The Polarity Assessment* for Organizations

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*Polarity Assessment TM by Barry Johnson and Polarity Partnerships
What are Polarities?

Polarities are two equally attractive possibilities that exist in tension with each other such as a “part” (for example a business unit) and a “whole” (for example, the entire organization).

Overemphasis on one pole to the neglect of the other leads to its “downside” and eventually the “upside”, then the “downside” of the other pole.

If not managed well, the polarity cycle is experienced as wild oscillations, leading to wasted time and resources.

Poorly managed polarities lead organizations and individuals to create the future they fear. Well managed polarities help them create the future they desire.

Diagram:

- Positive results from focusing on this left pole:
  1. Freedom
  2. Uniqueness
  3. Initiative of each part
- Positive results from focusing on this right pole:
  1. Equality
  2. Connectedness
  3. Synergy of all parts
- Negative results of over-focusing on this left pole to the neglect of the right pole:
  1. Inequality
  2. Isolation
  3. Lack of coordination
- Negative results of over-focusing on this right pole to the neglect of the left pole:
  1. Over-control
  2. Sameness
  3. Excess Conformity
The Polarity Map

Travel through the upsides and downsides of each pole is represented by the infinity loop.

In a well managed polarity, attention is paid to both poles and maximum time is spent in the upsides of the poles. Balanced, more profitable circumstances, are experienced than in the wildly swinging oscillations that come with neglecting one pole or the other and thus spending more time in the downsides of the poles.

Action steps and early warning signs are used to help manage polarities.
The Polarity Assessment Overall Process

1) Link Polarity Map work to organization’s strategy
2) Design Polarity Assessment so that it fits organization’s unique challenges and opportunities
3) Conduct assessment to learn how organization is currently managing its key polarities
4) Understand assessment results
5) Take action and sustain success
How the Assessment Works

1) Organization creates content for the assessment
2) Computer converts quadrant content into survey
3) Employees and/or stakeholders answer survey questions
4) Computer converts survey answers back into polarity maps and assessment results
Example of Map Content

How to Maintain Customer Service Leadership Over Time

**Action Steps**
How will we gain or maintain the positive results from focusing on the left pole? What? Who? By When? Measures?

A. Have clear and understandable operating policies
B. Use mistakes and errors as learning opportunities, do not ignore failures
C. Reward appropriate behavior
D. Address poor performance

**Early Warnings™**
Measureable indicators (things you can count) that will let you know if you are getting into the downside of the left pole.

A. Decrease in customer compliments about staff creativity in responding to their needs.
B. Increase in staff deferring to management on minor issues.
C. Increased turnover among staff who take initiative

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**Upside**

- **Hold Responsible**
  - We know the limit of our authority.
  - We are encouraged to demonstrate creative problem solving skills.
  - We are quick to take responsibility.
  - We all have authority to solve problems.

- **Give Freedom**
  - We are unaware of any limits on our authority.
  - We are concerned about making poor decisions because of lack of repercussions.
  - We lack a way to gauge our performance levels.

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**Downside**

- **Lack of Ownership**
  - Longer term from lack of balance

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**Upside**

- **Greater Purpose Statement (GPS): Why balance this pole?**
- **Shared Ownership**
  - We know when we are performing appropriately.

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**Downside**

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RMS Map™
Computer Converts Quadrant Content into Survey

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<td>58.</td>
<td>We have customer complaints due to</td>
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<td>59.</td>
<td>We feel confident in making decision</td>
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<td>Our leader is unaware of industry tr</td>
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Graphic by Margaret Seidler Associates, used by permission
Employees and Stakeholders Answer Survey Questions

### Survey Questions: 1-12 of 60

*In recent months within our company, how often have you experienced the following? ...*

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<td>2. We lack the ability and confidence to apply policies.</td>
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<td>4. We spend too much time on solving “trivial” problems.</td>
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<td>5. Capital spending is aligned with customer service needs.</td>
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<td>6. We lack confidence in making decisions; feel our ideas don’t count.</td>
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<td>7. We have the ability and confidence to do our jobs well.</td>
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<td>8. We are unaware of any limits on our authority.</td>
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<td>9. We do our work with a focus on customer needs.</td>
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<td>10. We have customer complaints due to failures in equipment or facilities.</td>
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<td>11. We feel confident in making decisions, feel valued.</td>
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<td>12. Our leader is unaware of industry trends and developments.</td>
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Computer Collects Open Ended Feedback

Feedback & Open-Ended Questions
Please make additional comments related to any of the above questions or your organizational context & climate that you believe are significant and relevant.

My insightful comments ...
Computer Converts Survey Answers Back to Original Polarity Maps
Example of Results
Managing for Shared Ownership Extremely Well
Example of Results
Managing for Shared Ownership Somewhat Poorly
Computer Provides Comparative Management Information

Breakdown by questions

Unlimited demographic comparisons between groups
Clients revisit action steps and early warnings based on results

- **Action Steps**
  1. Assess the long term impact of any decision we're making
  2. Design our compensation policies to reflect achieving long term goals
  3. Clearly define and regularly measure progress toward achieving our long term goals

- **Early Warnings**
Thank You

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