

## 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

### IT SUCKS TO BE STUCK!

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

Should you be efficient or innovative?

Sell or build?

Focus on the family or the business?

Spend or save?

Do it now or later?

The list goes on and on. Sometimes the answer is black and white. Sometimes the answer seems to be illusive.

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.

### 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.



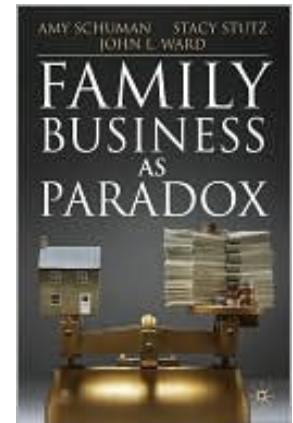
5. Don Beck and Spiral Dynamics. *Enlightennext* is a magazine that I’ve read since its inception in the early 90’s. This article is the most succinct presentation of SD that I am aware of. Here are two fundamental questions: First, “What meme level is your center?” Second, “In what meme level are they 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 7<sup>th</sup> one down. [http://www.giga-usa.com/quotes/topics/problems\\_t001.htm](http://www.giga-usa.com/quotes/topics/problems_t001.htm)
7. The management of polarities begins at the Green meme, and continues on to Second Tier Yellow.
8. One set of polarities, of paradoxes, that have captured my attention for decades have been those captured in “The Beatitudes” as they are found in the Sermon on the Mount in the New Testament book of Matthew, Chapter 5. Each, like a Zen koan, pushes one to expand consciousness.
  - Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (*Verse 3*)
  - Blessed are the meek: for they shall possess the land. (*Verse 4*)
  - Blessed are they who mourn: for they shall be comforted. (*Verse 5*)
  - Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall have their fill. (*Verse 6*)
  - Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. (*Verse 7*)
  - Blessed are the clean of heart: for they shall see God. (*Verse 8*)
  - Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. (*Verse 9*)
  - Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (*Verse 10*)

9. 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.”



10. “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.
11. 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.***

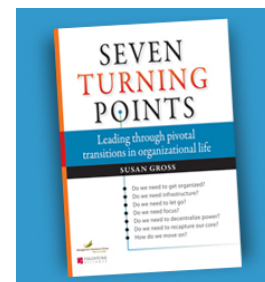
***To get along and get ahead,  
you must become agile enough to manage polarities.***

## **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:

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



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

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

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

| <b>Problem to be solved</b>                                     | <b>Decision Type</b> | <b>Polarity Within The Problem</b> |
|---|----------------------|------------------------------------|
| 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 trusts or owned outright?               | Choose               | Fixed <i>and</i> Flexible          |
| 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"> <li>Family employment policy –which family members can be employed; conditions of same.</li> <li>Helping family members in need –how the family intends to support members, both financially and non-financially.</li> </ul> |
| Management - Ownership | Rules              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shareholders agreement – who can own stock, how it will be valued.</li> <li>Estate plans – how and when ownership will be transferred.</li> </ul>  |
| Family – Ownership     | Values and Vision  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Family values statement – guiding principles to shape decisions and actions.</li> <li>Family vision statement – inspiring picture of what family will create together.</li> </ul>  |

## A CONTINUUM FOR ADDRESSING PROBLEMS AND POLARITIES

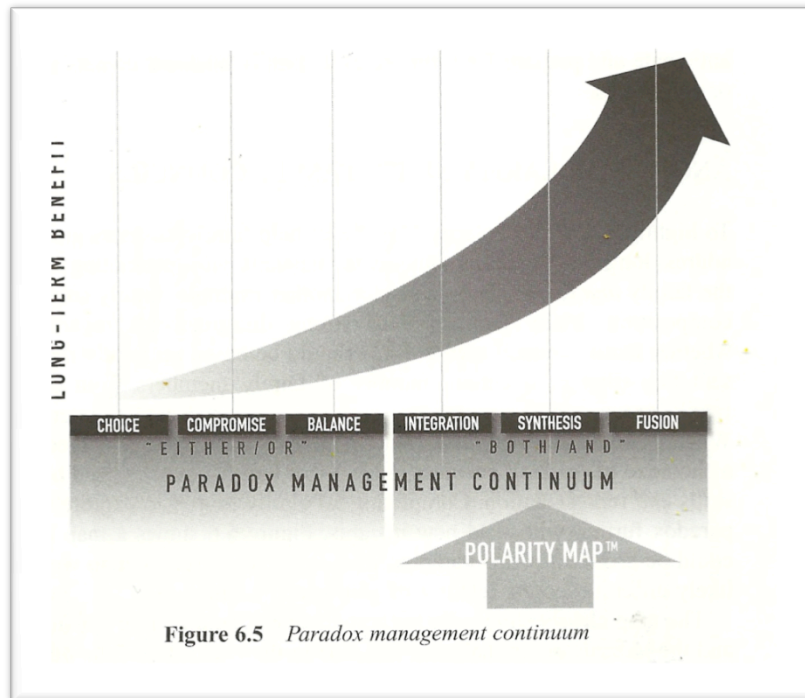
Again, I'm borrowing from the book *Family Business as Paradox*.

**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.

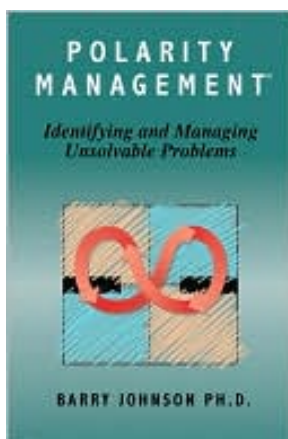
**Both/And Polarity Management™** – Implicit is a decision that will have longer-term benefits.

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.



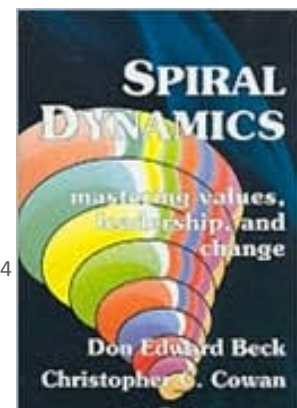
(Figure 6.5, page 129, FBAP)

## OUR OWN POLARITY GURU – DR. BARRY JOHNSON



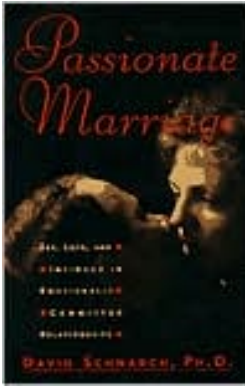
I first heard about Polarity Management™ and Barry’s work back in the early 1990’s while working at the Fountain Hill Center. **Barry is from Grand Rapids.** Those of who worked with couples in Marriage Counseling were very excited about Polarity Management™. We had great hope for its usefulness in helping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

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



Rev. Dr. Andrew D. Atwood, LMFT  
801 Broadway Avenue, Suite 436, Grand Rapids, MI, 49504  
Voice 616-901-9816 Email andy@andyatwood.com

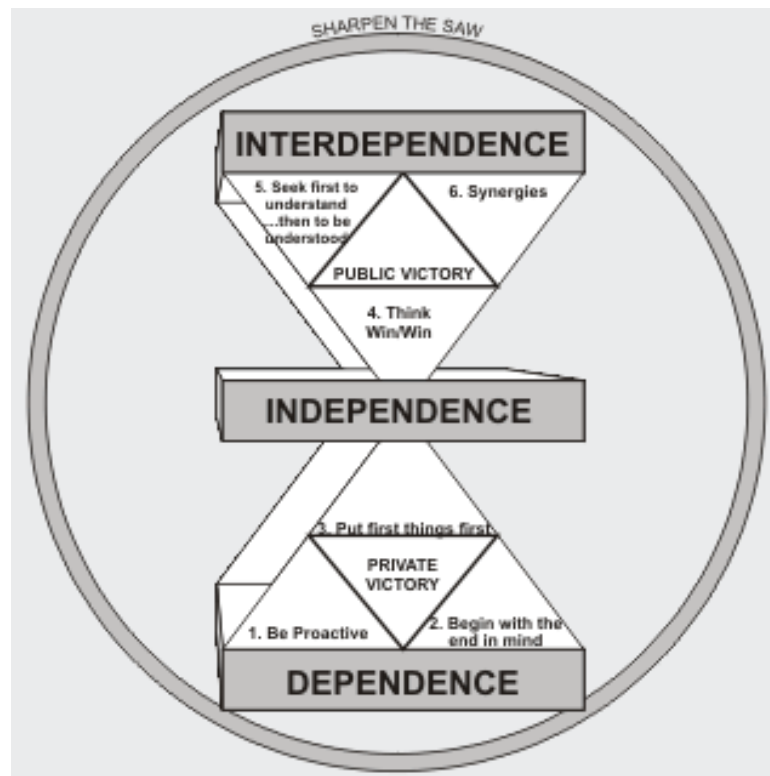
Here is the important insight that I had. Couples that functioned at an unstable Orange meme, or below, couldn't use Polarity Management™. However, if they could stabilize at Orange, then they could. People only move up one-half-step at a time.



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.



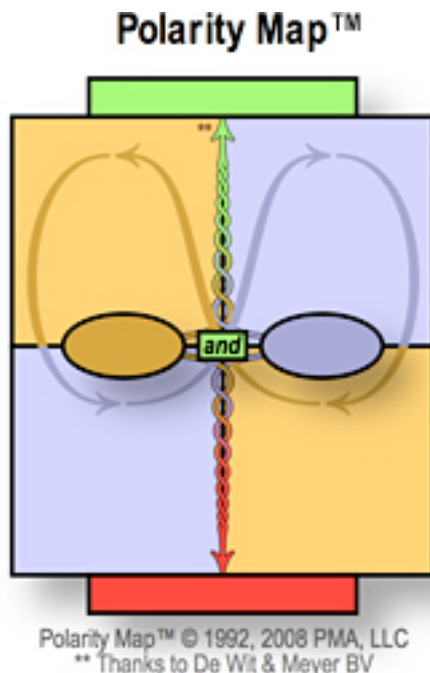
**Now, it all started to come together!**

**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™.

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. 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™