Managing Polarities in Pursuit of Quality

USE POLARITY MANAGEMENT TO APPLY A DIFFERENT WAY OF SEEING, THINKING AND COMMUNICATING IN A COMPLEX WORLD.

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Process of Polarity Management

Today, we will:

1. Define polarities, share examples
2. Review the dynamic pattern of polarities, particularly when badly managed
3. Outline the steps for managing a polarity well over time
4. Apply the polarity management model as a communication and conflict resolution tool

*This information is based on work by Polarity Management Associates (www.polaritymanagement.com) and Barry Johnson in particular.
What is a Polarity?

- Sets of opposites which are interdependent
- A paradox, dilemma, set of tensions, or points of view
A Polarity Map
**A Polarity Map**

- Easier to support and service
- Less cost to customers
- Can influence best practices
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- Customers have more choices
- Increased revenue potential
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- Product value may quickly decrease
- Developers may become bored and leave
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- Takes longer to design, test and release
- Cost is prohibitive for some customers
A Polarity Map

**Success**

- Easier to support and service
- Less cost to customers
- Can influence best practices

**Failure**

- Customers’ specific needs not met
- Product value may quickly decrease
- Designers may become bored and leave

**Uniformity**

- More difficult to support
- Takes longer to design, test and release
- Cost is prohibitive for some customers

**Customization**

- Customers have more choices
- Increased revenue potential
- More fun to design
Badly Managed Polarities

Time to release

Quality

1
Badly Managed Polarities

Time to release

Quality

2
Badly Managed Polarities

Time to release

Quality

3
Badly Managed Polarities

Time to release

Quality

4
Badly Managed Polarities

Unconscious and in reaction to the situation
## Problem or Polarity?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem:</th>
<th>Polarity:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Endpoint to the situation</td>
<td>- No endpoint</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Alternatives are independent</td>
<td>- Interdependent alternatives</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Either/or decision making process</td>
<td>- Both/and</td>
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<td>- Continuum</td>
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Examples of Polarities

- Uniformity and customization
- Stability and change
- Advocacy and inquiry
- Details and big picture
- Task and relationship
- Structure and flexibility
- Quality and time to release
- Cost and quality
- Part and whole
Steps to Managing A Polarity

1. Identify the situation/polarity you want to manage better.

2. Map the polarity
   - Use value-neutral words for the poles
   - Identify the critical upsides and downsides for each pole
   - Identify where you are right now, based on the behaviors or impacts showing up. How are you out of balance?
   - Identify the higher purpose and deeper fear. Why does this matter?

3. Identify action items to help you manage the polarity and experience the upsides of both poles. Think SMART goals.

4. Identify critical warning signs. Be specific.
Communication and Conflict

The people in charge don’t appreciate us and how important it is to complete thorough testing protocols.

Software should be released 100% free of defects!

We’re going to start using a different methodology for our design and testing.
Communication and Conflict

Recognition and use of polarities can help:
- Explain the polarized viewpoints
- Clarify what each side values about their perspective
- Clarify what each side fears about the other’s perspective
- I.d. the common purpose and common deeper fear that can bring both sides together
Values and Fears

**You value:**
- Accurate scoping
- Know what to expect, clear direction
- Resource adequately

**You fear:**
- Surprises
- Wasted resources
- Scope creep
- Plans not implemented
Values and Fears

The other values:
- Responsiveness
- Creativity
- Strong customer collaboration

The other fears:
- Lack of openness to customer requirements
- Not choosing the best solution
- Takes too long
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How to Communicate Polarities

1. Use for yourself, to increase your own awareness and understanding in how you communicate with others.
   - *I understand how you might be worried that ‘x’ could result in ‘y.’ Let’s talk about how we might minimize the risks of that occurring.*

2. Use as a sales tool for influence and persuasion.
   - *Here’s where I think both our views actually support the same goal and can work together.*

3. Use within a team or between teams.
   - *We seem to be on different sides. Let’s explore each others’ views and concerns, and see if there is a way for both of us to get our needs met.*
Going Forward

- Recognize the oscillation of badly managed polarities. Awareness creates choice!
- Get unstuck when caught between conflicting choices or polarities.
- Increase your understanding of what causes resistance and how to approach communication and change efforts in more open and engaging ways.
- Create dialogue with others about what is important and why, in order to reduce conflict and create momentum towards shared goals.
Potential next steps:
- Read paper #82, pg. 175 (includes references and a blank polarity map)
- Talk with me over my poster paper or contact me separately (Denise Holmes, denise@edge-leadership.com)
- Check out an upcoming workshop, Nov. 10th, “Leadership Between the Rock and the Hard Place: Managing Common Leadership Dilemmas”