

Andiron's Perspective on Navigating Polarities

Barry Johnson's polarity theory, built on the premise that interdependent pairs, like candor and diplomacy, both have upsides and downsides, is widely used to make sense of polarities and serves as the foundation of our work.

Additionally, here is some of the thinking key to our perspective and approach that draws on our research, as well as thinkers such as Richard Rohr, Brené Brown, and Parker Palmer:

- Not everything is a polarity, and not all polarities are worth the time worrying about because we navigate some of them quite naturally.
- Polarities we are suffering are definitely worth the attention. Suffering paradox happens when we preference one of the poles and begin to incorporate it as part of our identity—*I'm the results person on the team; I'm the caretaker; I'm known for telling it like it is.*
 - When we, individually or collectively, attach part of our identity to a pole, it is tempting to view those who prefer the other pole through a negative lens, setting up an "us against them" that impacts morale, relationships, and effectiveness.
 - The more tightly we hold to our pole, the more likely we are to experience the overuses and negative repercussions of our pole which then creates the need for change.
- That change often requires us to embrace more of the other pole, which can threaten or challenge our ego. "You're telling me to stop doing the things that have made me, me."
- Challenges to, and being asked to shift, our identity are experienced in the same way as physical and safety threats. The brain wants to protect our sense of self.
- This can make loosening up on our preferred pole to include more of the other pole seem risky. The challenge to our identity can leave us vulnerable as we seemingly have to let go of a part of who we are.
- A polarity lens lets us know we don't have to let go of, or lose, who we are—it's about expanding, not losing. This expanded mindset means more things are possible.
- Mindsets drive the actions that impact our results. If you want different, and more sustainable results, change the mindset that drives your actions—focusing on just actions is shortsighted.
- Our preference for a pole is a way of seeing the world, a perspective, or mindset. But, it is not the only perspective. In a polarity—the other pole is another way to see the world.
- Neither of these perspectives is wrong, per se, but both are incomplete without the other.
- A third perspective when dealing with a polarity is one that combines the benefits of both the first two without excluding anything about either. We call this the Third Way.
- The Third Way calls us to expand, not shed, our identity into a bigger way of seeing and being. This mindset drives different actions allowing us to get more of the benefits of both poles and reducing the suffering of paradox.
- Being aware of our preferences and accepting both the way they shape our identity as well as the vulnerability required to shift into the Third Way expands our choice of action.
- The expansion into a Third Way mindset allows us to see others who prefer the other pole more completely. This increases our capacity for dialogue, collaboration, and frankly, love.