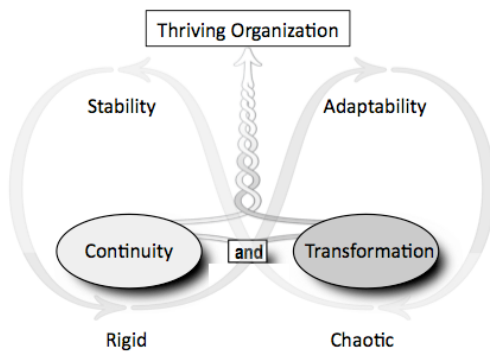


Leveraging Polarities – For Our: Selves, Organizations, Countries, and Planet
Barry Johnson

Polarities are energy pairs we can leverage in order to achieve our preferred future faster with greater sustainability. We live in them and they live in us. We live in organizational polarities. They often show up as tough decisions or tensions: Should we centralize for system integration or decentralize to support entrepreneurial initiative? Should we preserve our core traditions or go after innovation? Also, leadership polarities live within us: Should we be clear or flexible? Should we be grounded or visionary?

With polarities, the answer is that we need both. To be effective with polarities, we need to use “AND” in our thinking. We need to leverage the benefits of centralization AND decentralization. When we use “OR” thinking to “solve” a polarity, we get in trouble. We are less likely to achieve the results we want. If we do get those results, it will be slower than necessary and will not be sustainable. Polarities are unavoidable, unsolvable, indestructible and unstoppable. This set of realities could be a bit troublesome except for two other realities of all polarities: They are free and can be leveraged.

For example, all organizations are in the polarity of Continuity and Transformation. We need both in order to be a Thriving Organization. Continuity provides Stability and Transformation provides Adaptability. If we just focus on Continuity to the neglect of Transformation, we become too Rigid. If we just focus on Transformation to the neglect of Continuity, things can get Chaotic.



When we can “See” this as a polarity, we can “Map” it to identify the benefits and limits of each pole. Then we can “Assess” how well we are leveraging it and from the assessment results, “Learn” so we can make smart decisions about how to get the energy from it working for us in the future. Finally we “Leverage” this energy by identifying Action Steps to ensure Stability and

Adaptability and Early Warnings to let us know when we are getting into the downsides of either pole.

If we treat any polarity as if it were a problem to solve, we pay for this misdiagnosis twice. First we pay by spending energy fighting over the “solution” as if you could do one “OR” the other. Second we pay when one side “wins” because we always get the downside of the winners’ preferred pole first and then we get the downside of both poles.

The research on this is clear. Those organizations that leverage polarities (also called paradoxes, dilemmas, and tensions) outperform those that don’t. The polarity map, principles and processes are the most thorough methodology available for both identifying polarities and leveraging them to support your preferred future.