

## Leveraging Polarities

*This packet is designed to support groups working through concepts related to leveraging polarities as part of an investigating into how to use both/and thinking. The information is derived from a presentation delivered by Beth Applegate, Chandra Irvin, and Heidi Kim at the White Privilege Conference in 2016 that was built upon the work of Barry Johnson. Shelly Tochluk modified the information for use within the Living in the Tension workshop series.*

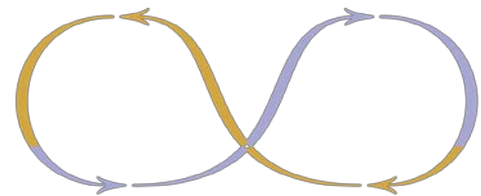
Polarities have always existed. But, it was in 1975 that Barry Johnson began developing the Polarity Map™ to leverage polarities. It identified key principles to describe how polarity energy systems work. In 1992, the book “*Polarity Management: How to Identify and Manage Unsolvable Problems*” was published. In 2012, Polarity Partnerships LLC was founded, which has introduced the Polarity Approach for Continuity and Transformation (PACT™) to systematically leverage polarities for leaders, teams, and large organizations.

### What are Polarities?

Polarities are ongoing, interdependent pairs which need each other over time in order to achieve a greater purpose.

They are energy systems that are:

1. Unavoidable
2. Unsolvable
3. Indestructible
4. Unstoppable
5. Free
6. Leverage-able



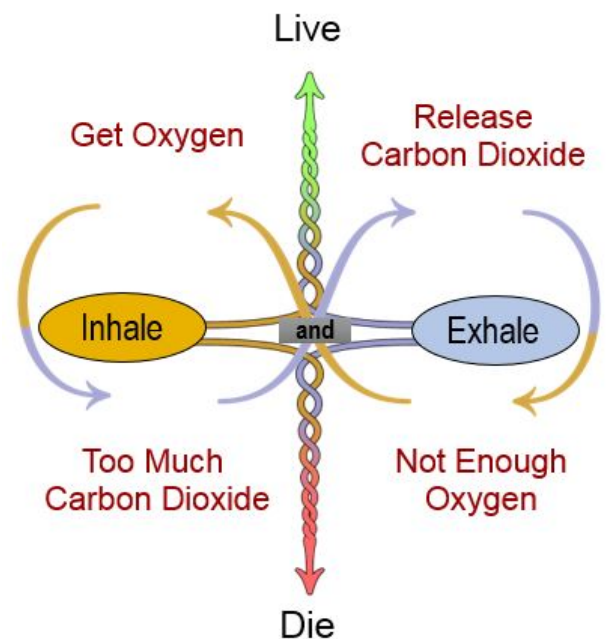
They work in a predictable way.

### What do you mean, they are interdependent?

There is inherent wisdom in each pole. You can't do one forever without significant consequences.

### How do I know it's really a polarity, and not just a problem that needs to be solved?

1. The difficulty is ongoing, like breathing.
2. There are two alternatives that both require eventual attention.
3. It is necessary, over time, to identify the upsides of each pole.
4. Focusing on one upside to the neglect of the other eventually undermines your efforts to move toward your higher purpose.

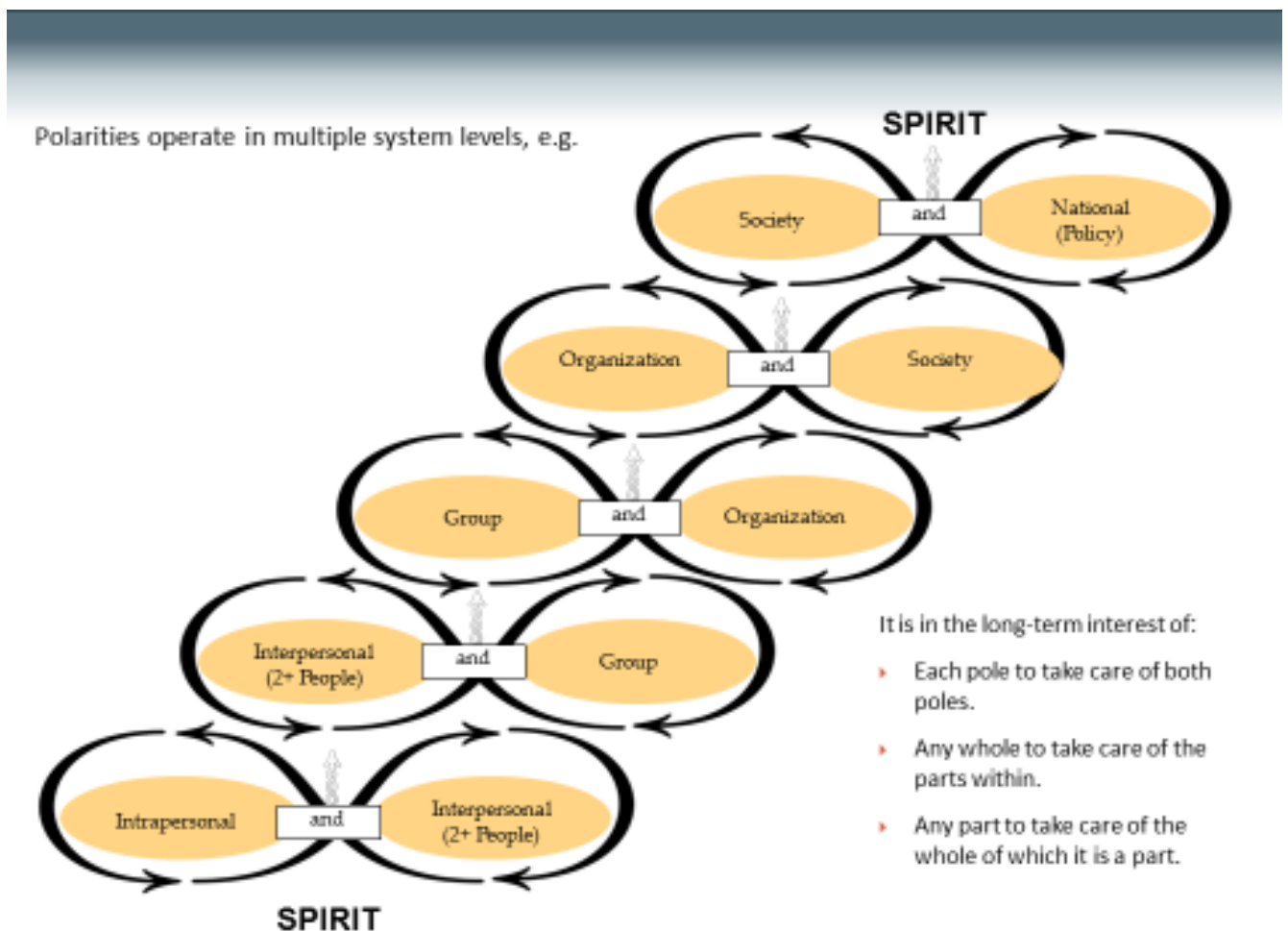


**What are some examples of problems versus polarities?**

Problem to be Solved	Polarities to be Leveraged
Who should be the leader?	Individual and Team
What action should the group take next?	Structure and Flexibility
Should we change our hiring policies?	Work and Home

**Are polarities experienced only within individuals?**

No. Polarities exist anytime there are ongoing competing interests. The image below indicates the various ways that polarities operate within systems.



**How can we work with polarities?**

We can begin by considering a tension we experience and asking ourselves two core questions:

1. What is my greater purpose?
2. What is my deeper fear?

The image below provides an example. The polarity is the tension between making the choice to spend time *reflecting* versus *taking action*. Notice the top line indicates a greater purpose of working for racial justice so that all can thrive. At the bottom, the deeper fear is that ineffectiveness will bring collective demise.

Look closely at each of the four quadrants. The upper two quadrants are the positive results that arise if we give attention to each of the poles. This is what we'd like to leverage. The lower two quadrants are the negative results if we over focus on one of the poles to the exclusion of the other. This is what we'd like to avoid. In other words, there are positive and negatives that exist for each pole. Leveraging the positive requires us to avoid neglecting either pole.

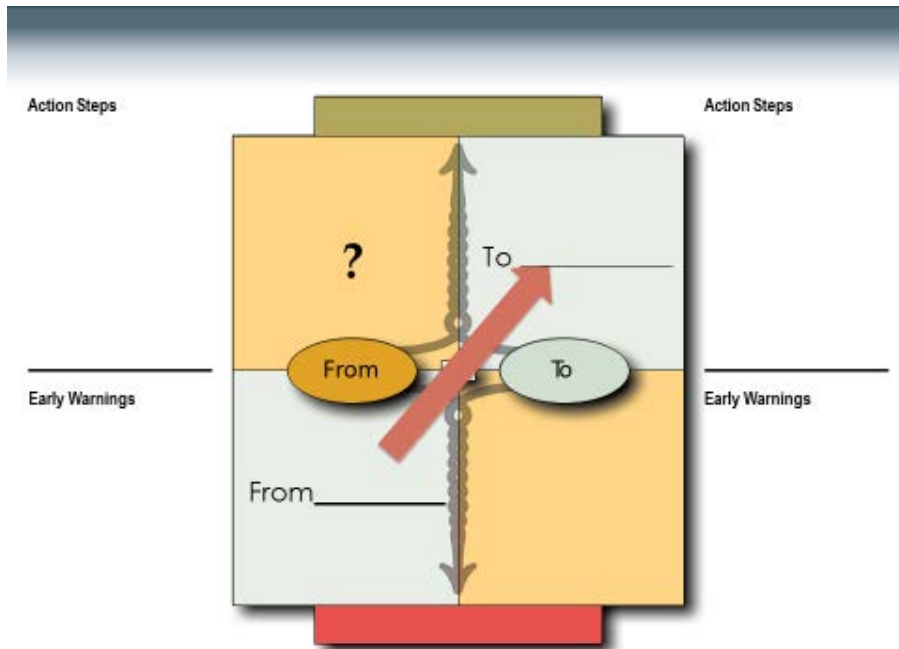


**Pause to consider what you might include within the four quadrants of the Reflecting/Taking Action polarity.**

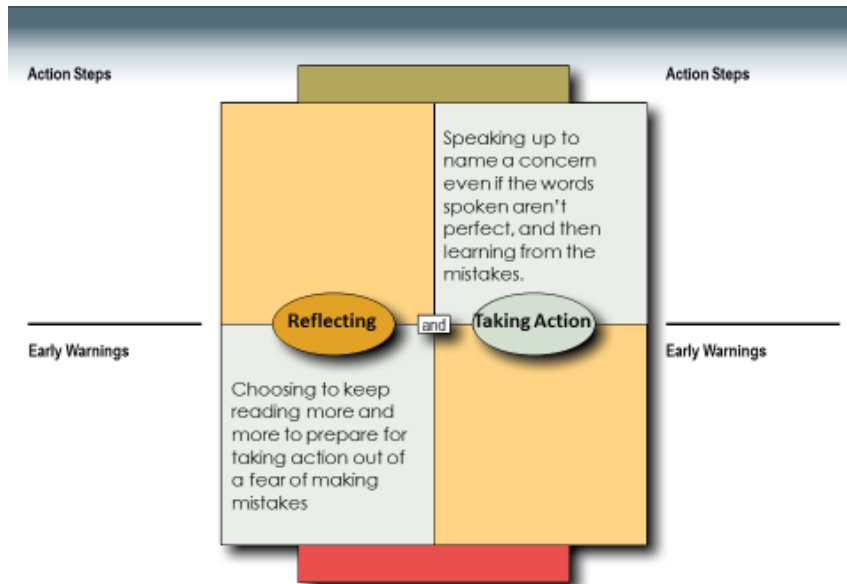
Positive results of focusing on the left pole 1. 2. 3.	Positive results of focusing on the right pole 1. 2. 3.
Negative results of over focusing on left pole 1. 2. 3.	Negative results of over focusing on right pole 1. 2. 3.

**How can this help us leverage the positive results?**

As we work with our polarities, we are attempting to move toward our purpose statement and away from our greatest fear. So, we need to consider what the **early warning signals** might be that can tell us that we are focusing too much on one side of the polarity. We can then implement the needed action steps to move the energy flow into the direction needed, which means shifting our focus toward the positive quadrant of the other pole (see graphic below).



For example...



**Pause to consider:**

What are the warning signs that we're over-focusing on one pole?

- Is there a feeling that alerts us?
- How do we know it's a warning sign?

How do we move energy from the "over-focused pole" into action towards our higher purpose?

Select one of the polarities from the table below and create your own Positive Results, Negative Results, Action Steps and Early Warnings on the map.

Set 1	Self-Directed <i>My inner Self is my guide for personal growth.</i>	and	Take Guidance <i>Feedback from others is essential for my personal growth.</i>
Set 2	Value Individual Dignity <i>I am accountable to myself.</i>	and	Respect Interdependence <i>I am accountable to my community.</i>
Set 3	Personal Agency <i>All people have personal agency in how they react to life circumstances.</i>	and	Systemic Barriers <i>My values require me to work to end systematic oppression.</i>
Set 4	Reflecting <i>Ensuring I understand how privilege affects my life is necessary.</i>	and	Taking Action <i>Taking action against injustice is necessary.</i>

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**Additional Resource:** Managing Polarities in Congregations: Eight Keys for Thriving Faith Communities, R. Oswald & B. Johnson Living in the Tension Workshop Series --- shellytochluk.com – For use with Book Chapter 3