

**Title:**

Evidence-Based Practices: Polarity Thinking in Practice

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**Session Title:**

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

**Keywords:**

Leadership development, Polarity thinking and conflict resolution

**References:**

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*Interprofessional Institute for Polarity Thinking in Healthcare.* Allendale, Michigan: Grand Valley State University.

Johnson, B. (1996). *Polarity management, identifying and managing unsolvable problems.* Amherst,

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Wesorick, B. (2016). *Polarity thinking in healthcare: The missing logic to achieve transformation.* Amherst, Massachusetts: HRD

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Wesorick, B., & Shaha, S. (2015). Guiding health care transformation: A next-generation, diagnostic remediation tool for

leveraging polarities. *Nursing Outlook,* 63, 691-

702. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.outlook.2015.05.007>

**Abstract Summary:**

This presentation will expand on the concept of polarity thinking, the tool of polarity mapping and provide examples of how and where these are effectively being used in practice.

**Content Outline:**

I. Polarity thinking, an evidenced based practice for leaders and teams

a. Types of teams and organizations

- b. Support and resources
- II. High performing team dynamics
  - a. Getting unstuck
  - b. Leveraging the poles
- III. Implications for future practice
  - a. Stacked polarities
  - b. New frontiers for research and practice

**Topic Selection:**

Polarity Thinking: An Innovative Strategy to Advance Leadership Teams, Education, and Improve Practice (25473)

**Abstract Text:**

**Purpose:** The purpose of this session is to discuss the value of and implications for practice in polarity thinking and the tools that help high performing leaders and teams manage the wicked problems facing organizations. Examples of use in practice, current resources and support, high performing team dynamics and implications for future practice will be considered.

**Methods:** This presentation will focus on providing examples of where polarity thinking frameworks and tools are being used and how they help move teams from “stuck” to getting “unstuck,” and leveraging the upsides of polarizing issues. The current organizations providing support and resources in polarity thinking will be considered. Examples of polarity maps of common polarizing issues will be explored and discussed as well as how teams become more effective when carefully managing action steps and early warning signs.

**Results:** Polarity thinking, developed by Dr. Barry Johnson (1996), is a framework for managing the ongoing unsolvable problems in groups of people. Each side or pole of the issue has merit, or an upside, but how can leaders and teams achieve the greater purpose that neither side can reach alone (The Bonnie Wesorick Center for Health Care Transformation, 2017). Arnold (2017) describes this concept of polarization as a “healthy tension,” which when effectively managed, can be a positive tool to move past ongoing, unsolvable problems. This concept is also known in the literature as “the missing link or logic,” which Wesorick (2016) described in her struggle to understand why so many issues reoccur in health care despite numerous paradigm shifts, intelligent and capable thinkers, and advances in research and technology. Change efforts which attempt to “fix” problems in health care, such as cost and quality, have not been able to produce sustainable gains (Wesorick & Shaha, 2015). There is always tension between the part and whole or individual and team. Effective teams possess qualities of listening to all voices, utilizing the strengths of each member, and valuing even the small opposing voice. Polarity thinking and management practices and tools are being effectively used in various practices. Religious organizations, health systems, educational organizations, and business teams have all successfully applied the concepts of polarity thinking to manage polarizing issues, reconcile differences, and become more effective in their respective industries.

**Conclusion:** This session will provide information, resources and examples of how this tool can advance leadership, improve education and practice outcomes. In addition, consideration of advanced concepts in polarity thinking and ongoing and future implications for practice and research will be discussed.