

Barry Johnson

And

Volume One: Chapter 33

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*Making a Difference
by Leveraging
Polarity, Paradox or Dilemma
Volume One: Foundations*

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Introduction to Volumes One and Two

I am in Brazil being warmly welcomed by a representative of Natura outside the front entrance to their main building. They know that I have written about polarities so they smile as they translate the Portuguese words carved deep and large into the wall: “Being Well *And*¹ Well Being.” They explain that “Being Well” means that we must take care of Natura as a company. It must be financially sound and healthy. “Well Being” means that it is equally important to take care of those who work at Natura, the community, and the environment. (*from Chapter 6*)

This Book is the First of a Two-Volume Set.

Volume One – Foundations

Volume One is a resource for people who want to make a positive difference. How? By overcoming two obstacles: resistance to change and polarization. From a problem-solving perspective, either of these challenges could be overwhelming. From a Polarity Thinking™ perspective, both can be addressed by replacing *Or* with *And* when *And* is required.

For example, the question, “Am I going to hold on to my values *Or* accept the change proposed?” is likely to create resistance to the change. That resistance could be significantly reduced by replacing *Or* with *And*. “How am I going to hold on to my values *And* gain the benefits of the change proposed?” We can save the baby *And* throw out the bathwater. (*Section Three*)

The question, “Am I going to support the group that wants to decentralize *Or* the group that wants to centralize?” is likely to create polarization. That polarization could be significantly reduced by replacing *Or* with *And*. “How do we get the benefits of decentralization *And* the benefits of centralization?” Effective decentralization requires effective centralization. (*Chapter 5*)

“Am I going to support ‘Black Lives Matter’ *Or* ‘All Lives Matter?’” This false choice is less polarizing if *Or* is replaced with *And*: “Black Lives Matter” *And* “All

¹ When the word “and” is used to connect two poles of a polarity, it will be capitalized and in italics: *And*. When the word “or” is used, incorrectly, to connect two poles of a polarity, it will also be capitalized and italic: *Or*.

Lives Matter.” It is precisely because all lives matter that disproportionate attacks on and incarceration of black people matters. (*Chapter 7*)

Regardless of the size of the system that you want to change, this book guides you through a clear process:

1. **Seeing:** Is this an issue where *And* is required?
2. **Mapping:** How can I see a more complete picture and respect alternative views?
3. **Assessing:** How are we doing with this polarity?
4. **Learning:** What can we learn from our assessment results?
5. **Leveraging:** What action steps will we take to make a positive difference?

Reading this book will help you address resistance to your efforts to make a difference. Also, it will help you address chronic conflicts that become vicious cycles as both sides become more polarized.

You will learn when and how to bring *And* into your efforts to make a positive difference. When done well, supplementing *Or*-thinking with *And*-thinking will help you convert the wisdom of those resisting change into a resource to support a more effective change. *And*-thinking will help you join polarized groups and convert a vicious cycle into a benefit for all. The results will benefit both groups and the larger system of which they are a part.

Volume Two – Applications

Volume One is from my perspective with a lot of input and help from others. What is missing are important other voices. When considering groups with power and privilege which have dominance in the United States and those groups that have been marginalized by the dominant group, I am a member of the dominant group in every category. I am white, cis male², financially secure, college educated, raised in a hetero-normative all-white family, from a Christian tradition, without physical or mental disabilities. Having the power and privilege that comes by being in these groups does not make me a good person or a bad person. But membership in the dominant group does come with responsibility to learn from those who are marginalized. It also includes sharing power with them and interrupting the practices and policies of the dominant group that contribute to their marginalization. This marginalization is oppressive and dehumanizing for both the dominant and the marginalized groups. Some marginalized groups include Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BI-POC), women, LGBTQI+³ people, the poor, those from religious traditions other than Christian, and those with physical or mental disabilities.

Volume Two includes the voices of people from marginalized groups. Each author provides an example of how they have applied Polarity Thinking to make a difference in their life and work. The authors come from a variety of disciplines. They have worked inside organizations as founders and leaders. They have also worked

² Cis men are men assigned “male” at birth and feel that “man” and “male” accurately describe who they are.
³ LGBTQI+ = Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, plus other identities.

as external resources to organizations as coaches, trainers, organizers for justice and equity, consultants, and teachers. At least one author in each chapter has completed a Two-Year Polarity Mastery Program.

Their stories can be used and adapted to your unique situation. The variety of examples will expand your possibilities and help you avoid common pitfalls as you apply Polarity Thinking. These diverse examples demonstrate how you can succeed in making a difference by combining your life experience with Polarity Thinking and the Polarity Map®.

Start with the Chapter That Interests You Most.

Though Volume One is written in a logical sequence, I encourage you to find the chapter that seems most relevant to you and read it first. Which chapter connects to where you want to make a difference?

All Are Loved *And* Accountable – All Are Connected *And* Each is Unique.

This book begins and ends with two double-messages (polarities) that come to us from most religious traditions.

1. All of us are loved unconditionally, without exception, *And* we are all accountable for our actions and inactions, without exception. In our effort to make a difference, we need to hold ourselves and others accountable. At the same time, the context for our accountability is that we are loved unconditionally (*Section Four*). When our message of accountability is combined with an often unstated message of unlovability, we generate a natural resistance from the self, family member, organization, or the country receiving the message of unlovability.
2. We are all connected in a unified whole *And* we are each unique. Neither our unity nor our uniqueness can be lost (*Section Two*). We can make a difference by affirming the reality of our connectedness *And* our uniqueness. We need not struggle to make us connected *Or* to make us unique. We are already both.

Not recognizing these two polarities (*1 & 2 above*) undermines our efforts to make the positive differences we seek to make with our families, organizations, and countries. Not recognizing these and other polarities in this book has contributed to organizational dysfunction, gross inequity and the marginalization mentioned above. Recognizing and intentionally leveraging these polarities and others can make a difference in how well our organizations are run, how financially sound they are, and how effective they are at enhancing our quality of life on the planet for all of us. My hope is that *And: Volume One* and *And: Volume Two* will support you in making your difference in the world.

Barry Johnson (he, him)⁴

⁴ In this book, I recognize diversity of identity and use she, her / they, them / he, him. For people I know well, and those identified in the public arena, like Dr. MLK, Jr., I use the pronouns they use for themselves.



Chapter 33

*Making a Difference *And* Enjoying Life*

It is 9:00 am on a summer morning in 1994. I am feeling great. My wife, Dana, has just called to let me know she is bringing lunch to the office. She has invited two of my closest friends to join us, my partner David Perkins and John Otterbacher.

I'm thinking, "This is just like Dana." The day before, we had finished a six-month project with Amoco and it was time to celebrate with my wife and friends.

Dana arrives with a picnic basket. I am helping her set the small table in my office for lunch when David arrives. He is his usual warm self but does not mention yesterday's completion of the Amoco project or seem all that excited about this celebration. John is close behind and he too seems a bit tempered for a festive gathering.

After we settled in and started enjoying our sandwiches, Dana tells me why she has planned this lunch. It related to the Amoco project, but not in the way I was thinking. She tells me that all three of them love me very much and they are angry with me. They are angry because my preoccupation with bringing Polarity Thinking to the world is undermining my health and my relationships with family and friends. It has resulted in my doing things that threaten my own safety and the safety of others.

One of many examples they cited was when I had worked all night preparing for a workshop. Early the next morning, without any sleep, I drove five hours to arrive at the workshop. When it was over, I drove home, arriving at 11:00 pm. They pointed out that had I fallen asleep at the wheel, I could have killed myself and others. They also cited examples of many missed opportunities to spend time with Dana, our five children, and our friends. The examples were undeniable and powerful when listed by these frightened, angry people who loved me.

I was embarrassed and saddened by what they said. I was also moved by the love and concern in their voices. Here I was, two years after my first book on how to leverage polarities was published, and loved ones were pointing out what a terrible job I was doing at leveraging the polarity of Work *And* Home. So much for my anticipated celebration lunch! The difference between the celebration I was

expecting and the intervention I experienced was a clear demonstration of how out of touch I was with this issue.

It has been twenty-six years since that lunch. On average, with the help of Dana, I am doing a better job of leveraging this polarity. I have changed the names of the poles to Making a Difference *And* Enjoying Life. Making a difference, for me, is any effort driven by the desire to contribute to the quality of life on the planet. Writing this book is one example. Enjoying life, for me, includes everything else: spending time with friends and family, sitting outside with my face toward the sun, eyes closed, listening to the sounds around me; quiet meditation; and kayaking down the Pine River in rural Michigan. While I enjoy my efforts to make a difference as well, the “Enjoying Life” pole for me is enjoying life beyond efforts to make a difference. If you build your own map on this tension, I encourage you to name the poles whatever works for you.

The day of the lunch intervention, Dana and I created a map for Work *And* Home with action steps and early warnings. *Figure 1* is a summary version, which has been useful to us and others. It might give you ideas for creating one that will work for you.

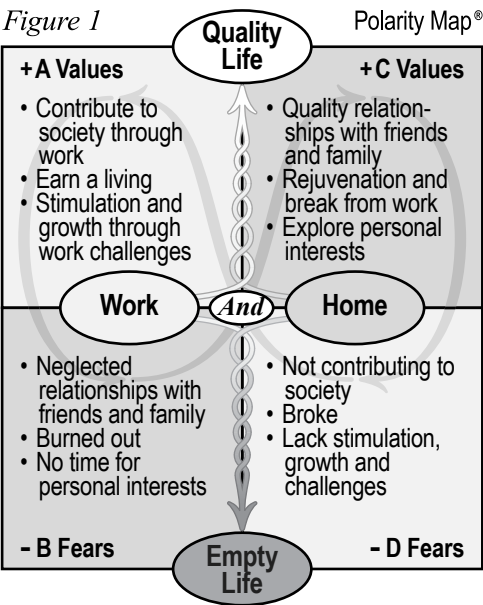
Action Steps

- Partner w ith experts in related fields
- Write books on applications
- Follow up on potential clients who have expressed interest

Early Warnings

- Feeling tired, unable to concentrate
- Dana and friends are worried about me looking exhausted, having poor contact
- I forget things about both work and home commitments

Figure 1



Action Steps

- Schedule “free time” each quarter for the next 15 months
- Have “date night” each week
- Increase skills in white water kayaking

Early Warnings

- Feeling guilty for not contributing to society
- Money is tight: not much work on the calendar
- Feeling bored: missing the stimulation and challenge of work

As you read through the map, the only part that might not be self-explanatory is the first action step for the upsides of Home: Schedule free time each quarter for the next 15 months. “Free time” is a concept from Dan Sullivan’s Strategic Coach program. This is time on my calendar which is clearly separated from work and work-related activity. I build in 6 to 8 weeks per year of free time, scheduling it 15 months in advance. In January through March each year, I plan with Dana what we will do for free time in April through June of the following year. This provides

planning time and also helps both of us connect with how we are feeling in the January–March timeframe that would influence what we would want to do in April–June the following year. This action step and the others have been very useful.

Over the past twenty-six years, I have continued to feel the tension between work *And* home. I continue to be vulnerable to over-focusing on work to the neglect of home, but I am doing a much better job of getting the upsides of each pole and avoiding getting caught in the downsides of the work pole. Our quality of life is better, and we are experiencing more of the upsides of *both* work *And* home.

Individual Responsibility *And* Organizational Responsibility

I had a big advantage in attempting to leverage the Work *And* Home polarity because the company was small and I was an owner. I have worked with some large organizations who wanted my help to support their employees in leveraging the Work *And* Home polarity. When the conversation begins, those inviting me are often thinking about what the employees can do to address the tensions in their commitment to work and to home. The focus on individual responsibility is important because there is a lot that the individual can do and it is very empowering to identify the things you can do that are within your control.

After acknowledging the importance of individual responsibility, I point out that there is another important polarity at play. It is the polarity of Individual Responsibility for Work *And* Home ***And*** Organizational Responsibility for Work *And* Home. If the organizational culture is one that expects 100-hour work weeks in order to demonstrate commitment, the individual attempting to leverage Work *And* Home will not have a chance. There is often collusion between the employee and the organization. The employee is willing to work long hours to support the company, and the company rewards the long hours with promotions and bonuses. This is an understandable agreement, but over time it can undermine the employee and the company. It undermines the employee who neglects their home life and becomes burned out. It undermines the company because burned out employees make more mistakes and eventually leave to take care of themselves and their family. When they leave, they take their hard-earned expertise with them. It also undermines the community because there is no energy or time available to get involved in the important aspects of making the community a community.

Figure 1 focused on Individual Responsibility for Work *And* Home. *Figure 2* on pages 282 and 283 is a generic map focusing on Organizational Responsibility for Work *And* Home. It offers some generic possibilities to support you in thinking about how your organization can support employees' efforts to leverage the polarity of Work *And* Home.

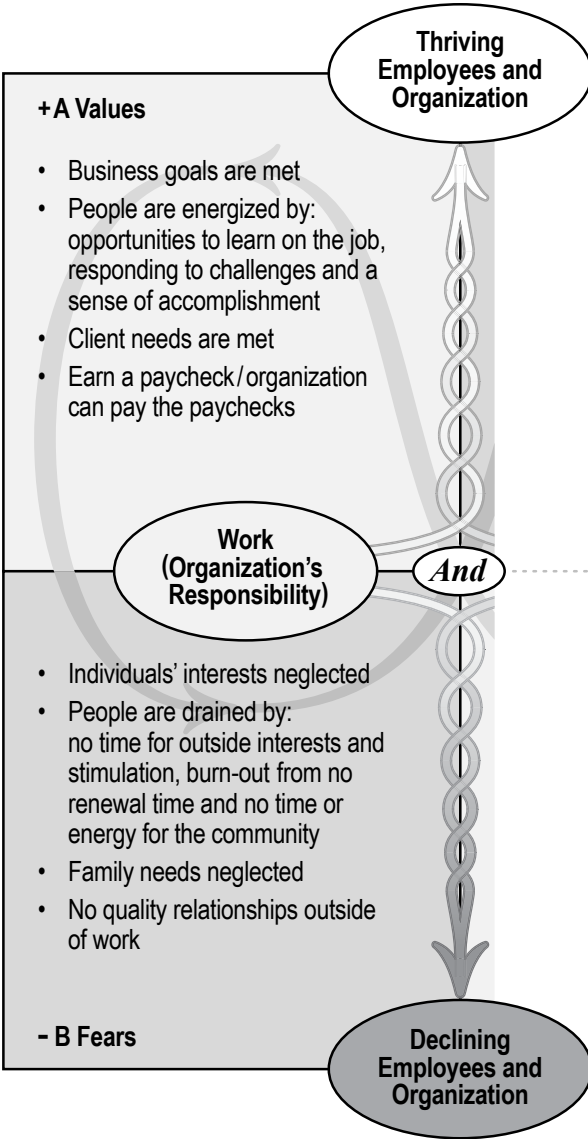
Figure 2

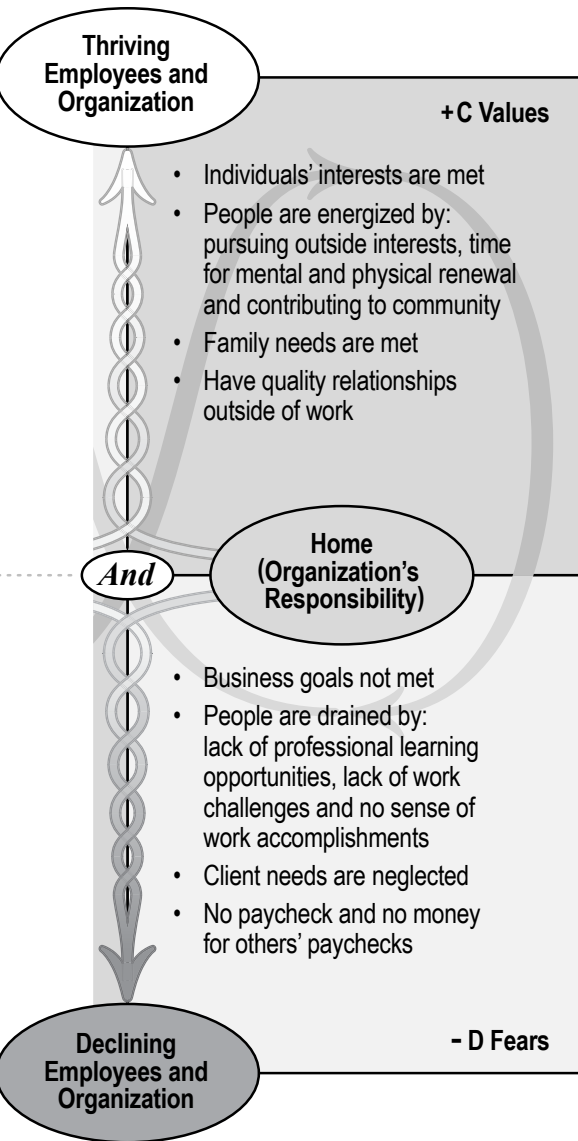
Action Steps

- Create clear projects with measurable outcomes
- Tie compensation to performance
- Align talents with responsibilities
- Create learning opportunities on the job
- Listen and respond to client needs

Early Warnings

- Increase in sick time
- More expressions of frustration with work
- Increase in complaints about being overwhelmed
- Increase in concerns of absence or neglect by partner/family





Action Steps

- Allow for planned vacations
- Allow time to pursue outside interests
- Provide recovery time after intense project completion
- Respect individual family needs and traditions
- Recognize work done in the community

Early Warnings

- Reduction in profit margin
- Clients complaining about neglect or poor service
- Increase in complaints about lack of accomplishment and boredom
- Paycheck reductions

You Can Do Both – Make a Difference *And* Enjoy Life

One of the common aspirations I hear is our shared desire to make a difference. It is my hope that this book will make a difference and be useful to you in some way. I hope you are reminded that you are loved as you are, you are unique, *And* you are connected to the rest of us and all of life. I hope that you feel encouraged to enjoy life while making your difference. The motivation for making a difference is not in order to be loved, it is that we are loved.

How do you go about enjoying life in the midst of making a difference in the lives of others? The possibilities probably will be an ongoing discovery that changes over time. There are unlimited ways to make a difference, and there are unlimited ways to enjoy life. From a polarity perspective, it is important that you recognize that you can do both and you can be intentional about doing both.

The more powerfully you are driven to make a difference and to live your mission, the more vulnerable you are to over-focus on making a difference to the neglect of enjoying life. As with all polarities, when you over-focus on one pole, you first get the downside of that pole and then you get the downside of the other pole as well. When we over-focus on making a difference, first we lose our enjoyment of life and the richness of joyful relationships and then we move toward burnout. When we get burned out, we reduce our ability to make a difference. Focusing on enjoying life (celebrating life *And* just being) supports us in sustaining our efforts at making a difference.

Summary

If we want to make a difference in a sustained way, over time, we also need to pay attention to enjoying life (celebrating life *And* just being in the beauty of life). I began this chapter acknowledging what a poor job I was doing at leveraging this polarity twenty-six years ago. I am still living with this tension and, at times, find myself over-focused on making a difference. With Dana's help, I am doing a better job at regularly gaining the upsides of both poles. It supports me (*And* us) in such a way that I believe I will never retire from this polarity even if I retire from an income-producing job. Making a difference is too important to me *And* enjoying life is too much fun to let go of either. Good luck in your own version of leveraging this polarity.

Praise for And



“Polarity Thinking has revolutionized how we approach tough problems in our work. There are countless moments – from making a big decision as a management team, to launching an issue campaign that requires navigating fraught political waters, to building deep and lasting coalitions, to building more inclusive and collaborative teams – in which we map out a polarity to push our thinking and hone our strategy. In today’s complex world of politics and advocacy, identifying ways to better leverage key polarities has exponentially increased our impact. We are vocal evangelists and have shared the tool with countless customers and partners who have adopted it to increase the efficacy of their own progressive advocacy work!”

~ **Lanae Erickson**
Senior Vice President for Social Policy & Politics :: Third Way



“The fight for equity, inclusion, social justice and humanity is not an ‘or’ argument. It is a ‘must’ argument which can only be achieved when advocates and allies augment *either/Or*-thinking with *both/And*-thinking. These two volumes are uniquely divided between Foundations skill building in Polarity Thinking, and a wide variety of Applications of *both/And*-thinking. The two volumes contain critical information to help us all break the divisiveness that can result from only using *either/Or*-thinking.”

~ **Eddie Moore, Jr., PhD**
Founder/Program Director, The White Privilege Conference



“Polarity Thinking is one of the essential disciplines underlying our vital and never-ending search for win-win solutions to our many challenges and dilemmas. Barry Johnson has given us an invaluable gift in creating – and now deepening – this powerful tool. It can help us arrive at *And* solutions in a world that often seems hopelessly tangled in a bipolar dance within polarities. Along with systems thinking, Polarity Thinking is an essential skill that should be part of the education of every human being on the planet, especially anyone charged with leadership responsibilities.”

~ **Raj Sisodia**
*FW Olin Distinguished Professor of Global Business, Babson College
Co-founder & Co-Chairman, Conscious Capitalism Inc*

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