Polarity Thinking: An Innovative Strategy to Advance Leadership Teams, Education, and Improve Practice

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Educating students to shape their lives, their professions, and their societies.
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Unsolvable Problems in Healthcare: An Introduction to Polarities
Introduction & Background

Tensions in healthcare globally

• World Health Organization 10 threats \(^1\)
• Lack of preparedness \(^2\)
• Health Policy
• Delivery Systems
• Roles & Entry level/Scope of Practice
• Culture
• Quality
Common Themes

- Complex
- No one simple answer
- Significant impact
- Multiple points of view
What do you see?
Historical Perspective

- Ardhanari from Hindu tradition 5000 + years ago
- Yin & Yang from Taoism 2,500 years ago
More Recent Thinking

- “And” thinking
- Paradox, dilemma, tension
- Competitive edge
- Effective leaders
- Interconnectedness
- Getting “Unstuck”
“NO PROBLEM CAN BE SOLVED FROM THE SAME LEVEL OF CONSCIOUSNESS THAT CREATED IT.”

ALBERT EINSTEIN
If you change the way you look at things the things you look at change.

Dr Wayne W Dyer
Problem Solving 4,8

- A situation, person, or thing that needs attention and needs to be dealt with or solved
- A question in mathematics that needs an answer

(Cambridge Dictionary)
What is a Polarity? ⁵, ⁶

• Interdependent values or points of view
• One is not more important or valuable than the other
• Each appears different or opposite but needs each other over time to reach outcomes neither can reach alone (to achieve a greater purpose!)
Problem or Polarity? 6

**Problem to solve**
- Not ongoing, end point
- Solvable
- Independent alternatives
- Contain mutually exclusive opposites (yes/no, now/later, here/there)

**Polarity to manage**
- Ongoing, no end point
- Not solvable
- Interdependent alternatives
- Contain mutually inclusive opposites (individual and team, compete and collaborate, work life and home life)
Practice

• Should we implement a clean water initiative?
• How should we address the pollution issues?
• Should we focus on patients or staff to improve satisfaction?
• What issues are you facing?
References


Image References


Slide 10: [Untitled image of Albert Einstein and quote]. Retrieved June 8, 2019 from https://i.pinimg.com/originals/4c/55/a2/4c55a22cc15a374dfa25347218584be9.png


Polarity Mapping: A Tool to Advance Leadership and Educational Teams

WHAT ARE POLARITIES?

Polarities are interdependent pairs that support a common purpose and one another. They are energy systems in which we live and work.
Polarity Thinking and Management

• What are the issues that keep you up at night?
• How do people typically approach these issues?
• Why do so many change initiatives fail or issues reoccur?
Common Polarities in Leadership

- Directive
- Visionary
- Teamwork
- Task focus
- Stability

- Participative
- Realist
- Individual work
- Relationship focus
- Change
Common Polarities in Education

- Educator satisfaction
- Traditional methods
- Theory - knowing
- Competition
- Profession centric

+  

- Student satisfaction
- Innovative methods
- Reality - doing
- Collaboration
- Interprofessional centric
Neutral values

Greater purpose statement

Virtuous cycle

Positive results of focusing on left pole

Positive results of focusing on right pole

Vicious cycle

Negative results of over focus on left pole

Negative results of over focus on right pole

Infinity loop

Greater fear

Specific steps to keep positive results

Specific steps to keep positive results

Specific signs of negative results

Specific signs of negative results
A Simple Metaphor
Action Steps
How will we gain or maintain the positive results from focusing on this left pole?
1. Establish clear tasks, quality standards and deadlines for completion.
2. Meet weekly with team members to be sure everyone understands what they are expected to do, when and how.
3. Reward employees for quality performance delivered in a timely manner.
4. Measure how well employees

Early Warnings
Measurable indicators (things you can count) that will let you know you are getting the downside of this left pole.
1. People resist supporting one another.
2. People won’t ask coworkers for help when they need it.
3. People say they are not interested in participating in team building or company social events.

Greater Purpose Statement (GPS) - why balance this polarity?
Thriving Workplace

Values = positive results from focusing on the left pole
A. People focus on the work at hand.
B. People get their own job done well.
C. We are good at identifying conflicts that arise.
D.

Values = positive results from focusing on the right pole
A. People care about each other.
B. People help each other get the job done well.
C. We trust each other to work through conflicts that arise.
D.

Tasks
A. People pay little attention to each other.
B. People are left to get their work done on their own without support from others.
C. People steer clear of working through difficult issues.
D.

Relationships
A. How we treat people gets in the way of getting work done.
B. People do a poor job of getting their own work done well.
C. We avoid identifying difficult issues.
D.

Fear = negative results from over-focusing on the left pole to the neglect of the right pole

Dysfunctional Workplace
Deeper Fear from lack of balance

Action Steps
How will we gain or maintain the positive results from focusing on this right pole?
1. Sponsor events for people to get to know one another.
2. Provide team building events twice a year.
3. Measure how well employees "build and maintain healthy work relationships" on performance reviews.
4. Reward employees for developing and maintaining healthy working relationships.

Early Warnings
Measurable indicators (things you can count) that will let you know you are getting the downside of this right pole.
1. Employees say they don’t know what they are expected to do.
2. Performance numbers start to decline.
3. When asked, employees cannot articulate how well they are performing against goals and objectives.
4.
Five Step Process: Think SMALL to go Big!

- Seeing
- Mapping
- Assessing
- Learning
- Leveraging
References


Evidence-Based Practices:
Polarity Thinking in Practice
Where is Polarity Thinking Used?

- Education
- Law Enforcement
- Healthcare
- Religious congregations
- Leadership
- Organizations
- Schools
- Communities
Why is Polarity Thinking Needed?

• To get unstuck
• To manage change
  – “If you want to guarantee the failure of a change effort, tie it to one pole of a polarity. If you want success, tie it to both poles of a polarity.” Barry Johnson
• Promote your mission, vision and values
• Motivate team members
How is Polarity Thinking Implemented?

• Identify the polarity, “seeing is relieving”
• Acknowledge bias, “embrace your opposite”
• Honest dialogue, “there is wisdom in resistance”
• Informed decisions, “go slow to go fast”
Culture of Healthy Teams

• Shared Purpose
• Dialogue
• Relationships
• Scope of Practice/Service
• Competency & Integrated Competency
• Infrastructure & Networking Councils
• Tools & Resources
Implications

- Academia
- Research framework
- Leadership functions
- Teamwork
- Practice issues
- Collaborations
- Policy
Resources for Polarity Management

• Polarity Partnerships http://www.polaritypartnerships.com
• Bert Parlee PhD http://bertparlee.com/training/polarity-management/
• Center for Creative Leadership https://www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/are-you-facing-a-problem-or-a-polarity/
• The Bonnie Wesorick Center for Healthcare Transformation https://www.gvsu.edu/wesorick/
• The Power of Polarities: Shoshana Boyd Gelfand at TEDxJerusalem https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jqd4-eemoAw
• UX Mastery The Joys of Polarity Mapping https://uxmastery.com/the-joys-of-polarity-mapping/
• Dr. Barry Johnson Linked In Profile (Creator of Polarity Maps and Principles) https://www.linkedin.com/in/barry-johnson-32871056/
• Polarity Thinking by Jay Roth https://www.livebinders.com/play/play?id=1241861#anchor
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