, data does not convince people – emotions and stories do. I feel that if we could have had that manager experience how others work from home – where they sit, what they do etc – he might feel more comfortable with it. My dad could not understand that working from home was actually work until he saw me doing it one day – on the phone, in Teams/Zoom meetings with my team, writing documents, processing invoices etc.

I am often called on to lead staffing teams who find themselves on one side of a great divide from upper management. Opponents at war, each sure of their position and ready to defend it to the last. When I listen to management they talk about the problems with the team, the things that need fixing, and the people they need me. When I listen to the staff, they speak about not being heard, broken promises, their anger with management and their care for the people they support. They speak to the emotional toll of their engagement with those above them and the lengths they will go for their beliefs. When I first engage in these situations, I feel sad. Each group has lost sight of the humanity in the other and all they can speak in is pain. They know how to fight all too well, our society teaches them this type of advocacy is prized, but they have lost sight that sometimes leadership is gentle and compassionate. When I work with these teams, I teach them to tell their stories in a way that others can hear. I help them grieve, ask the right questions and engage in advocacy that meets the need of the different situations they find themselves in, I teach them collaboration and how to connect with the wisdom of all to build the culture we want. For management I teach them not to be afraid of the passionate humans amongst them. Far from being difficult, our squeaky wheels are canaries in the coal mine with much to teach us.

People using emotion to argue against facts – it's a disconnect that is hard to break down, especially when the emotion is reinforced by like-minded people and becomes a belief system and is contrary to science and expert opinion. I could not justify expending my time to try and explain rationally the science and studies, so I disengaged and left feeling a bit despondent and frustrated.

Whether we should develop our clean energy resources for local use only or develop to support local business growth and contribution to a cleaner planet. Even for those who support development there are polarized views on what the development should be and where the new assets should (and particularly should not) be located. Opponents are typically more motivated to voice issues, and supporters can feel threatened by the aggression of opponents. There may also be those who quietly oppose who don't feel confident to raise views and be trusted that they will be heard. It is challenging to create engagement and discussion frameworks that all respect, and that the outcomes are taken as a reflection of inputs. Many who oppose will not consider themselves consulted if the outcome is not the one they support, despite it being supported by others.

I was confronted at work by a very unstable adult client who was known to the organisation from previous years. I shared my doubts about this person and for my safety and that of my team. I was met with senior/middle managers explaining that I was being dramatic, and they took the side of the client, advising that myself and my team 'had a lot to learn'. I immediately felt undervalued and this whole situation led to a sharp division.

I was in a group situation where the activity was to move from one side of the room if you were pro a current political discussion and the other if you were against. I found myself on the opposite side of the room with one other person out of around 20. I was surprised with the level of contrast in the group and I felt anxious about how I might be perceived because of my decision. I did feel that it did impact on my relationship with others in the group, most of whom I had gotten to know quite well. For me nothing had changed, but I felt the depth of conversations I had for the rest of the day became more superficial, like some level of trust in me was lost. Being white middle-aged, middle-class man, it was probably the first time I had experienced these feelings. They haven't left me as I try to use these when I consider the impact others might contend with as part of a minority view.

There are more and more social justice issues emerging that are truly polarising. I believe a majority of people don't care about these issues but will never speak up about them because of the vindictive or even violent response they have seen others receive.

The most obvious was the Covid crisis. I believed the Government reaction was overstated and that we should have continued to operate whilst rolling out the vaccine. I listened to the alternative views, discussed my differing views, and tried to understand alternative points of view. In the end I generally agreed to disagree.

Numerous challenges to the efficacy and safety of the science behind vaccines for the pandemic and even those who firmly believe in vaccinations being swayed by rumour and fake news to start to sway trust or 'it's not tested enough' views.

The UTas move to the centre of Hobart is a good example. People quickly took up a NO position and see it as a black/white issue without any scope for middle ground. Engaging with people on the issue is difficult because they are locked into their position and don't want to entertain options.

Polarisation is not necessarily bad. Different opinions often lead to better outcomes. These differences are often value or knowledge based. The way these differences are expressed can be problematic. I have handled polarised views all my life by truly trying to understand others' views and sources of their behaviour.



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