

# Engaging Polarities – Self as Instrument

By Abigail Lynam

What if, through more conscious engagement of polarities, we could not just bridge differences, but invite a space in which individual differences and discernment co-arise within an inclusive and compassionate embrace?

“Everything that manifests which one can describe or characterize, manifests in polarities. If there is an out breath there is an in breath. If there is desire there is aversion” ~ John Kesler

“Polarities are interdependent pairs that support a common purpose and one another. They are energy systems within which we live and work” ~Barry Johnson

## Polarities

- They are everywhere
- They go disguised as problems
- Supports re-interpreting conflict
- Dynamic energy systems

## The Life of a Polarity

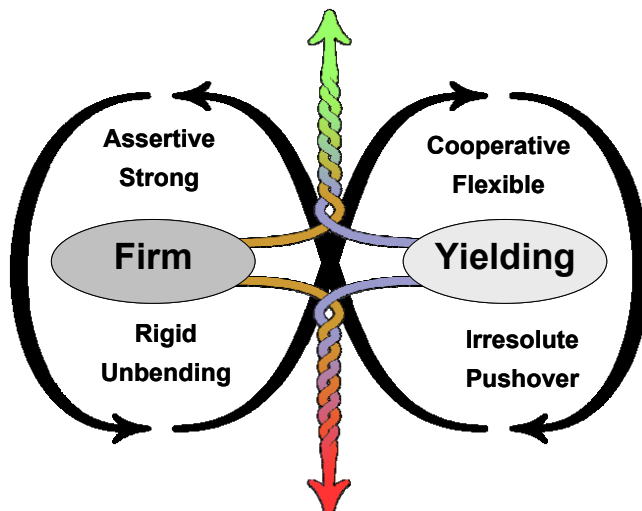
- No-choice
- Either/Or - Choice
- Polarity - Both/And
- Paradox - One within the other
- Unity – Still Point

## Examples of Polarities

- Expansion/Contraction
- Change/Stability
- Liberal/Conservative
- Agency/Communion
- Activity/Rest

## Resources:

- Institute for Cultural Evolution’s Depolarizing the American Mind <http://www.culturalevolution.org>
- Daniel Kemmis’ Philanthropy and the Renewal of Democracy.
- Barry Johnson’s Polarity Management <http://www.polaritypartnerships.com>
- John Kesler’s Integral Polarity Practice <https://theippinstitute.com>



## Both/And - Moving from Problem to Polarity

Most change efforts are more effectively seen as part of a polarity loop.

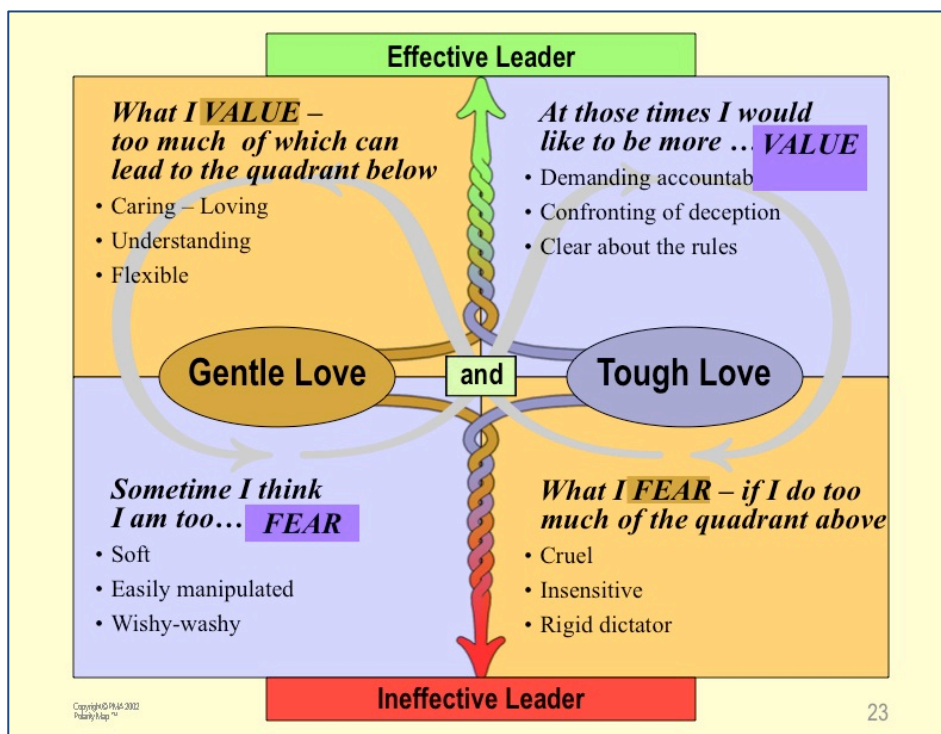
- The polarity will be: Unavoidable, Unsolvable, Indestructible (But can be managed and transcended.)
- Treating a polarity as if it were a problem to solve:
  - Reduces the attainability
  - Slows down the process by increasing resistance
  - Even if the resistance is overcome, the goal of the change is inherently unsustainable
- Treating the change as part of a polarity increases: Attainability, Speed, Sustainability
- Tying your change effort to a polarity increases sustainability because polarities are indestructible.
- Because polarities are unavoidable, unsolvable and indestructible, any polarity that you identify will be relevant for the rest of the organization's life and will have been managed in some form since the organization began.

## Problem to Solve vs. Polarity to Adapt to

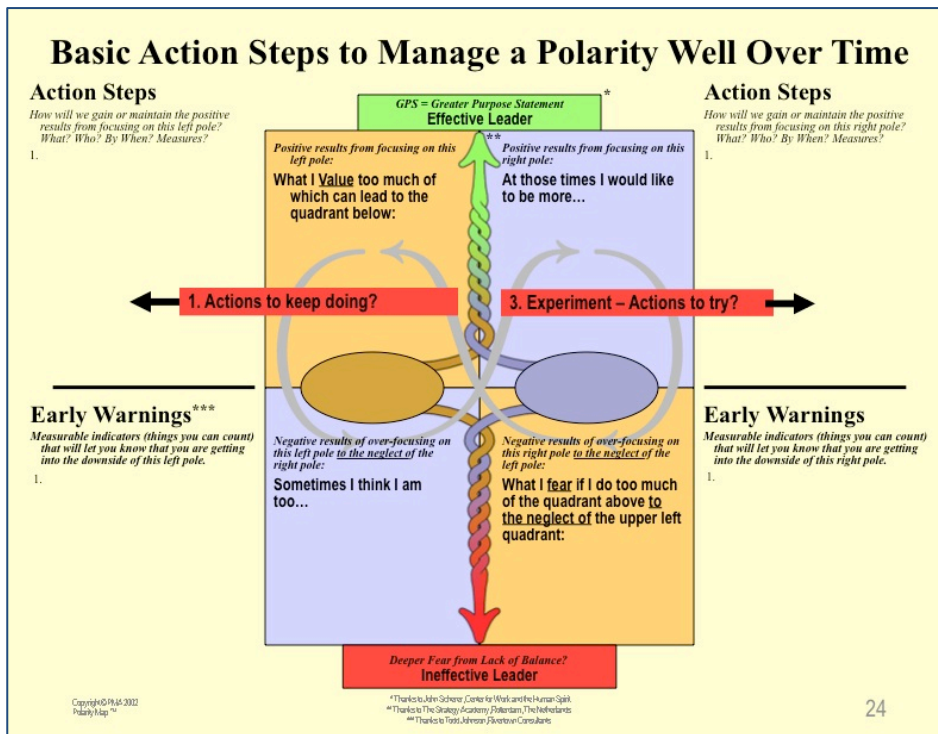
The criteria for identifying a polarity are:

- Is the issue ongoing – like breathing?
- Do you need both poles over time?

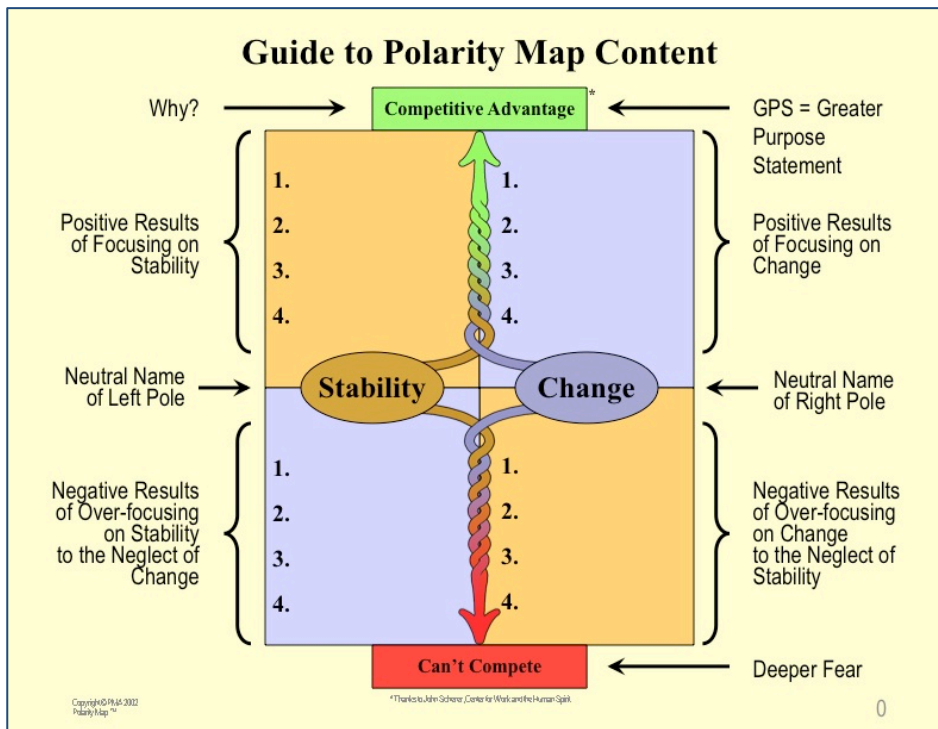
When naming polarities, you should look for inter-dependent opposites. Each pole should be neutral – neither negative nor positive. For example, stability/change, rather than order/chaos. When the poles seem to have a negative or positive connotation, you are probably naming the upside or downside of the actual pole.

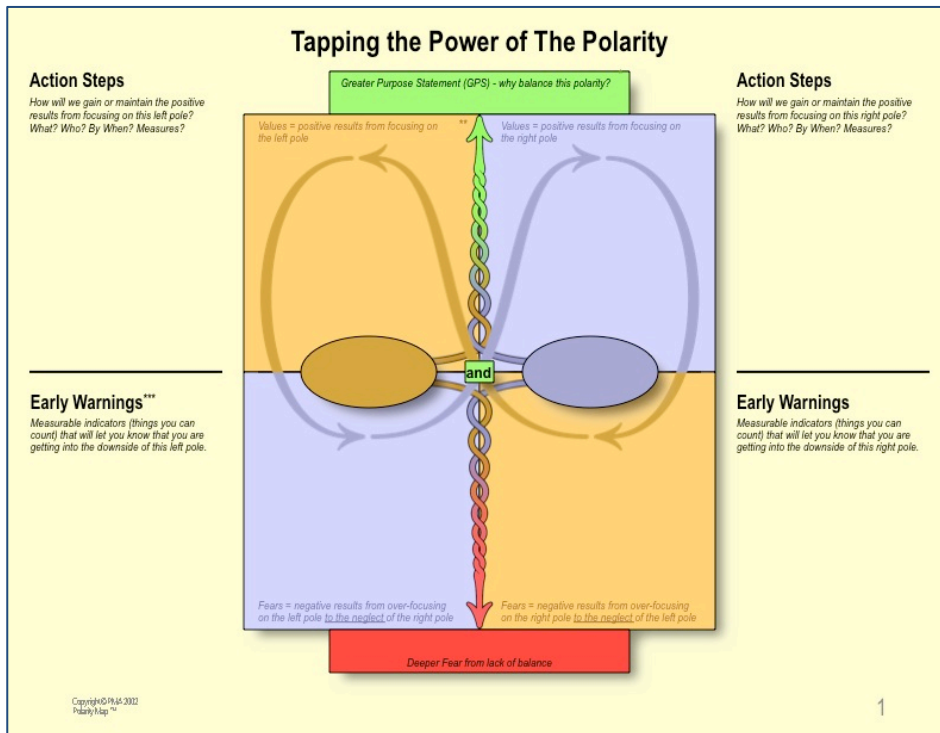


## Working with a Polarity over Time



## Adapting with Polarities using the Polarity Map





## Both/And - Bringing the Polarity Inside

- You have both poles in you (or within your group)
- Notice feelings, thoughts, projections you have about each part of the polarity map
- Inquire as a group, inquire as to how might you be fixating on different parts of the map or what unexamined expectations you have of yourselves or each other
- In committing to taking on the health of the whole polarity, commit to an ongoing reflection.

## Paradox

- Explore how one side of the pole arises from and with the other
- How does one side require the other for its existence?
- How is one of benefit to the other?
- How in some sense are both true and opposite simultaneously?

## Unity / Co-existence

- Hold both within yourself with your breath
- From a place of quiet, feel the still point that holds both poles
- Let go of the energy of difference and the minds need to resolve the poles
- Does the still point have a quality?

**Effective** \_\_\_\_\_

What I value - too much of which  
can lead to the situation below...

At those times I would like to be more...

4

2

1

3

Sometimes I think I am too...

What I fear, if I do too much of the above...

**Ineffective** \_\_\_\_\_