

Managing Polarities Well: A leader's advantage

Polarity Management™ gives leaders the understanding that *few* complex situations are problems to solve while *most* of these challenges are polarities that need to be managed.

Polarity Management™ module, learning objectives:

- Introduce an expanded world view
- Highlight the strengths and limitations of 'either/or' and 'both/and' thinking
- Present the six steps involved in managing polarities well
- Provide the Polarity Map tool and illustrate how it is used
- Apply the methodology and tool for key polarities including: "part and whole" and "change and stability"
- Share the value of maximizing the 'up' sides of each pole while minimizing the 'down' sides of each pole
- Appreciate the natural energy flow that exists between the poles and is illustrated with an infinity loop

The six steps to managing polarities well will be presented, discussed, and applied. They are:

- Step One Define the Difficulty
- Step Two Include Key Stakeholders
- Step Three Map the Polarity
- Step Four Understand How all Polarities work
- Step Five Assess Options, within an Integral framework
- Step Six Determine Action Steps and Early Warnings

Description of Polarity Management™

In our culture we are "springloaded" to define all difficult situations as problems that can be fixed. If we are only smart enough to find the right answer, the problem will go away. But life's experiences tell us that this approach frequently doesn't work - some problems never seem to get *solved*. The truth is, some "problems" are on-going and can *never* be solved in a traditional sense. These are polarities - situations in which *both conflicting points of view are true*.

Polarity Management™ converts intuitive wisdom into strategic action. Intuitively, we know that:

- Leaders need to be conservative for stability **and** revolutionary for change.
- Organizations need centralized coordination **and** decentralized initiatives

- Managers and employees need training **and** must do their work.
- We need to support team development **and** reward individual achievement.
- We need to reduce our costs **and** improve quality.
- All of us are faced with work commitments **and** home commitments.

None of the above are problems to solve by choosing one and neglecting the other. They are what we call polarities (dilemmas, paradoxes) which are inherently unavoidable and unsolvable. The on-going, natural tension between the poles can be destructive and debilitating or can be *managed*, and channeled into a creative synergy that leads to superior outcomes.

Polarity Management™ can significantly reduce the cost of overt and covert resistance to your change efforts. A shift in mindset from seeing all difficulties as problems to solve to a mindset that recognizes some difficulties as polarities to manage is the most powerful change readiness intervention available today. With Polarity Management™, opposition becomes a valued resource.

Those organizations that intuitively manage polarities well out perform those that don't. The real competitive advantage occurs when leaders move from intuitive wisdom about personal and organizational dilemmas to strategic and tactical application of Polarity Management™.

Polarity Management™ provides an organization and its leaders with:

- An ability to distinguish between problems that are inherently solvable and finite, and those which are both unsolvable and unavoidable.
- Enhanced decision-making through supplementing the problem-solving mind set.
- Reduction of wasted time and money spent in non-productive conflict and decisions that will result in "failed fixes". (*The Fifth Discipline*, 1990, Peter Senge).
- Reduction of time-to-market with new strategies and new products.
- Competitive Advantage by utilizing the best thinking from opposing viewpoints. (*Built To Last*, 1994, Collins and Porras).

An example of a Polarity Map follows:

Example: Polarity Map Content

