

Polarity Management™

The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function.

- F. Scott Fitzgerald

STUCK SWILING AROUND?

How often are you stuck swirling around analysis paralysis, dilemmas, double- binds, and unsolvable problems... while your life is sucked right out of you?

Should you be efficient or innovative?

Sell more or build more?

Focus on the family or the business?

Spend or save?

Do it our way or do it their way?

The list goes on and on. Sometimes the answer is black *or* white. Sometimes the answer is grey.

When you get stuck in the illusiveness of a dilemma the best way out is to manage the polarity between the two choices facing you.

Through “Polarity Management™” you can get unstuck.

Here is an outline of the content of this 14-page document:

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WHY THIS IS SO IMPORTANT - INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS ON CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE MANAGEMENT OF POLARITIES

1. My professional mission is to help people at home and at work, to get along and get ahead.
2. **“Getting along”** involves solving problems together. Most problems can be solved with a pretty straightforward approach that has been used for a long time. For years I’ve taught one version, or another, of **“CPS – Creative Problem Solving.”** You will recognize all of this:
<http://blog.thinkforachange.com/2007/03/04/creative-problem-solving--a-history.aspx>
3. Leonardo Da Vinci was the archetype of the Renaissance Man. Whole brain, paradox, integrated thinking, body – mind – soul – spirit. He was more enlightened.
4. **“Getting ahead”** involves heightened levels of consciousness. At higher levels of consciousness we have more agility. We can integrate more information, take more perspectives, and move among them all in search of more innovative solutions.



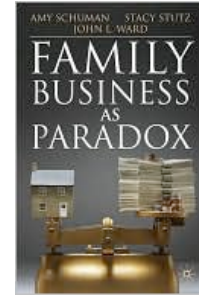
5. Don Beck and Spiral Dynamics. *EnlightenNext* is a magazine that I’ve read since its inception in the early 90’s. This article is the most succinct presentation of SD that I am aware of. Here are two fundamental questions: First, “What meme level is your center?” Second, “In what meme level are they centered?”

<http://www.enlightennext.org/magazine/j22/beck.asp>

6. Albert Einstein – another really smart guy! Look at the various ways in which he said, “You can’t solve a problem at the same level of consciousness at which the problem was created.” His quotes begin at the 7th one down.
http://www.giga-usa.com/quotes/topics/problems_t001.htm
7. The management of polarities begins at the Orange meme, and continues on to Second Tier Yellow.

8. In the wonderful book, *Family Business as Paradox*, (Appendix A, Conclusion) we read:

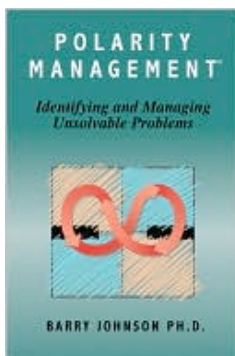
“It is clear that paradoxes have been and will continue to be found in almost every system of thought. That’s partly because paradox is a lens through which to conceptualize and understand a dynamic or a problem. What Hegel, Kant, Einstein, the Dalai Lama, Lao Tzu, and others understand is that these paradoxes, or a view that embraces finding paradoxes, need not be feared. Quite the opposite: they must be probed, because within their complications lies a kernel of fresh perspective, the understanding of which can rapidly advance progress. Thus in family business, those who seek out and conquer paradox will move forward.”



9. “The more turbulent the times, the more complex the world, the more paradoxes there are.” (FBAP 17) The rate of change and the rate of complexity, are increasing exponentially. Read Ray Kurzweil’s book, *The Singularity is Near* for breathtaking evidence. <http://www.singularity.com> It takes “agility” to lead in the world that is emerging all around us. Agility is about managing paradoxes.
10. This is all very important to me personally, and professionally, because I’m about “helping people at home and at work, to get along and get ahead.”

***If you learn to manage polarities,
you will get along and you will get ahead.***

***The more elevated your consciousness,
the more easily will you get along and get ahead.***



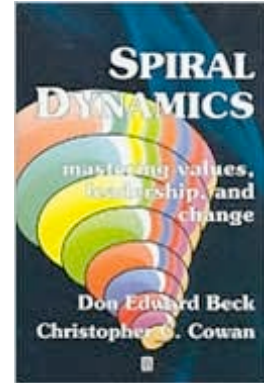
OUR OWN POLARITY GURU – DR. BARRY JOHNSON

I first heard about Polarity Management™ and Barry’s work back in the early 1990’s while working at the Fountain Hill Center. **Barry is from Grand Rapids.** Those of us who worked with couples in Marriage Counseling were very excited about Polarity Management™. We had great hope for its usefulness in helping couples to solve problems. However, while Polarity Management

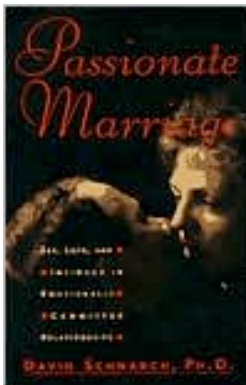
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was useful to me and how I thought and structured interventions, it was difficult for many to grasp.

Once I read the 1996 book, *Spiral Dynamics*, I became aware of the challenge that was tripping up my ability to apply Polarity Management™.



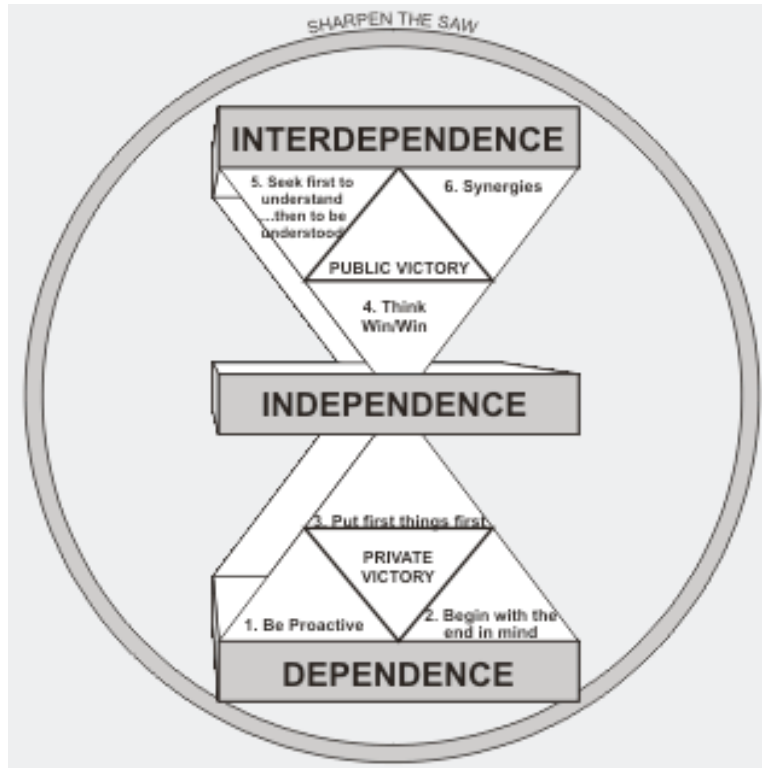
Here is the important insight that I had. Couples that functioned at an unstable Orange meme, or below, couldn't use Polarity Management™ themselves. However, if they could stabilize at Orange, then they could. People only move up one-half-step at a time.



Then, in 1997, David Schnarch wrote his pivotal book, *Passionate Marriage: Love, Sex, and Intimacy in Emotionally Committed Relationships*. David introduced the concepts of differentiation and how a person becomes stabilized at orange with a well-individuated identity. At orange, a person knows who they are. He or she has an identity, a set of values, is conscious of their personal strengths, and has come to a clear point of acceptance about “Who I am.”

Remember the 1989 perennial best seller by Stephen Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*? 15 million copies is a lot.

The first 3 habits are about moving personal growth and moving from dependence to independence. The second 3 habits are about moving getting along with others and the movement from independence to interdependence.



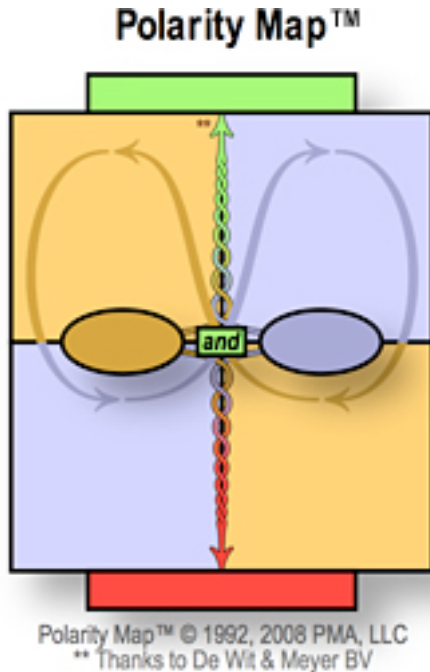
Now, it all started to come together!

Dependent people, undifferentiated Blue and below, can only solve problems with either/or thinking.

Independent people, differentiated Orange and above, can also solve problems by managing polarities with both/and thinking.

BACK TO POLARITY MANAGEMENT™ AND BARRY JOHNSON

I've taken a couple of workshops with Barry in days gone by, and I use Polarity Management™ all the time in my work, and I mean *all* the time. It is such a basic tool for working with couples, family owned business, and with just about any group of people that are stuck in a dilemma. You can learn more about Polarity Management™ at their website. <http://www.polaritymanagement.com/>



Let's just use the basic pole of FAMILY – BUSINESS. Should you direct your resources to the family, or to the business?

Put FAMILY in the circle in the middle, and on the left. Put BUSINESS in the circle in the middle, and on the right.

- Upper Left = the + or upside of directing your resources to the FAMILY.
- Lower Left = the – or downside of directing your resources to the FAMILY.
- Upper Right = the + or upside of directing your resources to the BUSINESS.
- Lower Right = the – or downside of directing your resources to the BUSINESS.

See the “infinity loop” that runs from Upside to Downside, and then over to the Upside and then the Downside, around and around? That's where the dilemma is experienced and where you get stuck. It is also where you can move to both/and Polarity Management™.

A CONTINUUM FOR ADDRESSING PROBLEMS AND POLARITIES

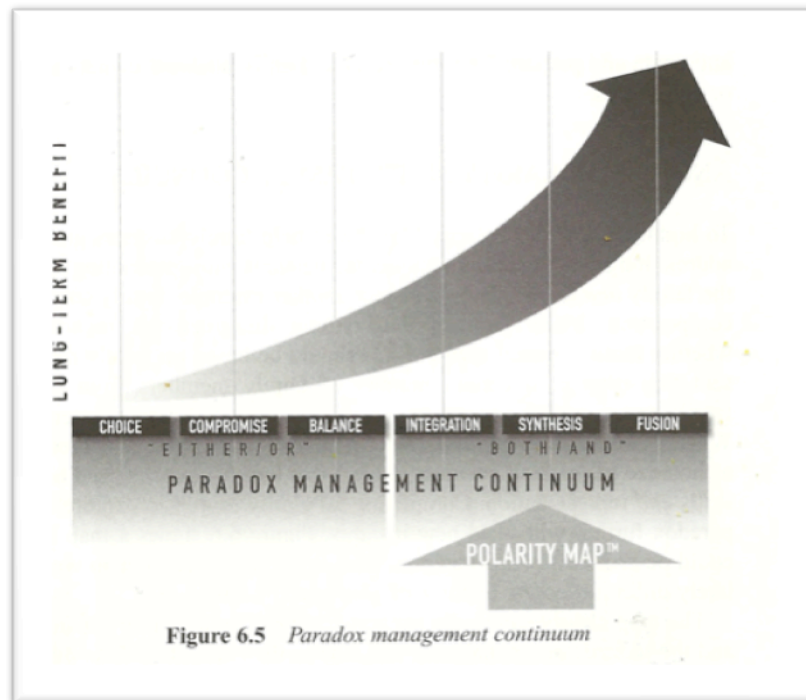
Again, I'm borrowing from the book *Family Business as Paradox*.

Either/Or Problem Solving – Implicit is a decision to minimize weaknesses or to exploit opportunities, and is focused on short-term benefits.

1. CHOICE – Involves simply picking one side of the polarity over the other.
2. COMPROMISE – Seeks to minimize the weaknesses present in either side of the polarity.
3. BALANCE – is about working to exploit some of the opportunities each side of the polarity represents.

Both/And Polarity Management™ – Implicit is a decision that will have longer-term benefits.

4. INTEGRATION – Identify the problem as a polarity; maximize the opportunities *and* minimize the weaknesses of **both** sides.
5. SYNTHESIS - Achieve **both** sides of the polarity simultaneously.
6. FUSION - Anticipate a problem as a paradox and implements a systemic approach that achieves **both** sides.



(Figure 6.5, page 129, FBAP)

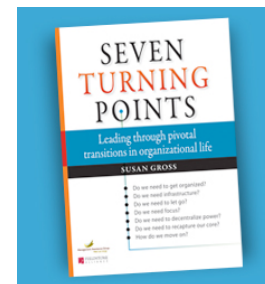
POLARITIES IN THE BUSINESS WORLD

In March of 2009, Susan Gross published her wonderful little book titled *Seven Turning Points: Leading Through Pivotal Transitions in Organizational Life*.

Here are Gross' SEVEN TURNING POINTS, identified especially for nonprofits:

1. **Do we need to get organized?**

When the organization can no longer operate with a loose, family style of management.



2. **Do we need infrastructure?**
When the management needs of an organization outstrip its executive director's skills.
3. **Do we need to let go?**
When a founding volunteer board hires its first executive director.
4. **Do we need focus?**
When unplanned growth results in an absence of focus and priorities.
5. **Do we need to decentralize power?**
When strong central direction becomes micromanagement and over-dependency on the leader.
6. **Do we need to recapture our core?**
When decentralization goes too far, splitting the organization into autonomous units that have little or no connection, coherence, or coordination.
7. **How do we move on?**
When a longtime executive director prepares to step down.

In her book, Gross outlines **11 polarities** that are managed routinely by all organizations.

It is worth noting that these polarities apply to **for-profit, as well as not-for-profit** organizations. In my consulting work I've used this model with effectiveness.

Productive, Efficient	Work Environment	Nurturing, Relational
Centralized	Management	Decentralized
Systematic	Operating Style	Informal
Tight, Integrated	Structure	Loose, mutable
Directive	Decision-Making	Collegial
Well-Defined, Specialized	Staff Roles	Fluid, Adaptable
Strategically Planned	Program Development	Opportunistic
Institutional Teamwork	Standard for Reward	Individual Entrepreneurialism
Active, Provocative	Governance	Supportive, Deferential
Complex, Highly Developed	Infrastructure and Systems	Simple, Barebones
Explicit, Enforced	Personnel/Operating Rules	Implicit, Reliable

**POLARITIES FROM BARRY JOHNSON'S BOOK, "POLARITY
MANAGEMENT™"**

Individual	And	Team
Inhale	And	Exhale
Critical Analysis	And	Encouragement
Clear	And	Flexible
Planning	And	Action
Either	And	Or
My Job	And	My Place
Individual Responsibility	And	Organizational Responsibility
Stability	And	Change
Conditional Respect	And	Unconditional Respect
Doing	And	Being
Autocratic	And	Participatory
Centralized	And	Decentralized
Stress	And	Tranquility
Part	And	Whole
Self	And	Other
Ethnicity	And	Diversity
Individual	And	Community

MYERS-BRIGGS POLARITIES

Introversion	And	Extraversion
Sensing	And	Intuiting
Thinking	And	Feeling
Judging	And	Perceiving

POLARITIES COMMONLY MANAGED BY FAMILY OWNED BUSINESS

The material presented here comes from the book, *Family Business as Paradox*. You will find the book in the bibliography at the end. Every family owned business should be familiar with this book.

Common Polarities		
Family	VS	Business
Growth	VS	Liquidity
Centralized	VS	Decentralized
Outsourcing	VS	Insourcing
Tradition	VS	Change
Short Term	VS	Long Term
Cost	VS	Quality
Reward Achievements of Individuals	VS	Reward Achievements of Group
Prudence	VS	Audacity
Local	VS	Global
Daring	VS	Caring
Passion	VS	Responsibility
Teamwork	VS	Valuing Each Individual
Money	VS	Hearts
Revolution	VS	Evolution
Individual Freedom	VS	Family Closeness
Control	VS	Trust
Expedience	VS	Patience
Action	VS	Planning
Proprietorship	VS	Stewardship
Roots	VS	Wings
Hands On	VS	Hands Off
Core	VS	Opportunistic
Merit	VS	Equality
Harvest	VS	Invest
Privacy	VS	Transparency
Formal	VS	Informal
Selective	VS	Inclusive
Market Driven	VS	Personal Need
FIRST GENERATION		
Business	VS	Family

Roots	VS	Wings
Action	VS	Planning
Expedience	VS	Patience
Control	VS	Trust
Proprietorship	VS	Stewardship
SECOND GENERATION		
Business	VS	Family
Work	VS	Home
Opportunistic	VS	Core
Task	VS	Process
Individual	VS	Collective
Merit	VS	Equality
THIRD GENERATION		
Business	VS	Family
Loyalty	VS	Freedom
Invest	VS	Harvest
Privacy	VS	Transparency
Formal	VS	Informal
One Family	VS	Family Branch

CONFLICT STATED AS A PROBLEM	CLASSIC CONFLICT	PRIMARY CONTRADICTION	UNDERLYING POLARITY
Which family members can be employed in the family business?	Family Employment	Side A: Strict requirements for family members Side B: All family members have a right to be employed	Selective <i>and</i> Inclusive
How to compensate family members?	Compensation and Perks	Side A: Based on market. Side B: Based on family member need.	Market <i>and</i> Need
Who will serve on the board?	Board Makeup	Side A: Based on relationship Side B: Based on	Representation <i>and</i> Qualifications

		skills and experience	
How much to pay out in dividend distribution?	Dividends/Distributions	Side A: Distributions for family owners to reward their investment Side B: Preserve cash in business for future investment	Harvest <i>and</i> Invest
Who will own stock?	Rights for Ownership	Side A: All family members. Side B: Based on participation and contribution.	Equality <i>and</i> Merit
How do we spend our meeting time together?	Family Meetings	Side A: Meeting attendance limited and focused on business Side B: Meeting attendance open and focused on relationships	Work <i>and</i> Fun

Problem to be solved	Decision Type	Polarity Within The Problem
Will we hire in-laws?	Yes or No	Inclusive <i>and</i> Selective
Do family members need to have outside work experience?	Yes or No	None
Will we find a job for our kids so they can stay close to home?	Yes or No	Roots <i>and</i> Wings
How big a board will be most effective?	Choose	None
What proportion of the board will be family owners?	Choose	Merit <i>and</i> Representation
Will the chair and the CEO be the same person?	Yes or No?	None
Will stock be placed in	Choose	Fixed <i>and</i> Flexible

trusts or owned outright?		
Can in-laws own stock?	Yes or No	Inclusion <i>and</i> Exclusion
At what age will benefits flow to beneficiaries?	Choose	Control <i>and</i> Trust

Intersection	Governance Vehicle	Examples
Family - Management	Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family employment policy –which family members can be employed; conditions of same. • Helping family members in need –how the family intends to support members, both financially and non-financially.
Management - Ownership	Rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shareholders agreement – who can own stock, how it will be valued. • Estate plans – how and when ownership will be transferred.
Family – Ownership	Values and Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family values statement – guiding principles to shape decisions and actions. • Family vision statement – inspiring picture of what family will create together.

LESSONS I’VE LEARNED ABOUT MANAGING POLARITIES

Here are some lessons I’ve learned about managing polarities from Barry Johnson, others who have done work in this important field, and from my own trial-and-error work with individuals, couples, and groups of people.

1. Your gut can often feel stuck before your head knows you are swirling around a polarity. When you are frustrated, stop and ask yourself if you are swirling around and getting nowhere because you are stuck in a polarity.
2. Diagnosis:
 - a. Is the difficulty ongoing? (No = problem solving.)
 - b. Are there two poles that are interdependent? (Yes = Polarity Management™)
3. The fear of getting stuck in the opposite pole gets you stuck in your own pole. The more you stay stuck in your pole, the more you experience the downside of your pole.
4. In order to gain and maintain the benefits of one pole, you must also pursue the benefits of the other.

5. It is very often the incompleteness combined with the conviction of the rightness (accuracy) of one's perception, which is the source of challenging problems. The "Curse of Knowledge" blinds us so that we forget that the more we know, the more we don't know.
6. Instead of contradicting each other's view, the task is to supplement each other's view in order to see the whole picture.
7. It is easier to expand your own view than it is to get those with an opposing view to expand theirs.
8. The greater the difference in clarity about the content of the two sets of diagonal quadrants, the stronger someone will feel about the "rightness" of their position and the "wrongness" of their opposition.
9. The goal of any crusade for change and new opportunities is to maximize the upsides of each pole while minimizing the downsides. This is the management of polarities.
10. Start by getting yourself clear about their perception of reality rather than starting by trying to convince them of yours.
11. Don't ask anyone to contradict their closely held attachment to their position, but do ask them to become more aware of the other party's position.
12. Those who see the downside of either pole are not negative naysayers. They are the keepers of important knowledge that you need in order to manage away from the downside of each pole. Mine their negativity.
13. Identify triggering events and put alerts in place. As soon as you start to dip toward the downside of a pole a trigger should be set off that alerts you to the dip. Catch it – Check it – Change it. Get back on track.
14. Change happens with a move from the upside to the downside of one pole. Then, a vision for the upside of the other pole is put forth, which then elicits from others information about the downside of that new pole. These naysayers provide important information which will help to manage away from the downside of both poles.
15. The "sweet spot" is the +++, the upside of both poles. In order to make the +++ sweep spot sticky, make it concrete, unexpected, and wrap it in a story.

I'll be adding more lessons to the list above as time moves along.

If you have any questions about how to apply Polarity Management™ shoot me an email. Love to learn together.

